Foreword

Although literacy is the cornerstone on which all modern societies are built, we seem to have curiously lost the ability to “read” nature. Identifying an organism and knowing what it does, where it lives, and how it interacts with the rest of the world makes it relevant to us and, hopefully, instills in us the importance of our stewardship of the natural world. Field guides, in part, are a tool for relearning how to read the natural world.

Venture into any tropical forest in Costa Rica and you will undoubtedly encounter reptiles as soon as you enter. Perhaps, on a given day, you might spot two charismatic anoles showing off their colorful dewlaps. In this instance, this new book by Twan Leenders would help you distinguish among the 38 anole species in the country and provide insights into their biology and natural history. The detailed range maps alone assist in making a proper identification. *Reptiles of Costa Rica* allows you to identify all 245 species of reptile currently recognized in the country, and who wouldn’t want to know what kind of snake has just crossed one’s path?

Written for herpetologists and novices alike—and published in a compact, portable format—this is an essential field guide to use as you explore the country. I am old enough to recall a time when there were no field guides to either the reptiles or amphibians of Costa Rica. In the early 2000s, we biology students had to rely on a dichotomous key devoid of images to identify these animals. But this was often not enough. Experience and access to museum specimens were crucial for successfully identifying many groups of reptiles. The process was frustrating and there were few people in the country who were experts on the taxonomy of Costa Rican reptiles.

On past research trips to Costa Rica, I would haul out Jay Savage’s encyclopaedic, and extremely heavy, tome *The Amphibians and Reptiles of Costa Rica: A Herpetofauna between Two Continents, between Two Seas*. To make it easier to carry, I eventually ended up ripping out the plates of one copy and would just take those and some identification keys into the field with me. But now, I’ll carry *Reptiles of Costa Rica* with me to help with species identification, but also as a class resource when I am out teaching herpetology and conservation biology classes. In fact, I will soon be taking four of my students out into the field to collect data for their dissertations and I have required them to get copies and keep them with them at all times!

This new field guide is not only comprehensive and easy to use, it is also up to date and has magnificent pictures. Chock full of natural history information, it contains wonderfully annotated images, one of my favorite features of the book. This guide is an essential tool in an endeavour that has a greater purpose, which is to account for Costa Rica’s biodiversity, in its entirety, and to conserve it for future generations.

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