LIZARDS: A NATURAL HISTORY OF SOME UNCOMMON CREATURES—EXTRAORDINARY CHAMELEONS, IGUANAS, GECKOS, AND MORE. Text by David Badger. Photographs by John Netherton. 2002. Voyageur Press, Stillwater, Minnesota. ISBN 0-89658-520-4. 160 p., 100 color photos. $29.95 (cloth).—This is a strikingly illustrated coffee table book intended to whet the interests of general readers with vibrant color photographs and interesting facts about lizard biology. It follows on the heels of two previous Voyageur Press volumes by the same writer/photographer team, Frogs (1995) and Snakes (1999). Sadly, photographer John Netherton died tragically young before Lizards appeared in print, and therefore, future herpetological installments in the series may be in doubt. Netherton’s outstanding photographs remain, however, as a legacy of his obvious talent.

Depending on one’s perspective, this book either succeeds admirably as a general introduction to lizards and is to be justly lauded, or it is so replete with technical errors and inaccuracies that it does even this readership a disservice, for which it should be criticized. Frankly, my own feelings about the book are ambivalent, and I will, therefore, give the case for both points of view.

As a nontechnical book on lizards, the book is both easy to look at and easy to read. Netherton’s photographs are beautifully composed close-ups of a variety of taxa that certainly draw a reader in, making a persuasive case that lizards are beautiful creatures in a purely aesthetic sense. I would fault the photos only in that they are mostly taken of captive animals and, therefore, lack the biological context of pictures taken in the field. One might compare, for example, the types of photos that adorn this book to those in the more technical volume on lizards by Pianka and Vitt (2003) in which most photos were taken by various investigators in the field. Nonetheless, Netherton’s images are exquisite examples of wildlife photography with animals in naturalistic, if not natural, environments. They are so crisp one wants to run one’s fingers across the pebbled skin of their subjects!

The design and layout of the book is pleasing. It is large format (8.5 × 11.5 in.), and many of the photographs are full page, or nearly so. It is organized into four chapters, starting with a short introduction to “lizards and humans,” followed by the meat of the text on “physical characteristics and behavior” and accounts of individual species under “families and species,” concluding with the now obligatory chapter on “lizard conservation.” Each section of the second chapter includes a photograph or two and a one- or two-page text description of “skin and coloration,” “smell and taste,” “internal anatomy,” or “communication,” to name just a few of the topics covered. The third chapter provides individual species accounts of one or two pages each for an eclectic mix of taxa, also accompanied by color photos. There is no apparent rationale for the particular species chosen, nor are species accounts arranged according to phylogenetic or ecological affiliation. Choices were probably determined by the availability of photographs. The somewhat random assortment of species is unlikely to trouble general readers and also accounts for the rather awkward, run-on subtitle of the book.

Badger’s writing is pleasant and breezy. The text is unusually easy to read and is full of interesting, catchy information about lizards, emphasizing at all times their remarkable diversity in nearly all respects. Badger uses quotes frequently and effectively, and I especially appreciate his generous use of attribution, acknowledging by name many of his sources—something unusual and welcome in a general text. This probably reflects Badger’s background as a professor of journalism at Middle Tennessee State University.

That the author is a journalist and science writer may be at the heart of the problems with Lizards from a technical standpoint. The author admits in his introduction that he did not have the natural affinity for lizards that he had for his previous subjects of frogs and snakes and had to be convinced that a book on lizards was a worthwhile project. Although he obviously overcame his ambivalence, the text suffers from an overreliance on secondary and even tertiary sources, perhaps reflecting the author’s lack of experience with his subjects. Indeed, many of the “authorities” cited or quoted in the text are themselves science writers rather than scientists or researchers. The greater the distance between source and statement, the greater the likelihood that inaccuracies will be introduced, and that is the case here. There is a tendency to reference source and statement, the greater the likelihood that inaccuracies will be introduced, and that is the case here. There is a tendency