

Book review

GONZÁLEZ GUILLÉN, A., 2008. Cuba, the landshells paradise – Cuba, el paraíso de los moluscos terrestres. Greta Editores, Verdú: 1-306, [many, unnumbered] figs, pls 1-25, [2] tables. ISBN 978-84-933615-0-1. Paperback: € 79.00.

The land snail diversity of Cuba is overwhelming; more than 1,400 species are known, of which 96% endemics. This is, however, not a book with a systematic overview of these species but rather an introduction to the Cuban land malacofauna.

The book, which is entirely bilingual (English and Spanish), starts with a historical introduction. Many well-known names pass in review, most of European origin but some Cubans as well. Rafael Arango was the first Cuban who dedicated himself to malacology; he published the first catalogue on land shells in 1878. In the beginning of the 20th century a local group of malacologists was formed, centered around Carlos de la Torre. Due to the political situation, malacological interest languished since the 1950s, resulting in only an extremely small group of people studying land snails.

The first chapter highlights the groups of land snails and their biology and the second chapter focuses on the diversity of Cuban land molluscs. The most diverse families are the Urocoptidae (503 species), Annulariidae (366 species), Helicinidae (79 species), and Megalostomatidae (79 species). Cuba is famous for its limestone outcrops ('mogotes') on which many subspecies are found. Biogeographically the island is divided in three regions: west, central, and east; some schematic maps show the distribution of selected genera on the island.

The next three chapters deal with ground dwelling, rock-dwelling, and arboreal snails. For each of these groups the typical representatives are mentioned. Two genera have their own chapter, *Polymita* and *Liguus*. Both have colourful shells and are dubbed "monarchs of the Cuban malacological garden". This is also the reason why species of these genera are much sought after as craft for the tourist market. Besides a chapter on predators, with details on the biology, the final chapter of the book deals with threats and extinctions. Facilities for tourists are, directly or indirectly, threatening the diversity of land snails on Cuba. Many (sub)species live in very restricted areas. Habitat destruction and fragmentation are serious threats to the bewildering biodiversity of this island fauna.

A strong point is the great number of beautiful pictures of living snails, spread throughout the book. Many were contributed by José Larrimendi. Quite a number of additional pictures give an impression of the habitats and splendid nature that can be found on Cuba. Photographs of shells, arranged on plates according to family and genus, necessarily show a sample of all the species living on the island.

People with a taxonomic interest will be somewhat disappointed as a systematic treatment has clearly not been the prime aim of the author writing this book. A second book is announced that will cover bibliographic references. However, a general public that is keen to know more about Cuban land shells is perfectly served by this well got-up publication. One can only hope that it will stimulate the interest in, and the conservation efforts for this less-known but overwhelmingly rich malacofauna.

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