

BOOK REVIEWS

Conserving Florida's Turtles

Biology and Conservation of Florida Turtles. 2006. By Peter A. Meylan (ed.). Chelonian Research Monographs, No. 3, 376 pp. Hardcover Edition – ISBN: 0-9653540-2-4 – \$ 60. Softcover Edition – ISBN 0-9653540-3-2 – \$ 48.

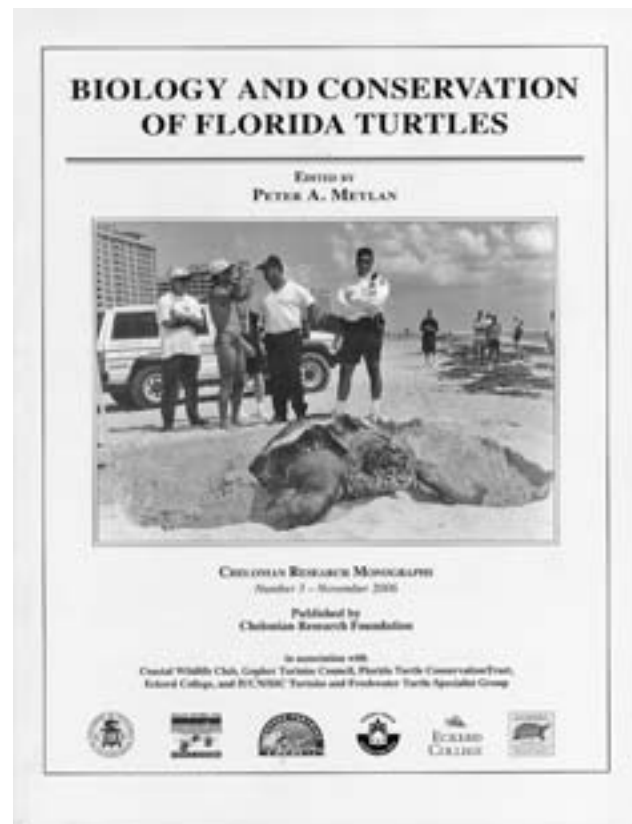
Conant and Collins (1998. *A Field Guide to the Reptiles & Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America*. 3rd ed., expanded. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston) provided the last scientific-based field guide of the amphibians and reptiles of Eastern and Central North America. Although that guide is utilized more frequently than any others by the scientific community as a single source for herpetofaunal information, it has become somewhat outdated. At last, Peter Meylan completed his long-awaited book that covers a single group (the turtles) from the State of Florida.

Contributions by 40 authors are arranged into seven main headings: Contributors, Dedication, Foreword, Introduction, Habitats and Ecosystems Utilized by Florida Turtles, Family and Species Accounts, and Epilogue. This volume is dedicated to the late Dr. Walter Auffenberg (1928–2004), former curator of Herpetology at the Florida Museum of Natural History, University of Florida.

The Foreword illustrates the association between turtles and humans, and also provides detailed information on turtle diversity, density, endemism, threat levels, and conservation priorities throughout the world. The exceedingly informative Introduction includes the ecological history of a few selected species, taxonomic arrangements of turtles and their correlation to the fossil record, and lists of Florida turtles accompanied by notes on geographic distribution and protection status (if any). The next section relates turtle conservation to habitat protection, specifically uplands, freshwater wetlands and aquatic ecosystems, coastal ecosystems, and artificial man-made habitats.

The majority of this volume (32 chapters, including 25 species accounts) falls under Family and Species Accounts. Species accounts are arranged by Family and begin with an introductory chapter to each Family. Each introduction consists of Family content, systematic placement, fossil record, extant geographic distribution, and ecological status. Species accounts are quite comprehensive and include a summary and coverage of conservation status, species recognition, taxonomic history, distribution, habitat relations, growth and reproduction, population biology, threats, ecological status, conservation options and solutions, and literature cited, along with numerous color photographs and range maps. The Florida map on page 32 is useful, especially for those not familiar with county names.

Referencing of voucher specimens in systematic collections is important and further illustrates the considerable amount of effort invested in these accounts. Although FLMNH is the correct acronym for the Florida Museum of Natural History, the



recognized institutional code for this collection is incorrectly stated and should be UF (University of Florida).

On a positive note, the use of updated molecular techniques and changing philosophical points of view (i.e., evolving species concepts) may well lead to a number of unique turtle populations being recognized as full species in the near future. Unfortunately, a well-documented threat common to many species of turtles is their ongoing exploitation by humans for merchandise or food, not to mention the accidental toll of automobiles. A number of photographs (e.g., Figs. 2–7, 2–8, 5–16, 7–7, 20–11, 23–13, 23–14, 24–10, 25–8, 25–9) are particularly appalling. Concluding the book with the poem “Dead Turtle” is particularly appropriate. As the “summer sun tanned him to leather,” this volume clearly demonstrates how humans have affected our beloved turtles.

The majority of illustrations, figures, maps, and photographs throughout this book are of high quality. Although including the number of records (i.e., sample size) in the figure heading of the geographic distribution for each species would have been beneficial, the amount of time and effort it took to compile these data using GIS is obvious. Despite these few criticisms, I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in North American turtles. It was written (and edited) in a style

suitable for either amateurs or professional herpetologists, and the price is eminently affordable.

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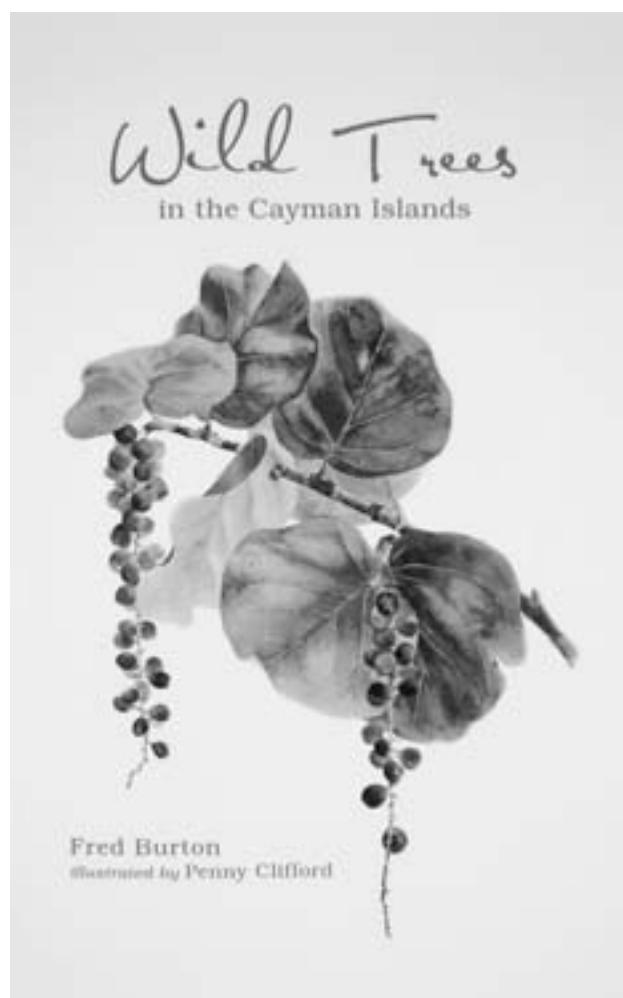
Butler, C. Kenneth Dodd, Jr., Michael A. Ewert, Terence M. Farrell, J. Whitfield Gibbons, Margaret S. Gunzburger, George L. Heinrich, Richard Herren, John B. Iverson, Dale R. Jackson, Kevin P. Jansen, Chris Johnson, Peter G. May, Earl D. McCoy, Brian K. Mealey, Walter E. Meshaka, Jr., Anne Meylan, Peter A. Meylan, Paul E. Moler, Henry R. Mushinsky, Larry H. Ogren, Peter C. H. Pritchard, Anthony Redlow, Anders G. J. Rhodin, Jeffrey R. Schmid, Richard A. Seigel, Robert M. Shealy, Kelly Stewart, R. Brent Thomas, George E. Wallace, Dawn S. Wilson, Blair Witherington, Robert T. Zappalorti.

Plants and the Animals that Eat Them

Wild Trees in the Cayman Islands. 2nd ed. 2007. By Fred Burton, illustrated by Penny Clifford. International Reptile Conservation Foundation (IRCF), San Jose, California, on behalf of the National Trust for the Cayman Islands. 240 pp. Softcover – ISBN 987-1-4276-2168-9 – \$ 20. Copies may be ordered from the National Trust (www.nationaltrust.org.ky) or from the IRCF (www.IRCF.org).

I once defined biology as the study of animals and their food, when an acquaintance, who happened to be a botanist, corrected me by saying that biology was really the study of plants and their parasites. Regardless of whose definition you favor, the reality is that all life forms on earth are inextricably intertwined, which explains in a round-about fashion how the International Reptile Conservation Foundation (IRCF) came to publish a book about trees. In fact, the Foundation's statement of purpose says that the organization works both for the conservation of reptiles and the natural habitats and ecosystems on which they rely. So, a book about trees, especially "wild" trees is not such a bizarre concept, particularly when one considers that the book also is about the Cayman Islands, home of the Grand Cayman Blue Iguana (*Cyclura lewisi*), the conservation of which the IRCF has supported from the organization's inception. In fact, all proceeds from the book are earmarked for the Blue Iguana Recovery Programme.

The most obvious purpose of a book about the trees of the Cayman Islands is to help the reader identify the myriad different species found on the three islands that comprise the nation. How well does it work? I'm not sure, but am inclined to think it does quite well. Unfortunately, I could not put it to a real test, since I haven't had the good fortune to visit the islands in several years. However, using photographs of trees and leaves and some material gleaned from herbaria that contained Caribbean species, the keys worked reasonably well, even for a biologist more inclined toward animals than their food. The only problems I encountered involved specimens from other West Indian islands, which might well have represented different varieties than those found in the Caymans (common, cosmopolitan



species were easily and accurately identified). Regardless of my success, the choices were obvious, the language clear (even to one not entirely familiar with botanical jargon), and the options provided at each step generally corrected mistakes before venturing too far along the wrong path. The individual descriptions were