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Birds; Mammals; Insects; Reptiles

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Reptiles so often have to share books with amphibians that it's easy to get confused about which is which. No chance of that here, there isn't a wet-skinned water-spawner (that's how you tell) in sight as we sidewind our way through a variety of species, their habitats, food, venomousness, locomotion, skins and senses. The selection of examples manages to capture well the characteristics of a reptilian nature and as a bonus there's an excellent diagram of how a snake's poison gets into its victim.

Birds are really just reptiles with feathers for scales, wings and beaks, and are subjected to the same formula of investigation as reptiles. If this book has less impact than **Reptiles**, it's probably because the selection of species is less exciting and the pictures a bit turgid. And could the editors please note that the plural of snipe is snipe.

For years I thought fleas were crustacea but **Insects** shows me categorically that they're not. We get, too, good examples of insect behaviour and a succinct statement of the important message that to carry one's skeleton outside one's body limits one's growth potential - so there are no enormous insects.

There are enormous mammals, though, and the blue whale makes a useful appearance. So too do oddities like pangolin, platypus, and armadillo - all exceptions that prove the mammalian rule.

While it breaks little new ground, and is somewhat uneven in achievement, this is a set constructed on sound useful lines which makes some good points and, in the case of **Reptiles**, considerable impact.

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