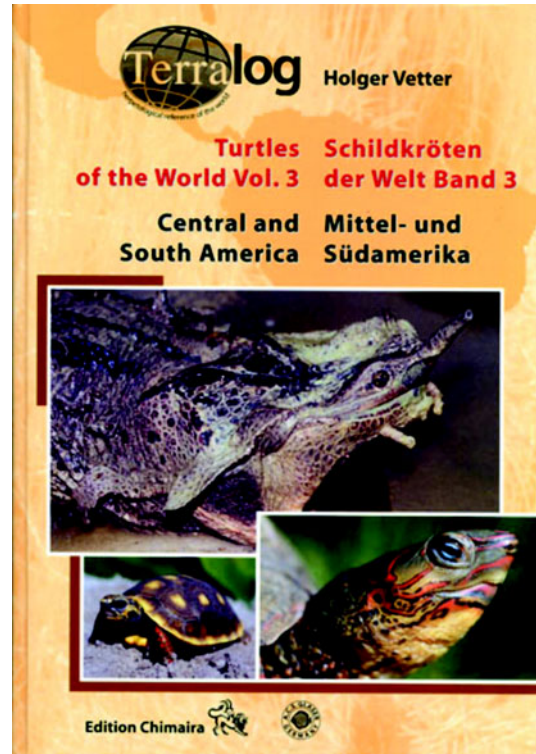


Book Review

Vetter, H. 2005. Terralog. Turtles of the World. Vol. 3. Central and South America/Schildkröten der Welt Band 3. Mittel- und Südamerika: 1-128, color pictures 606 + 9. Edition Chimaira, Frankfurt, Germany. ISBN 3-930612-82-8; 29.7 x 20.8 cm Price: Euro 34.80. www.chimaira.de; frogbook@aol.com

In 2002 the first volume of the Terralog series (Vetter 2002), with the proud subtitle "Herpetological reference of the world", appeared. According to the text on the back of this volume: "This first volume of the Terralog series, designed to cover all reptile and amphibian species and subspecies, shows for the first time all recognized, and even many yet undescribed, turtle and tortoise species or subspecies inhabiting Africa, Europe and the Middle East." It thus seems Mr. Vetter and Edition Chimaira have embarked on an ambitious project to provide pictures of all reptiles and amphibians, including their distribution areas. So far 4 volumes concerning turtles and tortoises have appeared (Vetter 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006) and one on poisonous snakes of Asia (Vogel 2006). According to the Chimaira catalogue 2006/2007 (p. 32) six more volumes are planned to appear in early 2007 (Henkel 2007a,b, Manthey 2007, Philippen 2007, Schönecker 2007, Vetter and Thomson 2007, Vogel and Dobiey 2007). Although all the volumes on turtles and tortoises have Mr. Vetter as the single author, or as the senior author (Vol. 5), the other volumes dealing with lizards and snakes have different authors (mostly German so far). The intention of the series is to provide a pictorial overview of all reptiles and amphibians known and provide basic information for their keeping in captivity. The text has been limited to the bare minimum and the major part of the books is filled with color pictures of animals and habitats of good to excellent quality. In Vol. 1 no distribution maps are provided, but they appeared as a valuable addition in volumes 2-4. All volumes have a similar outlook: the front



cover shows a combination of three different sized pictures, the back cover shows six pictures of the same size. The pictures of the front cover are not identified, those on the back cover are provided with their name and the name of the photographer. None of these pictures are repeated in the book itself. Each volume of the series treats a certain geographically well-circumscribed group and as such can be used by itself. Who is interested to have an overview of the reptiles and amphibians of the world, of course can buy all volumes of the series. No time limit has been set for the completion of the series, but at the rate volumes are published or intended to be published, it seems the entire series might be complete in a relatively short time. Of course the task of obtaining pictures of many species, especially tropical ones, may be much more difficult for lizards, snakes and amphibians than for turtles and tortoises which are a relatively well known group.


In the following I will restrict myself to a review of Vetter (2005), which deals with the turtles and tortoises of Central and South America, covering the entire area from Mexico south to Argentina and Chile, including the Caribbean and the surrounding oceans as well. The inside front cover and the frontispiece show a physical and political map of Central America and the Caribbean, the inside back cover and preceding page a physical and political map of South America. Pages 3-9 provide a list of taxa dealt with and a description of their distribution. In total 126 taxa (species and subspecies and a number of "forms", which are not provided with valid names, but are indicated as geographical populations) are mentioned and later on pictured in the book. Forms (which apparently can be either species or subspecies, or not really different at all in this reviewer's opinion) are recognized in *Kinosternon cruentatum* (4 forms), *Claudius angustatus* (2 forms), *Chelonoides carbonaria* (6 forms), *Chelonoides nigra* (10 named subspecies and 2 forms), *Chelus fimbriatus* (2 forms), *Mesoclemmys* Tocantins form, *Phrynops* Tocantins form, and *Podocnemis unifilis* (2 forms). Pages 10-13 are an introduction in which the author explains a number of recent changes (e.g. the use of *Chelonoides* rather than *Geochelone* for South American tortoises) and on which references he based himself. This introduction is followed by a small chapter explaining how to use the book. Pages 14 and 15 provide references (strangely enough without initials of authors) and comments on references. All text is both in English and German. Page 16 lists acknowledgements to photographers. The major part of the book, pp. 17-128 is occupied by photos, mostly six per page (81 pages), sometimes 5 (13x), 3 (18x) or 1 (1x) per page. The volume provides a total of 49 maps showing distribution areas in bright colors on the map (or parts of it) of Central or South America or the Caribbean, not as points from where the species is known, as was done by Iverson (1992). Each map is associated with the species it belongs to.

Furthermore 27 habitat pictures and 539 pictures (including the nine on the cover) of animals, both in dorsal and ventral view, close-ups of heads and pictures of hatchlings, are provided. Most pictures are of live animals, only exceptionally of preserved museum specimens. Each picture is provided with a code number, the name of the animal depicted (including the author's name and year of description), its provenance when known, the size range of the species, when it is a juvenile that is specifically stated, sometimes the sex is stated, the name of the photographer, and a bottom line with symbols providing information on how to keep the species in captivity, with details on size of terrarium, water level, how to arrange the interior of the terrarium, temperature requirements, diet, resting periods, outdoor husbandry, group composition and peculiarities. An explanation of the symbols can be found in the back of the book on a page that can be folded out. It shows that the origin of this series of books is in the world of German terrarium keepers, a large group that has a lot of specialized knowledge.

The general impression of the book is fine, with high quality illustrations, but some problems might be mentioned. First, the matter of the unique number, explained on the out-folding page, consisting of two letters to indicate the group (RT = Reptiles, Turtles), five numbers that would be the code number for the species, and a number at the end indicating the age of the animal depicted. However, it turns out that the "unique code number" per species only consists of four numbers (the first number being always a 0), the fifth indicating the sequence of the picture for the species. Thus, the 4 pictures of e.g. *Podocnemis vogli* (p. 128) are respectively numbered RT03810-4, RT03811-4, RT03812-4 and RT03813-4, showing that the code number for this species is actually four-numbered: 0381 and that the fifth number relates to the picture sequence and as such is unique for the picture. Another problem is that the author does not explain in the introduction what exactly is meant

by the different forms he discerns and on what basis. No differentiating characters are given. In most cases it seems that the author considers them as subspecies that still need to be described, but in at least two cases (*Mesoclemmys* and *Phrynops*) the suggestion seems to be that they should be considered as species. Apparently the book went to press before Bour and Zaher (2005) was published, and consequently *Mesoclemmys perplexa* is not considered in the book. The *Mesoclemmys* “Tocantins form” mentioned by Vetter (2005) was considered as an isolated population of *Mesoclemmys gibba* by Bour and Zaher (2005), who only considered the genera *Phrynops* and *Rhinemys* valid and joined all species considered by Vetter (2005) as belonging to the genera *Batrachemys*, *Bufocephala*, *Ranacephala* and *Mesoclemmys* as belonging to the genus *Mesoclemmys* (*s.l.*). In the case of *Phrynops tuberosus* a wrong distribution map is given. The map on p. 113 suggests that this species would occur from Venezuela through all of the Guianas to northeastern Brazil. However, the species has never been recorded for Suriname, French Guiana, and the Amazon valley in Brazil, whereas the occurrence in Guyana is rather questionable (Pritchard and Trebbau 1984) and probably is based on a wrong interpretation of the type locality. However, if the plastron of *Phrynops tuberosus* shown on p. 114 really is of a specimen from Guyana, this would constitute the first record for that country. I did not see obvious mistakes in identification, although the pictures of the plastron of *Phrynops geoffroanus* (no locality) on p. 112 and that of *P. tuberosus* (Guyana) on p. 114 show little difference and in this reviewer’s opinion might belong to the same taxon. In the introduction in the English text the “Order *Chelonia*” is mentioned, where the Genus *Chelonia* is meant. The German text is correct.

This book is the first attempt after Freiberg (1981) to provide an overview of all neotropical turtles and tortoises. Of course Freiberg (1981)

was at a much more modest scale, just dealing with South American turtles and tortoises and with less color pictures, but as an advantage presented keys to identify genera and species. The informative content of the present book could have been enhanced considerably if an indication of the natural habitat per species had been given as well. It also would have added much to the usefulness if keys had been presented, but this probably would have sprung the framework of the original idea. Despite the few problems mentioned above this is a very useful and carefully executed pictorial guide to the turtles and tortoises of the Neotropics that deserves to be in the library of every herpetologist interested in South American herpetology. It is a useful addition and complementation of regional guides for turtles and tortoises as Fretey (1987), Métraillier and Gratiet (1996), Cabrera (1998), and Richard (1999). 

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