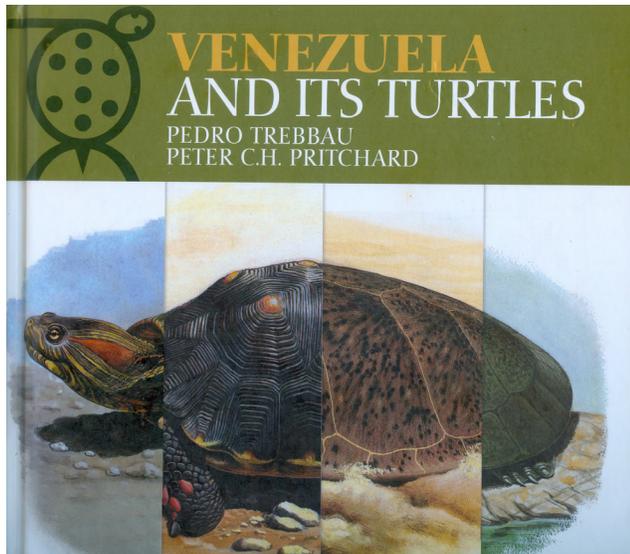


Venezuela and its turtles

Trebbau, Pedro & Peter C. H. Pritchard

2018. [Second Reissue]. Madrid: Ediciones La Fauna KPT, 227 pp. + [v].
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Contents: In memoriam Saúl Gutiérrez Eljuri (1960-2012); Acknowledgements; Presentation (by Carlos Rivero Blanco); Foreword (by Vivian P. Páez); Introduction; List of Venezuelan native turtles; Turtle shell nomenclature; Key species of Venezuelan turtles; Species catalogue: Family Podocnemidae, Family Chelidae, Family Emydidae, Family Testudinidae, Family Geoemydidae, Family Kinosternidae, Family Dermochelyidae, Family Cheloniidae; Species possibly present in Venezuela; Species mistakenly attributed to Venezuela; Bibliography – References; Turtles of the past: a look at the Venezuelan fossil records (by Jorge D. Carrillo-Briceño & Marcelo R. Sánchez-Villagra); Bibliography – References; Glossary; List of abbreviations and acronyms; About the authors.

I should say that this, so-called second reissue of *The turtles of Venezuela* (Pritchard & Trebbau 1984), is actually a true third edition of one of the most outstanding monographs of the chelonians of any region of the American continent. It is essential for institutional, private amateur and professional libraries devoted to the vertebrate fauna of Venezuela and South America. It does not only contain the most relevant, complete and updated information on the chelonian reptile taxa so far recorded in the Venezuelan territory (including its adjacent sea portion of the Caribbean and all rivers, lakes and ponds), but also makes a commendable contribution to the art of book printing in relation to the second edition previously published in Spanish in Caracas (Trebbau & Pritchard 2016). This third edition contains more illustrations, changes the layout and the landscape graphic format of the second one, which nevertheless was very beautiful, but physically awkward to handle. Clearly, this time Ediciones La Fauna KPT aimed to offer its editorial product to the international community market, returning to the original text in English, currently the most read language in science*.

It cannot go unnoticed that from the second edition on, this work appears with the authors in reverse order. The explanation lies in the fact that the German-Venezuelan zoologist, Pedro Trebbau (1929-2021) had already foreseen in 1984 the production of a version of this book with more illustrations and adapted to popular readers.

* *Venezuela and its turtles* has also been published simultaneously by La Fauna KPT in Spanish, with the same size and format (*Venezuela y sus tortugas*. 2018. [2a ed.]. Madrid: Ediciones la Fauna KPT, 227 pp. + [v], ISBN: 978-84-69-79467-8).

It was Trebbau's well known inclination to make zoology available to ordinary people. Accordingly, he took the initiative to deeply update the scientific content of the book, incorporating an appreciable amount of novel information, recent or previously omitted, that has been revealed through field experiences and scientific studies published during the last forty years. For this task, he requested the collaboration of four Venezuelan herpetologists, Tito R. Barros, Omar E. Hernández, Hedely J. Guada and Gilson A. Rivas, who with their recognized experience in nature surveying and their good knowledge of turtles, were kind enough to help worthily to one of the masters of field vertebrate zoology of Venezuela. Trebbau also thought of adding an original appendix that consists of a review on turtles in the fossil record of Venezuela, written by paleontologists Jorge D. Carrillo Briceño and Marcelo R. Sánchez Villagra. All chapters, in addition to being illustrated with the beautiful paintings made by Giorgio Voltolina for the plates of the first edition, include a number of good photographic images provided by more than 30 contributors. Standing out for their imaginative style, there are two precious pictorial reconstructions of fossil taxa in their palaeoenvironments, illustrating the paleontological appendix. These were produced by the biological artist Jorge A. González (pp. 215, 216)

The main involvement of Peter Pritchard (1943-2020) in this editorial project dates back to the 1970s. His career as a world expert on turtles and his friendly initiative provided much more enthusiasm for Trebbau to advance and complete this work. I personally remember the anecdote in which both authors discovered the peculiar western Venezuelan endemic species, *Mesoclemmys zuliae*, while carrying out a routine to take morphometric measurements of captive chelonians in the main pond of the Zoológico Parque Sur de Maracaibo (the zoo of the second largest city in Venezuela). Before his astonished eyes a specimen of this unknown toad-headed turtle appeared. They immediately initiated a guided search, which led them to the discovery of its natural habitat in the swamps and streams of the neighborhood of El Guayabo, in the south of Lake Maracaibo region. Listening to their story produced the greatest possible enthusiasm in younger zoology amateurs because of the evident possibilities for discovery still offered by some underexplored tropical regions.

This book begins with a heartfelt dedication to the memory of Saúl Gutiérrez (1960-2012), a respected colleague dedicated to the science of zoological parks, and a disciple of the first author. A presentation written by Carlos Rivero Blanco brings historical memories with an inevitable tone of admiration to the authors, of whom he

was a close collaborator for several years. Vivian P. Páez (University of Antioquia, Colombia) makes a precise summary of the qualities of the work in a foreword that covers virtually all what is needed to say. It is in fact a concise book review.

Expanding on Páez's opinion in relation to the content of the book, I consider that it introduces the reader very well to the general knowledge of turtles as living beings and to their biology. Later on, it focuses on the physical characteristics of their morphology and anatomy, emphasizing graphically the anatomical nomenclature to describe the carapace plates, which forms the basis of the descriptive terminology used throughout the work. A complete count of the 22 living species of turtles (terrestrial, freshwater and marine) known in the territory of Venezuela is presented, they are included in fifteen genera and eight families. Each taxon is described and illustrated individually, with input of data on its geographical distribution - including a map for each taxon in what corresponds to Venezuela -, its habitat, its diet and its reproductive biology. It is also widely discussed what is known about the exploitation of each species by human populations, for consumption as a source of protein or as a supplier of raw materials for ornaments such as hawkbill, nowadays fallen into disuse due to the supervening threats because of the slaughter for these purposes. This section leads directly to long considerations on the conservation status of each taxon, a subject that the authors handle with great erudition, since they were pioneers on this field.

Towards the end of the book there are a couple of brief but important sections: the first mentions the species of turtles not yet detected, but whose presence is predictable in some part of the territory of Venezuela, as could be inferred from their general distribution; and in the second, explanations are presented on the erroneously cited species for the country.

As expected from a revised and updated edition, the list of bibliographic references at the end is complete and exhaustive. It takes time to build up such a collection of sources. The reader is advised to pay attention to the many little-known papers and monographs in this section.

Finally, a small but very pleasant additional detail refers to an unexpected cultural element. It is the representation of native turtles in philately and notaphily in Venezuela. The book contains reproductions of images of Venezuelan postal stamps and banknotes, whose main motifs are the national emblematic turtles. These are past efforts that have been made to spread popular knowledge of the autochthonous cheloniofauna of Venezuela and to promote its conservation worldwide.

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