

BOOK REVIEW

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HELLER, J., 2009: Land snails of the Land of Israel. Natural history and a field guide: 1-360, 198 figures, many colour drawings. ISBN 978-954-642-510-2 (HB), ISBN 978-954-642-511-9 (e-book). Published by: Pensoft Publishers, Geo Milev Str. 13a, Sofia 1111, Bulgaria; www.pensoft.net; hardcover, € 70.

This book on the land snails of the Land of Israel consists of two parts, with the first part covering aspects of the natural history of land snails, and a second part being a field guide to the molluscan biodiversity of Israel. Parts of this book are based on an earlier version in Hebrew. Next to a general introduction to land snails, the natural history section is subdivided in chapters dealing with the shell, the body, activity patterns, resistance to desiccation and heat, predation, defence strategies, biogeographical aspects, and confrontations with man. Two supplements give information on the freshwater snails of the region and their biogeography, and finally a short sketch on the history of land snail research and an extensive list of references complete the first section. In the second part, the field guide lists all the species of recent land snails considered as being native to region. Each species is characterised by a short description, a colour drawing and a map illustrating its distribution.

It has to be noted that this book is unique, as there is no modern comprehensive work of such a high scientific standard available for the area. In the natural history section, the author finds quite a successful balance between introducing laymen to general characteristics and habits of land snails

and focussing to the special ecological requirements of snails living under steppe- to desert-like conditions. The first chapters contain information on gastropod taxonomy, shell morphology, life styles and similar topics, but even here, the direct relationship to the area is always stressed. Exemplary are the chapters on activity and resistance to desiccation, where the autecology of particular species is summarised displaying the adaptation strategies used by snails to withstand uncomfortable environmental conditions. The chapters on freshwater snails (quite unusual in a book on land snails) represent a beneficial trip owing to the author's proper field of investigation, the freshwater fauna of the Middle East. The final chapter on the history of land snail research is thought to serve readers not really acquainted with malacology in general and remains at the surface; for those with a deeper interest in this subject, other sources are certainly more relevant.

Last but not least, the field guide is more a kind of appendix if compared to the attentive style in the first part. Recalling the complicated nomenclatural history of dozens of the species treated, presentation of more nomenclatural details would certainly have raised the quality of this section. The species-level taxonomy may be debatable in several cases, but the relativeness of the system presented is only seldom mentioned as for example in the question whether *Oxychilus camelinus* and *Oxychilus renanianus* in fact represent two distinct species! In the current shape, the field guide suggests a stability of taxonomy which clearly is not yet reached in the Eastmediterranean region.

Concluding it can be said that this book is a must for all students of malacology in the area, but also for those who want to learn about the fascinating adaptation strategies of land snails in an arid environment. It should also be read as a plea for more effective conservation efforts in an area, which will be considerably affected by the global Climate Change. It is hoped that this book will not soon be an illustration of a past malacobiobiodiversity.