

# Book reviews

research by the author, and contains all that is currently known about this family. The text is well put together and although it is packed with information, it is not just a list of facts; the extended accounts are lively and readable. My only criticism of the text is very minor, and concerns the presentation of the scientific names on pages 22–23. The capitalisation of the generic name is acceptable, but it should have been printed in italics. The decision to print the name in this fashion was probably made for clarity's sake, but there is a convention which should be followed—there is no room for artistic licence. The vignettes by John Busby are delightful and capture the 'jiz' perfectly, but the colour plates are somewhat disappointing and do not attain the excellence of the remainder of the book.

Whatever my criticisms, I can only thoroughly recommend this publication to both the professional and amateur. Needless to say, it will be the main source of reference for the bee-eaters for many years to come, and is a must for any library. Further, I would like to congratulate the publishers on producing yet another fine addition to their current series of ornithological titles.  
C.A. Walker, *Palaeontology Section, British Museum (Natural History)*

## Snakes: Biology, Behaviour and Relationship to Man

Wolf-Eberhard Engelmann and Fritz Jürgen Obst  
Croom Helm, London, 1984, £13.95

This is a comprehensive introduction to one of the least understood and most feared animal groups. The authors give a strong emphasis to explaining the influence and importance snakes have had on human cultures, across the world and throughout history.

The text is divided into chapters on evolution, anatomy, physiology, behaviour, diversity and systematic classification, and is refreshingly interspersed with briefer topics such as the religious, commercial and culinary use of snakes. Folklore, legends and fairy-tales concerning snakes are included and reinforce the impact of the book, which leaves the reader not only with an excellent insight into how snakes have adapted to their

present-day environments, but with a balanced perspective of how and why they have been exploited by the human race. *Snakes* is well illustrated with 73 colour plates, 83 black-and-white photographs and many line drawings among the 244 pages. Translated and revised from the original German text, the concluding pages on keeping snakes in the terrarium do not explore the recent trends of European legislation to control and limit the numbers of snakes entering the pet trade, or the importance of encouraging the study of these animals in the field rather than in the home.

Tom Langton, *GLC London Pond and Newt Survey Officer*

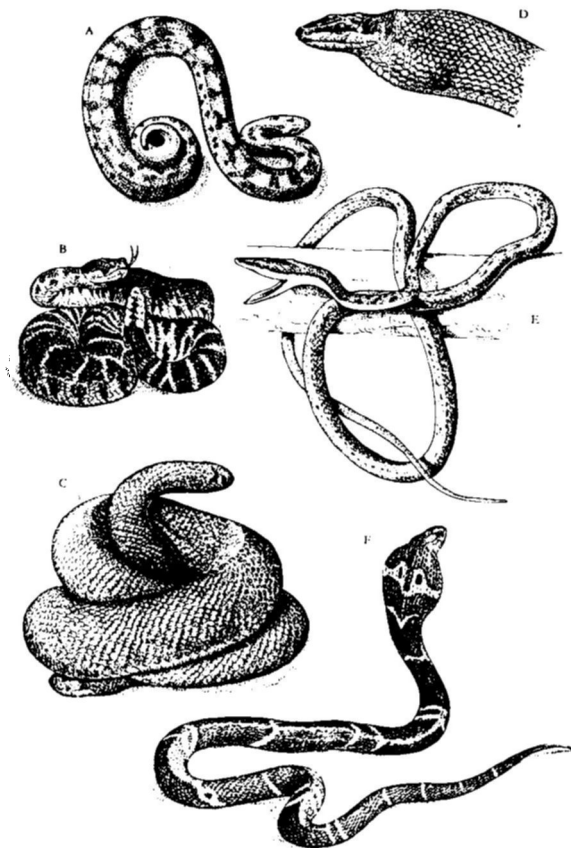


Illustration from *Snakes* showing defensive display in: A. tartar sand boa; B. Prairie rattlesnake; C. rubber boa; D. red-tailed racer; E. bicuda; F. spectacled cobra.