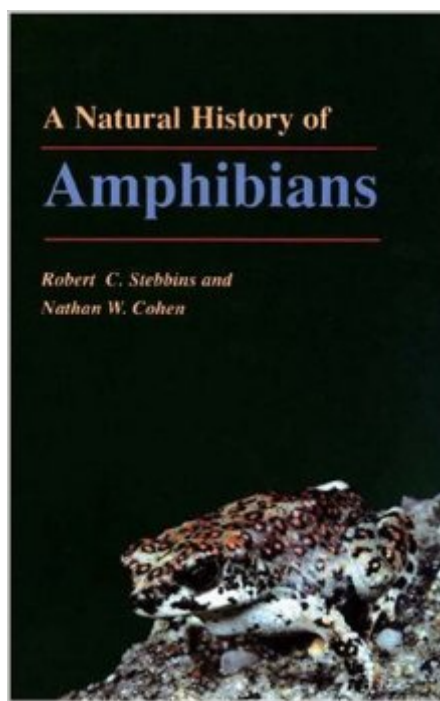


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A Natural History Of Amphibians



Synopsis

This is a book for all readers who want to learn about amphibians, the animal group that includes frogs, toads, salamanders, and caecilians. It draws on many years of classroom teaching, laboratory experience, and field observation by the authors. Robert Stebbins and Nathan Cohen lead readers on a fascinating odyssey as they explore some of nature's most interesting creatures, interspersing their own observations throughout the book. A Natural History of Amphibians can serve as a textbook for students and independent learners, as an overview of the field for professional scientists and land managers, and as an engaging introduction for general readers. The class Amphibia contains more than 4,500 known living species. New species are being discovered so rapidly that the number may grow to more than 5,000 during our lifetimes. However, their numbers are being rapidly decimated around the globe, largely due to the encroachment of humans on amphibian habitats and from growing human-caused environmental pollution, discussed at length in the final chapter. The authors focus our attention on the "natural history" of amphibians worldwide and emphasize their interactions with their environments over time: where they live; how they reproduce; how they have been affected by evolutionary processes; what factors will determine their destinies over time. Through the experienced eyes of the authors, who are skilled observers, we come to see and understand the place of amphibians in the natural world around us.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Amphibians usually are ignored when speaking about species that are threatened with extinction.

Unlike birds and mammals, amphibians are not romanticized in the nature magazines of the popular press, due possibly in part to their physical appearance, which may not garner sympathy as compared for example to a bald eagle or an elephant. But amphibians are fascinating and beautiful creatures, and in this book their biology and evolution is discussed concisely but effectively. Those readers, such as this reviewer, who are not familiar with the subject matter but who are very curious about the biology of amphibians, will find a good introduction here, and many references can be consulted for readers who need more details. There are many interesting discussions in the book, and many surprises for those who are new to the subject. For example, it is surprising to learn that there are salamanders that can grow to over 1.5 meters, that some amphibians keep their gills throughout their life, instead of losing them, as is typically the case for most of the species, and that amphibians usually drink by dermal absorption. The authors also describe the breathing mechanisms for amphibians, and the reasons why one observes a different frequency between the movements of the throat and the body. Readers with a background in physics in particular will appreciate this discussion, along with others such as the vision capabilities of amphibians (they focus by changing the position of the lens rather than its shape), their extraordinary auditory capabilities, and their hydoregulation. It is also amazing to learn that amphibians can survive freezing of their bodily fluids by converting liver glycogen to glucose in response to the formation of ice in their body tissue.

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