



BOOK REVIEWS

Skinner, J.D.; Chimimba, C.T. (Eds.): The Mammals of the Southern African Subregion, 3rd ed., Cambridge University Press, Cape Town (2005). XXV & 814pp., numerous black and white and coloured illustrations and maps, five black and white plates, 40 colour plates, £159.00, \$ 225.00, Hardback, ISBN: 978-052184418-5

The first edition of this monumental book had been published by the University of Pretoria under the authorship of the late R.H.N. Smithers. The reader does not find this original author mentioned on the title page of the present third edition. He is mentioned only in the preface, and a “personal perspective” of Smithers’ life and work can be found, written by C.K. Brain, emeritus curator of the Transvaal Museum.

What information is made available in this impressive volume that deals with 354 species? Colour illustrations in the introductory section of this edition improve the readability and allow easy access to basic information that is important to fully appreciate the following chapters on species of mammals. After the scientific name has been given, the English vernacular name is presented, as well as a reference to an illustration on one of the colour plates (some of which have been newly painted). Next, there is a short explanation and comment on the colloquial English name, followed by taxonomic notes. The following section of each article on species gives a description, sometimes followed by a special paragraph on the skull. Together with a map that depicts the geographical distribution of land species with yellowish-brown shades on a black-white-grey background, the distribution of a species in Africa – not necessarily and exclusively from the southern African subregion – is identified. On the other hand, maps on the distribution of Cetacea are not presented. Comments on the habitat and on habits follow, putting emphasis on behavioural ecology, ecophysiology and conservation. Food is characterized and information on reproduction can be found. In some cases a general concluding remark ends the chapter on a species.

The present edition differs from the two previous ones by the application of a new taxonomic arrangement. This is based on a publication by Bronner et al. (2003) and on the second edition of the fundamental work of Wilson and Reeder (1993; a third edition has been published in 2005). For example, in the present book the eutherian order “Whippomorpha” includes the whales (Cetacea) together with their closest living relatives, the Hippopotamidae.

In spite of the disturbing fact that they did not mention the author of the first edition on the title page, the achievements of the two editors deserve the reader’s full respect. Their list of references has been remarkably extended since the previous two editions: publications are listed on 69 pages, each with approximately 95 papers. This means that more than 6500 references are considered in the present edition!

At the end of this volume a glossary of scientific terms (four pages) can be found, followed by a characterisation of the “Conservation status of southern African mammals” and a detailed appendix of seven pages listing colloquial names of species in English, Afrikaans and a multitude of southern African native languages. Finally, an index of scientific names of the species can be found, followed by an index of English colloquial names.

References

- Bronner, G.N., Hoffmann, M., Taylor, P.J., Chimimba, C.T., Best, P.B., Matthee, C.A., Robinson, T.J., 2003. A revised systematic checklist of extant mammals of the southern African subregion. *Durban Mus. Novit.* 28, 56–106.
- Wilson, D.E., Reeder, D.M., 1993. *Mammal Species of the World: A Taxonomic and Geographic Reference*, second ed. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC.

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