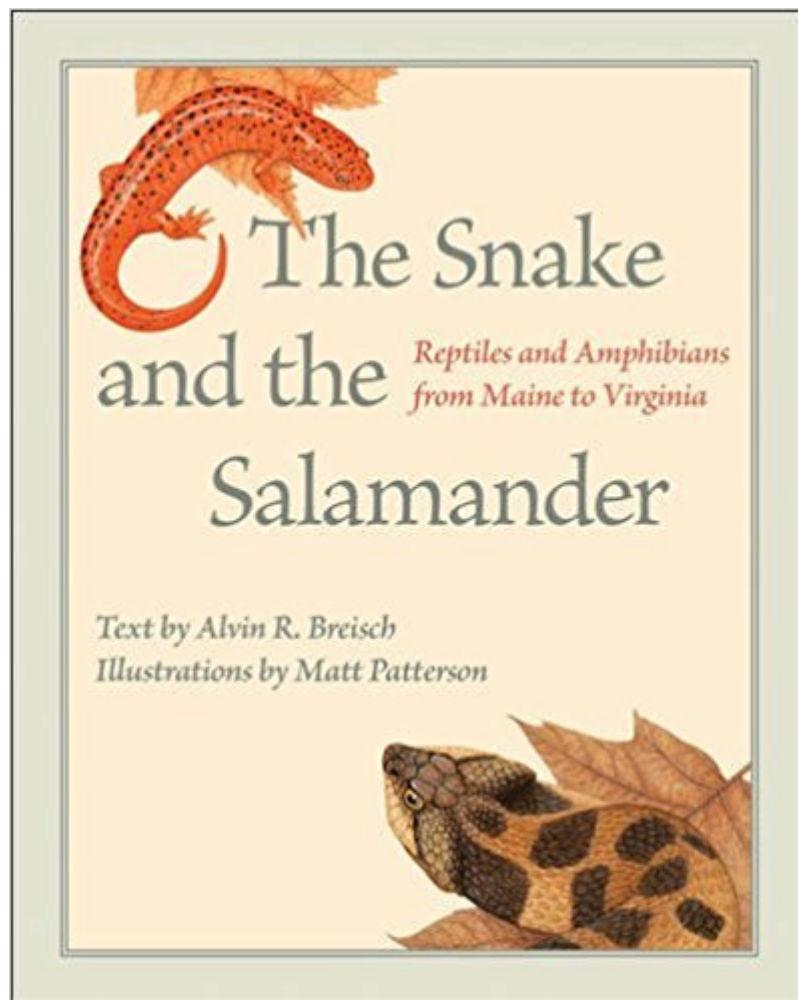




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The Snake And The Salamander: Reptiles And Amphibians From Maine To Virginia



Synopsis

In the best tradition of natural history writing and art, *The Snake and the Salamander* explores the diverse collection of reptiles and amphibians that inhabit the northeastern quadrant of the United States. Covering 13 states that run from Maine to Virginia, author Alvin R. Breisch and artist Matt Patterson showcase the lives of 83 species of snakes, lizards, turtles, frogs, and salamanders. These intriguing animals are organized by habitat and type, from forest to grassland to bogs to big waters, and revealed through a combination of Breisch's engaging prose and Patterson's original color illustrations. Breisch's guided tour combines historical notes and conservation issues with lessons on genetics, evolution, habitats, life histories, and more. Discover how careful attention to frog calls coupled with DNA analysis led to the discovery of a new species of frog in New York City, why evolutionary adaptations made the Eastern Ratsnake a superb climber, and the surprising fact that Spiny Softshell turtles actually sprint on land to retreat from predators. Breisch also tells the odd tale of the Green Frog and the Smooth Greensnake, two "green species" that do not actually have any green pigment in their skin. Every species has a story to tell—one that will keep the reader wanting to learn more. The breadth of herpetofauna in the area will surprise many readers: more than 8% of the world's salamanders and 11% of all turtle species live in the region. Beyond numbers, however, lie aesthetics. The surprising colors and fascinating lifestyles of the reptile and amphibian species in this book will mesmerize readers young and old.

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Customer Reviews

"The breadth of herpetofauna in the area will surprise many readers: more than 8% of the world's salamanders and 11% of all turtle species live in the region. Beyond numbers, however, lie aesthetics. The surprising colors and fascinating lifestyles of the reptile and amphibian species in this book will mesmerize readers young and old." (The Birdbooker Report)"While most field guides are organized by species, this book is more than a field guide; it places the animals in the context of their environment." (The Altamont Enterprise)"... go find Al's book. It is a real gem, full of great insights and huge fun to read." (Post Star)"Recommended. All readers." (Choice)"The Snake and the Salamander clearly reflects the author's extensive knowledge and love of our natural world. Readers will be illuminated by its tales and lessons, and should strongly consider adding this book to their libraries." (Conservation Magazine)"The Snake and the Salamander is full of engaging, fascinating facts presented in the context of habitat, science, and history... it inspires people to fall in love with reptiles and amphibians, to learn about how and where they live and to protect them." (Vermont Institute of Natural Science)"I recommend it to anyone who loves herpetological art and natural history. The book would be especially appropriate as a gift to family members and friends who appreciate nature." (Copeia)

Alvin R. Breisch, a collaborator with the Roosevelt Wild Life Station, was the amphibian and reptile specialist and the director of the Amphibian and Reptile Atlas Project for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation until his retirement in 2009. He is a coauthor of *The Amphibians and Reptiles of New York State: Identification, Natural History, and Conservation*. Matt Patterson is the illustrator of *Freshwater Fish of the Northeast*, which won the 2010 National Outdoor Book Award in the category of Design and Artistic Merit.

I just finished reading this book and found it very interesting and very different from books usual for this genre. In the first place, it's not a field guide nor a life cycle compilation. I think few people would read an entire field guide in a few sittings. Those are books meant for thumbing through. I got through this whole book in about two sittings and found a fascinating, if eclectic, array of information. A "good read" is the best way to describe it. Herpetology has been my hobby, on and off, for sixty years. I like to think I've acquired a bit of knowledge on the subject, if in an unorganized way. I was pleasantly surprised to discover, in virtually every species description, more than a few interesting facts entirely new to me. This certainly attests to the recognized professional expertise of Al Breisch, the author. I mean who knew that stir-frying a batch Five Lined Skinks would make you nauseous. They would certainly have added a touch of color to a

bed of white rice. The original art work is also very notable. These prints were reminiscent of the works of the early naturalists. It was only the words "Some assembly required" that stopped me from contacting Ikea and ordering up an immediate coffee table. Those that know me would not rate me as much of an art critic. My tastes run the gamut between Goya's Naked Maja and Wyeth's ever lovely Helga. In much the same way, I find Matt Patterson's paintings "fetching". I can easily imagine turning a rock at the edge of a summer field and discovering a beautiful Milk Snake or standing in a cold, nighttime, spring swamp and lighting up a Spring Peeper in full song. These paintings provide an inspiration not usually felt from viewing glossy photographs. Good job Matt. This book provides an alternative path to maintain contact with the natural world and should be considered a mandatory addition to the library of any person interested in this subject.

Wonderful explanations of the specifics of the species and also excellent drawings. Al Breisch has many funny asides in the thorough descriptions of habitats, life cycle, etc. He was the herp specialist for the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

This is a good, fast read on reptiles from Maine to Virginia, as the title says. Readers should be aware that this is not a field guide, and it does not list all species. It's really more a vehicle to display the wildlife art of Matt Patterson, which is excellent. So if you buy the book, it's really more of an art book (I read my library's copy). Each species has one page of painting and one page of description. The descriptions are excellent. The artwork is composite, from photos; it has a retro sort of feel, like 19th century natural history paintings. Each painting has detail on the type specimen--who first described it, where it was found and when (most in the book date to the early to mid 1800s). The descriptions offer some interesting information: the Red-backed salamander has been found (by one study at least) to be the most abundant vertebrate in the Northwest both by number and by weight (that is, biomass). Each chapter covers a particular ecosystem. These include dry pine woodlands, grasslands, bogs, headwaters, "small waters" (such as ponds and beaver impoundments), "wicked big puddles" (these would be wetland part of the year only), rivers/lakes, and the coastal plain. Some of the information is pleasantly odd. Spiny softshell turtles have been clocked at nearly 15 miles an hour on land, which may be the record. The Tiger salamander may live 20 years. The Hellbender (boy, is it ugly!) may live 30 years, get up to 19" long. And some of the people who first described species have wonderful names. The person who described the Eastern mud turtle was named Bernard-Germain-Etienne de la Ville-sur-Ilion-Lacépède.

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