Book Review

Salamanders of the Old World
(by Max Sparreboom. 2014)*

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The Dutch appear all over in the world fluently using more than one language. Dr. Max Sparreboom, the author of this book, is just such a person. Academically speaking, he is a researcher of Indo-Iranian languages and cultures. He is the director of the International Institute for Asian Studies, as well as the chair of Scientific Relations between Asia and Europe at Leiden University. He was a professor of the Faculty of History and Arts at the Erasmus University Rotterdam and formerly dean of its faculty. In this way, he is a person with an arts background and has to date published many papers on Vedic ritual and humanity. On the other hand, he has deep knowledge in many fields of herpetology, particularly in Eurasian urodèles (tailed amphibians), and has published many studies on breeding behavior and its evolution. He has long been a member of HSJ, and is a subscriber of the Bulletin of HSJ, written in Japanese, unlike most other members abroad who receive only the society’s English publication, CH. Still energetic at the age of 63, he frequently visits habitats of urodèles around the world and continues observations of ecology and breeding behavior, while also collecting world-wide literature on urodèles. He really is the typical Dutchman as mentioned above.

This book is a compilation of data amassed through his long history of researches in the field and laboratory, and of vast information from literature. It is a bulky, heavy book weighing 2.2 kg. It contains species accounts of nearly all the currently known caudate amphibians from the Old World (Europe, North Africa, and Asia), an attempt made long ago by Thorn (1968). In general, the accounts provide a robust overview of each of the 165 focal species. It is a highly rewarding urodelan book rivaling the publication of Petranka (1998) on salamanders of the opposite continent. Many of the photographs of salamanders and their habitats were taken by the author himself during his extensive travels. These photographs alone can be viewed as his lifework. Dr. Sparreboom has a much stronger affection for urodèles than almost anybody we know of, and his work would fascinate many students of these animals. As shown in his acknowledgements, he seems to have no shortage of supporters of his activities in each of the relevant

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