

Book Review / Recense

THORINGTON R. W. JR., KOPROWSKI J. L., STEELE M. A. & WHATTON J. F., 2012: *Squirrels of the World*. The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 459 pp. Hardback; ISBN 978-1-4214-0469-1, US\$ 75

The title indicates the enormous task the book tackles, to give an overview of the known 285 species of squirrels of the world – and this is well done. The squirrels appear as well defined family of rodents, which can be recognized by features of their teeth and jaw muscles, but to distinguish “different groups within the Sciuridae and discerning interrelationships among them has been difficult” as stated in the book. Well known ground squirrels are included as well as tree squirrels, flying squirrels, prairie dogs, chipmunks and marmots.

The book gives a brief basic introduction to the family Sciuridae, its taxonomy, anatomy, palaeontology, ecology and behaviour. Some basic conservation issues of this rodent family are also treated. As the Sciuridae are diverse, here no great details can be treated. In the taxonomic introduction it is stated that “Pocock’s conclusions served as the basis of squirrel classifications until 2003, when molecular studies based on the DNA of several genes supported a classification of five subfamilies, modifying the Pocock arrangement in some interesting ways.” The book follows the classification based on molecular data (naming in particular works from 2005 and 2009 in Table 1.1), without going into details – which is not the purpose of the book. For an interested taxonomist, however, it is a shame that no citation is given of Pocock’s work on squirrels leading to the long used classification. Pocock (1923) published “The classification of Sciuridae” in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London*, pp. 209–246, giving also a review on the views existing at that time.

The focus of the book is clearly on the descriptions of the individual species. These accounts are arranged taxonomically and all include a brief description of the animals with its normal size range, and information on the distribution with a map printed in reasonable size. Further, details on conservation issues, geographic variations, the natural habitat and natural history and at least one or several general references for the species are given. The part on geographic variation sometimes includes quite a list of subspecies with brief information about their special features like coloration and where they occur. Good photos illustrate the book and most species are well covered. An overview of photographs of skulls of representative species of different genera adds to the information given on the individual species. These yield some additional information for taxonomists and morphologists. The book is completed with a substantial list of references – more than 30 pages.

Even though of course the information on each individual species cannot be extensive and cannot go into great depth, compiling the species accounts with a similar amount of facts concerning the same subjects in one volume is very helpful and forms a valuable resource. The book cannot be a determination key but it serves as reference to the squirrel species of the world. Even subspecies and their peculiarities are included – not often found assembled in one volume. The distribution maps are also very valuable as reference tool. With the literature including historic as well as recent references every interested person can find more information about individual species or particular genera and squirrels in general. Therefore, the book is a helpful resource for all mammalogists who are interested in squirrels, rodents or who need some quick information on them or their distribution at hand. So it should not be missing in any relevant library.

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