

In June 2005, WARC staff were called on a number of occasions to deal with bats that had apparently been washed out of their roof roosts during heavy rain. A bat box was produced and erected near to the roost site to help place bats back in a dry environment. This had limited success, as some bats were young and were not being cared for by adults. It would be interesting to know how widespread this phenomenon is during torrential rain.



Fig. 11a. Collared Scops Owl chick after being returned to its nest in Sai Kung. Fig. 11b. The same owl chick, two weeks later (Photo: Leo Ko).

#### (4) Other News

South East Asian Lepidoptera  
Conservation Symposium  
Hong Kong 2006



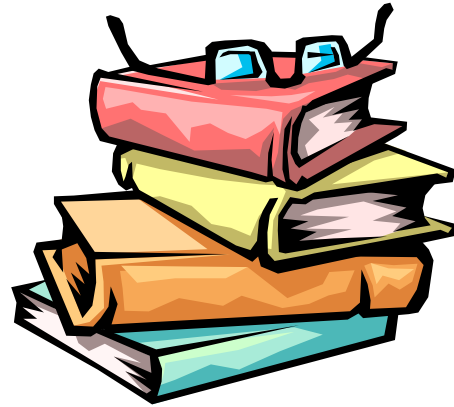
Between 4 and 8 of September 2006, KFBG will host the first South East Asian Lepidoptera Conservation Symposium. Unlike Europe, the Americas and Africa, there has been no regional or continental approach to the conservation of butterflies and moths in South East Asia. There exist various bodies at national and local levels, almost all non-governmental, that undertake conservation measures of some sort, and to varying degrees. By bringing such bodies together, an overall assessment of the state of Lepidoptera conservation in the region can begin.

The symposium is intended to bring together conservationists, academics, field workers, traders and natural history enthusiasts, to identify and agree upon regional conservation strategies and actions through a practical series of talks and workshops. The possibility of setting up a regional Lepidoptera conservation umbrella body will be explored.

Anyone interested in participating in the symposium should contact the Fauna Conservation Department at [fauna@kfbg.org](mailto:fauna@kfbg.org). Further information on the symposium is available on-line [2].

[1] <http://www.nationalmothnight.info>

[2] <http://asia.geocities.com/hkmoths/SEALCS2006/>



## BOOK REVIEWS

### A Field Guide to the Amphibians of Hong Kong

by Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), 212 pages, softcover. Friends of the Country Parks and Cosmos Books Ltd., 2005.

This is the latest in a series of field guides to local fauna produced by AFCD, and is the first dedicated solely to Hong Kong amphibians (but do not be taken in by the disingenuous claim on the inner sleeve that this is the first comprehensive text on the amphibians of Hong Kong: the Urban Council's *Hong Kong Amphibians and Reptiles*, co-written by Hong Kong's leading herpetologists, was equally comprehensive, at least in the second edition (1998), and broke considerably more new ground than the current guide). It is a misfortune, therefore, that the formatting and layout of much of the book have departed so waywardly from the staid, sensible approaches adopted in AFCD's other recent field guides to dragonflies, butterflies and freshwater fish. Some hooligan at AFCD or Cosmos Books has been handed a profusion of frog photographs, drawings, snippets of text and an early version of Photoshop, and instructed to do their worst with it. What a migraine-inducing dog's dinner he or she has come up with.

Did I say "dog's dinner"? That is perhaps a little harsh. The book divides into five parts, of which the first three ('Introduction', 'Knowing More About Amphibians', and 'Observing Amphibians in the Wild') are relatively easy on the eye and do not induce any kinetic psychosis in the reader (although the mind does boggle somewhat at the assertion, made in the introduction, that amphibians evolved a mere forty million years ago, which would place their emergence considerably later than the demise of the dinosaurs which evolved from them; it is to be hoped that this misprint will be corrected in the second edition).

The field guide portion of the book, however – Part Four - is cluttered with a ghastly, clamorous jumble of overlapping amphibian photographs printed in oval-shaped frames or, even more jarringly, with the backgrounds entirely removed. Each

species is further illustrated, as if the profusion of photographs used were not already enough, with a drawing done in dorsal view. One wonders what additional information these drawings are supposed to impart. Much more useful are the distribution maps given for each species. The accompanying text provides a good deal of information on species characteristics, habitat, diet, distribution, conservation status and so forth, but falls short in the description of breeding habits. Given that one has a far greater chance of hearing frogs and toads than actually seeing them, it would have made a lot of sense for the authors to include a description of the breeding vocalizations of every species. Better still, why not include a CD-ROM of anuran calls, to be sold with the book? This would have represented a clear advance on the previous *Hong Kong Amphibians and Reptiles*.

Part Five of the book contains a worthy discussion of conservation issues facing Hong Kong amphibians. Indeed, it is clear that much earnest effort has been put into the entire book, and I take little pleasure in writing such a negative review. To finish on a high, therefore, *A Field Guide to the Amphibians of Hong Kong* represents an important improvement on its afore-mentioned predecessor in three regards: it is written in Chinese as well as English, it covers an additional species, *Amolops ricketti*, for the Hong Kong list, and it brings the nomenclature of several species up to date. It is certainly good value for its HK\$80 price tag, and I recommend it to non-epileptics as a useful addition to their libraries on Hong Kong wildlife.

Graham Reels

## **Tropical Rain Forests: An Ecological and Biogeographical Comparison.**

by Richard Primack & Richard Corlett,  
hardback. Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

It is probably true to say that most biologists unacquainted with tropical rain forests tend to think of them, in the abstract, as more or less homogeneous ecosystems aggregated around the world's equatorial regions. I certainly shared this over-generalised conception (although several weeks in the jungles of northern Borneo had begun to discline me to it), before the advent of *Tropical Rain Forests: An Ecological and Biogeographical Comparison*, and it was with great fascination and delight that I was able to read much of this illuminating book during a recent field trip to Sarawak.

Regular readers of *Porcupine!* will need no introduction to Richard Corlett – surely the most prolific and stimulating contributor to this newsletter since its inception – and will be aware of his long-standing interest in tropical Asian forests. Co-author Richard Primack is himself a distinguished botanist, based at Boston University, and author of *Essentials of Conservation Biology* (1993) – reputedly the first introductory text on this discipline. The two of them have combined their skills to produce a lively and absorbing

challenge to the orthodoxy that tropical rainforests are essentially similar the world over, by explicitly emphasizing the manifold ways in which such forests differ, floristically, faunistically and ecologically, from region to region. The underlying comparative theme is continued throughout the book, sustaining the reader's interest and inviting one to delve deeper.

The authors set their stall out in Chapter 1, identifying the areas of the world in which tropical rain forests occur, their geological histories and meteorological regimes, the reasons why there are differences (as well as the acknowledged similarities) in rain forests from region to region, and flagging up the functional consequences of such inter-regional differences. Less emphasis is given to differences in forests within the same region, although such differences certainly occur (one thinks of the various forest types – mangrove, kerangas, peat swamp, alluvial swamp, mixed dipterocarp and montane – and the different associated range of species, which may be found even within the tiny sultanate of Brunei).

The following chapter explores the different kinds of plant communities which characterize tropical rain forests in different regions – the familiar dipterocarp forests of south-east Asia, the bromeliad-rich forests of the neotropics, the relative abundance of the families Dichapetalaceae and Olacaceae in Africa. Clear regional differences in species diversity are also highlighted: forests in the neotropics coming out on top with on average just under 200 species per hectare, and Africa coming bottom with approximately half of that figure. Forest structure and timing of fruiting and flowering events also vary regionally, with concomitant effects on faunal assemblages.

These effects on key elements of the forest fauna (primates, carnivores and forest floor herbivores, birds, bats and gliders, and insects) are discussed at length in the ensuing five chapters, with particular reference to the ways in which the ecological roles of these groups vary regionally as a consequence of forest structure and floral composition. These chapters contain much revelatory information of absorbing interest to floristically-challenged rain forest neophytes (this reviewer included), who may be familiar with the fauna but have a slender grasp of how it relates to the flora.

The book rounds off, as all such books must do nowadays, with a discussion of threats to the various rain forests around the world. One emerges at the other end with a renewed concern for, and fascination with, these vibrant ecosystems, and I heartily recommend this book, while at the same time admitting that my knowledge of rain forests is inadequate to detect flaws which may seem evident to others. Perhaps the best recommendation I can make is that I have compared this book with T. C. Whitmore's 1998 offering, *An Introduction to Tropical Rain Forests*, and found that, to my mind at least, Primack & Corlett's book benefits by the comparison.

Graham Reels

The Conceptual Ecology of the Human Microbiome. Morar et al. Invisible Designers: Brain Evolution Through the Lens of Parasite Manipulation. Del Giudice. Polydactyly in Development, Inheritance, and Evolution. Lange et al. 1427 East 60th Street, Chicago, IL 60637. Tropical Rain Forests: An Ecological and Biogeographical Comparison explodes that myth by showing that rain forests in different tropical regions are unique despite superficial similarities. Throughout the book the distinctive characteristics of rain forests in tropical Asia, tropical America, Africa, Madagascar, New Guinea, and Australia are emphasized. After an introduction to the climate, biogeographic history and environment of tropical rain forests, successive chapters are devoted to plants, primates, other mammals, birds, canopy animals and insects. The first edition of Tropical Rain Forests: an Ecological and Biogeographical Comparison exploded the myth of "the rain forest"™ as a single, uniform entity. In reality, the major tropical rain forest regions, in tropical America, Africa, Southeast Asia, Madagascar, and New Guinea, have as many differences as similarities, as a result of their isolation from each other during the evolution of their floras and faunas. This new edition reinforces this message with new examples from recent and on-going research. After an introduction to the environments and geological histories of the major rain f...