



Book review

Handbook of the Mammals of the World. Vol. 7. Rodents II, D.E. Wilson, T.E. Lacher, Jr. and R.A. Mittermeier (chief editors). Lynx Edicions, Barcelona (2017). 1008 pp., 58 colour plates, 342 colour photographs, 1753 distribution maps. Hardback. €160, ISBN: 978-84-16728-04-6.

Volume 7 of the Handbook of the Mammals of the World is the second one covering the Rodentia, including the hyper-speciose taxa Cricetidae and Muridae with 765 and 816 species accounts, respectively, as well as the following seven groups: Sminthidae, Zapodidae, Dipodidae, Platacanthomyidae, Spalacidae, Calomyscidae and Nesomyidae. Such a line-up is certainly not only a taxonomic challenge but also one for a handbook that wants to present every single species separately rather than, as is often done, combine closely related taxa into “species complexes”. The result, however, is impressive. Like all its predecessors, the present volume is again a milestone, simply because nothing like it has existed so far. The photographs are once more superb; the fact that there are not that many this time may be due to there simply being fewer of rodents, or perhaps also because of space limitations. After all, with more than 1,700 species accounts this volume covers more species than any other in the handbook. That said, I was really impressed by the more than 300 photographs that include many little-known species and stunning pictures of groups that are difficult to photograph in their natural environment, such as the subterranean Spalacidae. There is some empty talk about whether X should be a distinct “family” or a “subfamily” of Y, but in general systematics and phylogenetics are not the strong suit of this handbook (see, however, the phylogenetics chapter in volume 6 covering the higher subgroups of rodents). I had been curious about whether there would be an extra introductory chapter in this volume again, and there is: “Conserving the Biodiversity of the Largest Order of Mammals: Priorities and Actions for the Rodentia”. This is a very good choice. Rodents, and small mammals in general, are under-represented in conservation, although rodents alone account for

more than 40% of all known mammal species. Too often attention, efforts and money are focused on the charismatic and better-known large mammals that are perceived of as ecologically more important and certainly are more popular with the media and the general public. This is also neatly confirmed by a bibliographical finding mentioned in this chapter: while more papers on threatened large mammals are being published than on non-threatened ones, it is exactly the other way around for small mammals. Thus, the conservation chapter is a timely reminder that small mammals need our help. The authors report on the ongoing activities of the IUCN Small Mammal Specialist Group (SMSG). For example, the SMSG has identified 11 Key Regions for small mammal protection that should be prioritized when it comes to conservation measures. Not surprisingly, six of these are located in Asia and four of these six in the southeast of the continent – the region whose biodiversity is globally most threatened. While this may not be new to mammalogists and conservation biologists, many non-expert readers will perhaps be surprised; particularly if they usually think of tigers, rhinos and elephants when it comes to threatened mammals. Since the handbook does not only aim at specialists but at a wider audience, emphasizing the conservation needs of “rats and mice” is an important educational issue.

The first volumes of this groundbreaking project dealt with the “easier” and larger-bodied groups. The most recent two and the remaining two (on eulipotyphlans and bats) tackle the mega-diverse ones. Just like volume 6, the present volume, which is rounded off with almost 10,000 bibliographical references (!), has left me looking forward to what comes next.

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