

# Book Reviews

## ZOOLOGY

### **Mammals of the Neotropics, Volume 2: The Southern Cone: Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay**

By Kent H. Redford and John F. Eisenberg. 1992. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago. ix + 430 pp., illus. Cloth U.S. \$95; paper U.S. \$39.50.

This is the second of a planned three-volume set dealing with the biology of the mammals of South America. (Volume 1 was reviewed in *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* 105(4): 600–601. The “southern cone” is defined to include Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay. The format is essentially unchanged from the first volume, even though this time Redford collaborates with Eisenberg and takes on the senior authorship.

Three chapters provide an introduction to the biogeography, community ecology, and human effects on mammals of this region. The remaining chapters describe the various orders of extant mammals found in the study area under the topics of diagnosis, distribution, history and classification, and natural history. These chapters are further divided into family, genera, and species with increasingly more detailed taxonomic accounts at each inclusive level. For the nearly 360 species of mammals, subjects typically covered include common names, measurements, description, distribution, life history, ecology, and other comments. Each chapter ends with a list of cited literature. There are also indices for both the scientific and common names found at the end of the book.

One welcome improvement to this volume is the replacement of generalized shading with specific collection localities for the distribution maps of species. This makes the maps more reliable and useful. Another nice addition is the source of the measurements for each species; however, standard deviations have been substituted for minimum and maximum values in many cases. Although there are identification keys for the higher taxa, these are noticeably lacking for species. Admittedly, some groups have no practical keys available, but in the first volume at least some species keys were presented. A disappointment is that there are very few references after 1988. In general, traditional taxonomic classifications are used and published phylogenies are given at the higher levels. As stated by the authors, “we have made no effort to revise taxonomic identifications”, a

point I found discouraging because many systematic revisions have been published in the recent literature.

There are eight colour and ten black-and-white plates by Fiona Reid representing all orders of mammals in the text. As in the first volume, they are of exceptional quality, and add to the usefulness and attractiveness of the book. Also scattered sporadically throughout the book are skull drawings and external illustrations.

The remark, “... a progress report, a state-of-the-science work, that should be used as much to find out what is not known as what is known”, is an apt statement for this three part project. Certainly, through no fault of the authors, scientific work and biological knowledge of the mammals in South America has lagged behind other comparable parts of the world such as Central America. However, interest in Neotropical mammalogy is on the increase with both foreign and local scientists becoming more active in the biology of this area. This is an encouraging sign because tropical conservation and the biodiversity crisis are issues that need to be addressed sooner, not later. Under no circumstances should these books be considered “somewhat premature” as alluded to in the first volume. As science has to build on what we already know, these books are a good addition to the foundation.

For the specialist, especially systematists, the book only begins to scratch at the complex surface of biology but it is a good starting point. When working on South American mammals, I consult it frequently because it covers such a broad geographic area and presents diverse information in a single reference. For students and naturalists, the three planned volumes may be the key to opening up a whole new fascinating area of study and interest. Prior to this, information was found primarily in relatively obscure and inaccessible scientific papers, making it difficult and not encouraging for the uninitiated. I look forward to the publication of the last instalment of this series.

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