

## Book Review:

# BO BEOLENS, MICHAEL WATKINS, MICHAEL GRAYSON. The Eponym Dictionary of Amphibians

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Carolus Linnaeus, the scientist who laid the foundations for the modern biological naming scheme passed away over 200 years ago but still new species are discovered every day and even amphibians, a rather small group of animals, had over 160 new species described last year (2012). Describing new species is funny because it is one of the few instances in science where you can leave a permanent record and, at the same time, express yourself without too many constraints. Zoologists, explorers, collectors and sometimes relatives, lovers, and friends of the taxonomist often had the honour to have their name Latinised and used to name a previously unknown species. This is considered a great privilege as the scientific names can perpetuate the memory of a person for hundreds of years.

The book "The Eponym Dictionary of Amphibians" deals exactly with this subject: it provides information about scientific and common names that contain a person's name. So if you consider an amphibian species as *Hydromantes strinatii* (Aellen, 1958) you will find a biography of the Swiss biospeleologist Pierre Strinati to whom the species is dedicated (but not of Villy Aellen who described it because the describer is not considered an eponym).

For each entry there is a list of amphibians named after the person, a short biography that ranges from a few words for persons that contributed only marginally (or not at all!) to science and culture in general, to over 25 lines for famous zoologists. Since this book is organized as a dictionary it is not illustrated except for the nice front cover; the references are limited to a general list of books and journals, this latter could not be a problem in the internet age as a quick web search with carefully selected word usually delivers a wealth of information.

Names are arranged alphabetically and so, when needed, it is easy to check for a surname and obtain the information you are looking for. I tried to look for the *Societas Herpetologica Italica* members and I found few people listed: Franco Andreone, Emilio Balletto, Benedetto Lanza for whom there are complete and correct data.

I then tried to check if all the eponyms of Italian amphibians were included and again I was amazed by completeness and the accuracy of the biography presented. I was a little surprised by the absence of Paolo Savi that is related to the Italian common name of *Salamandrina perspicillata* but then I realized that the most used English common name for this species is Northern spectacled salamander, thus it does not include the word "Savi". This poses some questions about the choice of common names that, especially for amphibians and reptiles, are often controversial so that for some species a plethora of names is available.

Is this book really complete and up to date? I had the opportunity to keep it at hand on my desk for nearly three months, I checked it often and I am quite sure that the book is the result of a long and careful work; with 2668 eponyms listed to honour 1609 names I am fairly sure that is almost complete. Even species recently described as *Lyciasalamandra yehudahi* 2012 dedicated to the father of middle east herpetology Yehudah Werner were included.

This book will unfortunately not going to be a best-seller as there are not so many people that are eager to know that *Uraeotyphlus oommeni* is dedicated to the Indian zoologist Oommen V. Oommen, but anyway I found it a very useful tool, especially when the eponym you are looking for is not so famous or when the name honoured is a living zoologist.

As a final note, I would like to add that the tireless authors of this book already published few other eponym dictionaries dedicated to Reptiles and Mammals that you'll find listed among the references (while the ones dedicated to Shark and Rays, and to Birds are in press). There are still many species on the Planet that are waiting to be described and named, this is the reason why I sincerely hope that all these books will be updated on a regular basis, maybe taking in account also fossil species so that *Eobarbourula delfinoi* the eponym of the president of our *Societas Herpetologica Italica* could be listed.

The book can be purchased at the cost of €43.99 from the publisher's website (<http://www.pelagicpublishing.com>, ISBN 978-1-907807-41-1).

#### REFERENCES

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