



The Princeton Encyclopedia of Mammals.

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Finally, anyone who travels in search of birds (or lives on the cusp of the east/west divide in North America) will be frustrated by the regional nature of the volumes. I would rather buy one book that works on both coasts, rather than two volumes that duplicate the many widespread species (e.g., Red-winged Blackbird).

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THE PRINCETON ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MAMMALS.

Edited by David W. Macdonald. Princeton (New Jersey): Princeton University Press. \$45.00 (paper). xli + 936 p.; ill.; index. ISBN: 978-0-691-14069-8.

[Originally published by The Brown Reference Group, London (United Kingdom), 2006.] 2009.

One of my first purchases as a student was the original edition of the *Encyclopedia of Mammals* sometime in the mid-1980s. It was big, it was beautiful, it was authoritative, and it was pretty darn expensive. Since that time, much new information has been learned about mammals and the *Encyclopedia of Mammals* has gone through two sets of updates, one in 2001 and a second in 2006. The last of these updates was noteworthy for two important aspects. First, it represented a substantial rewrite incorporating much new information, including being updated to reflect the current state of opinion regarding mammalian phylogenetics. Second, it was not just pretty darn expensive, but incredibly so, effectively putting a wonderful resource outside the budget of most people.

The *Princeton Encyclopedia of Mammals* is identical to the 2006 edition apart from one major difference: the price. Perhaps for the first time, this great volume has been priced so that nearly everyone can afford and enjoy it. The coverage of mammals remains excellent, written by leading academic experts for each group, but remaining readily accessible to a general audience. In going through the different chapters, readers are provided with a thorough overview about diverse aspects of their favorite mammals, from their morphology to their taxonomy, evolution, ecology, physiology, and conservation biology and beyond. The information is by no means exhaustive, but with its 936 pages, the book manages to cover all the major groups and the more than 5000 species of living mammal more than adequately. A general introduction discusses the general aspects of what it is to be a mammal, including from a conservation perspective, and provides a useful set of background information to the various taxon-specific chapters. The production quality of the volume remains high and the pictures, as in previous versions, are always lush and simply jaw dropping in

places. In short, this book remains a must have for anyone who is interested in mammals, from the casual reader to even the most knowledgeable mammalogist. Best yet, at the current price, there is simply no excuse anymore not to have it.

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CAPYBARAS: A NATURAL HISTORY OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST RODENT.

By Rexford D. Lord. Baltimore (Maryland): Johns Hopkins University Press. \$50.00. x + 159 p. + 24 pl.; ill.; index. ISBN: 978-0-8018-9163-2. 2009.

Capybaras capture the imagination because of their unusually large body size (for a rodent) and pig-like appearance. Scientifically, the capybara's semiaquatic lifestyle, social organization, and tendency to harbor diverse parasites make them good study organisms for various questions. Economically, capybaras are an important source of income in Colombia and Venezuela. Thus, the comprehensive review of capybaras presented in this book is warranted.

The author uses the scientific literature and personal observations to discuss a wide range of topics, including anatomy and physiology, behavior, natural history, and conservation. Lord also includes data from a long-term census study in Venezuela. The incorporation of such a breadth of information, personal experiences, and original data is a strength of the book.

In an attempt to reach a broad audience, however, this volume may not completely satisfy any audience in particular. Scientific readers will be disappointed with the lack of rigor in the treatment of data and use of anthropomorphic language. Casual readers will appreciate the unique characteristics of capybaras and the author's enthusiasm. However, regardless of scientific background, most readers will lose focus of the "message" because of Lord's tendency to use scientific terms without defining them and his overly descriptive writing style. Moreover, the book is poorly organized and lacks continuity. The writing is redundant with frequent referrals to preceding and future chapters. In particular, Chapter 3 does not flow well and includes information that should be in other chapters. For example, the "lens technique," an interesting method of estimating an individual's age, is discussed in the context of mortality in Chapter 3. The details of the technique are not introduced until Chapter 5, leading to some confusion. Additionally, the topic of mortality is out of context in Chapter 3 and should have been introduced in Chapter 5.