

gent) views within working groups. The reader of this book is thus not likely to be set astray by overly parochial viewpoints and can hence obtain a reasonable overview of current ideas on the processes that maintain the solar outer atmosphere in its very hot and very inhomogeneous state. The few chapters that are exceptions are rather easy to spot by virtue of the detailed attention given by some authors to their own work; this seems inconsequential. If fault is to be found with the book, it is rather in the long delay between the event and publication. As a result of the delay, some of the theoretical material (such as that on hydrodynamic stability) has already been superseded by published papers in refereed journals. This problem should not detract from the enormous usefulness of the book. It is a valuable addition to the literature on solar atmospheres, one that should be on the reading list of all who are interested in the physics of the outer layers of stars such as the sun.

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Life of a Giant Lizard

The Behavioral Ecology of the Komodo Monitor. WALTER AUFFENBERG. University Presses of Florida, Gainesville, 1981. x, 406 pp., illus., \$45. A University of Florida Book.

He is coming at you, flicking his tongue. He is almost three meters long and, with a meal in his stomach, can weigh over 200 kilograms. His rapid gait sounds somewhat like "a muffled machine gun." His kind has been known to attack and kill humans. This is the Komodo dragon pictured on the dust jacket of this new book on the world's largest lizard. If the jacket doesn't grab your attention perhaps the book cover will; it is textured like reptile skin.

Despite this veneer of sensationalism, this book is a substantial and serious account of the ecology and behavior of the Komodo monitor. Indeed, the author spends many pages correcting misconceptions in the literature about the biology of *Varanus komodoensis*. He scrupulously avoids idle speculation, carefully documenting his conclusions.

Large chapters are assigned to macro- and microecology, activity and movement, demography, reproduction, feeding dynamics, scavenging, predation, and inter- and intraspecific coactions. Subjects that fit under more than one

heading are often treated in more than one chapter. This repetition is conspicuous, but not excessive. It makes the chapters independent and makes information accessible to readers with specific interests without obligating them to track through the whole book.

Few readers are likely to be interested in all the material in this book, but portions should interest scientists in fields well beyond herpetology and behavioral ecology. Geographers will find extensive edaphic, climatic, and vegetational data on the Lesser Sunda Islands (Republic of Indonesia), where *V. komodoensis* lives. Botanists will be surprised and presumably pleased by all the attention given plant communities in this ostensibly zoological treatise. Researchers concerned with conservation of rare and endangered species may focus on the book's epilogue, where Auffenberg addresses the topic of wildlife management.

The many tedious man-months that Auffenberg spent behind blinds watching

monitors are revealed in the details of his ethograms. Everything has been recorded down to the sneezes of lizards trying to dislodge fly larvae from their nasal passages while feeding on carrion.

The ecological core of the book documents that *V. komodoensis* is an opportunistic predator "more similar to unspecialized predaceous mammals than to most reptiles." Comparisons with top carnivores elsewhere in the world show that this giant lizard does differ from predaceous mammals in being able to sustain a higher predator-to-prey ratio and in having a smaller hunting range. Consistent with this is the fact that average daily meat ration is much lower in the Komodo monitor than in mammals of comparable size. Though such results may seem predictable, they are impressively quantitative in the present work.

A few topics given little or no coverage stand out just because the book is otherwise so comprehensive. Among these are some that are dealt with more



Dominant male Komodo monitor of Loho Liang, Komodo. [From *The Behavioral Ecology of the Komodo Monitor*]

extensively elsewhere—for example, zoogeography (see W. Auffenberg, *Bull. Fla. State Mus. Biol. Sci.* 25, 39 [1980]); some that are peripheral to behavioral ecology, no matter how interesting they may be (such as insular giantism and the relationship of varanids to other lizards and to snakes); and some that have only recently moved toward center stage in the organismal biology arena (such as sexual selection, the significance of skewed sex ratios and metabolic scope of varanids vs. other amniotes).

Similarly, because the author has been so thorough in his fieldwork and cautious in his wording, discrepancies in figures, captions, and textual references to figures and appendixes stand out. Though such problems are irksome, most are surmountable.

The last chapter brings good news that there are "about 5000" extant Komodo monitors, and estimates of more than 7000 are given earlier in the book. These figures are higher than previously reported. Auffenberg concludes with practical, well-tempered recommendations for the preservation and management of these marvelous beasts.

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