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BOOKREVIEW by K.R.G. Welch.

*Reptiles of Southern Africa*. Rod Patterson; photography: Anthony Bannister. Published by C. Struik (Pty) Ltd, R.S.A. ISBN 0 86977 352 6. Price £ 9.95 (Available from New Holland (Publishers) Ltd, London. 128 pages and 232 colour photographs.

Republic of South Africa as a country has, in comparison to all other African countries, a large number of classic books on their reptile fauna, snakes in particular, while lizard enthusiasts have to go back to 1943 for Fitzsimons masterpiece. So it was with some eagerness I awaited the arrival of a new book titled *Reptiles of Southern Africa*.

The book has seven chapters, the first a short introduction followed by tortoises, terrapins and turtles (18 pages), crocodiles (6 pages), lizards (26 pages), snakes (39 pages), snakebite (4 pages) and finally reptiles in captivity (22 pages). The text as a whole is very general but written with obvious love and indepth knowledge of the animals while the photography is of such quality rarely seen in books. The text is centred around ninety species, with snakes dominating the list. Each of the ninety species is named (english, afrikaans and scientific), illustrated and a short text on description, habits and habitat follows.

Chelonia enthusiasts will be pleased with the selection of photographs illustrating species rarely seen in other books, and snake enthusiasts can only warm to more quality pictures of the rich South African snake fauna. Amongst all this enthusiasm I cannot help but feel that lizard fanciers, having waited for over 40 years, have been cheated. The lizard fauna of South Africa is very rich yet only three species of chamaeleon are illustrated, only six species of skink, only seven species of cordylids, though the variety of body form in the last

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group is shown. The lacertids are given only two pages. So lizard fanciers will have to wait longer before a writer and a publisher take up the challenge of *Lizards of South Africa*.

*The Reptiles of South Africa* has to be recommended to the youngster just starting his interest and yet to obtain a book on reptiles of the region -buy this one first, the book is also recommended to the more experienced for its all round quality text and photographs, which are matched by publishing quality.

I finish with a word of warning. On page 124 a serie of photographs show the use of probes to sex snakes. This should not be attempted by the inexperienced.