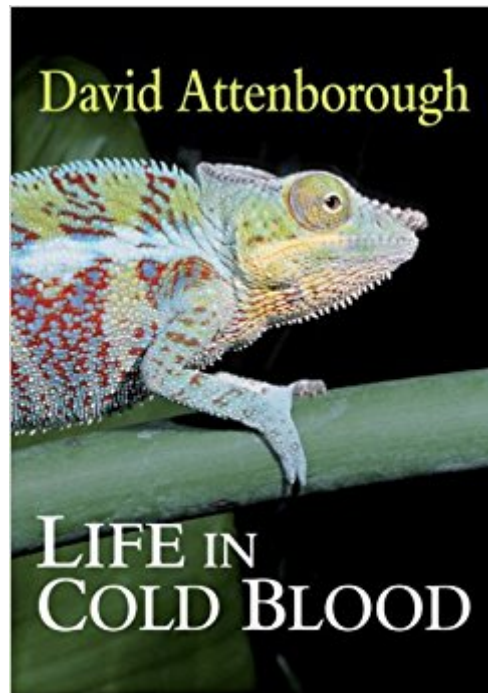




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Life In Cold Blood



Synopsis

Life in Cold Blood offers a rare glimpse into the peculiar world of amphibians and reptiles, the first vertebrate creatures to venture forth from the primeval waters millions of years ago, yet which today include species that are the most at risk of extinction. Join acclaimed naturalist Sir David Attenborough as he travels to the far corners of the Earth to tell the epic story of these animals in this companion to the television series. Discover the secrets of their astounding success--and the profound implications of their uncertain future. Amphibians and reptiles once ruled the planet, and their descendants exhibit some of the most colorful variety and astounding behavior known to the animal kingdom. What are the origins of these creatures? How have they transformed themselves into the beautiful and bizarre forms found today? In this gorgeously illustrated book, Attenborough gets up close and personal with the living descendants of the first vertebrates ever to colonize the land, and through them traces the fascinating history of their pioneering ancestors. He explains the ways amphibians and reptiles have changed little from their prehistoric forebears while also demonstrating how they have adapted and evolved into diverse new forms, some of them beyond our wildest imaginings. And Attenborough raises awareness of the threats global warming and other man-made environmental changes pose to many of these creatures. Life in Cold Blood inspires a genuine sense of wonder about amphibians and reptiles and the marvels of the natural world around us.

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Customer Reviews

Life in Cold Blood My admiration for this book stems from a mix of my ignorance of taxonomy and my perspective as a neurologist. This explains my inability to comment on any of the misspellings and errors detected by some of the other reviewers. With every book I read on comparative anatomy or evolutionary physiology, my erstwhile enthusiasm, rigid and fixed, for the human nervous system relents. It admits graciously a greater pervasive wonder for life across the spectra of all animal forms. This is the promontory from which I approach this work. This book of 281 pages and 6 chapters is aglow with vivid pictures of animal grandeur. Frogs, salamanders, lizards, iguanas, crocodiles, turtles or snakes greet you page after page. We learn about the anatomy, behavior and evolution of amphibians, reptiles and other cold-blooded animals. There are exquisite descriptions, whether it is of snakes calibrating their predatory strikes or of frogs producing internal anti-freeze to survive the arctic chill. Elaborate mating rituals of frogs and eating patterns of pythons would fascinate the reader. It is likely that other books in this area have covered as much ground or even more. That possibility need not reduce the merit of this volume. The comparative biology that underpins this volume is a riveting reading experience in itself. There are numerous utterly captivating mechanisms that the cold blooded animals use to protect and evolve.

I have been involved in the Hungarian production of both the television series as well as the book to accompany it, and while the first is informative, entertaining and essentially correct in all respects, the second dealt with here is FULL of factual (and, of course, typographical) errors -- far too numerous to be mentioned one by one in a review aimed at a general public. Just a few to make my point: the Japanese giant salamander (*Andrias japonicus*) is said to be "the biggest of all amphibians", but the Chinese giant salamander (*Andrias davidianus*) surpasses it by about 40 cm (nearly 30 percent!), and the "young Japanese giant salamander" illustrated on page 15 is actually a mudpuppy (*Necturus maculosus*)! The olm (*Proteus anguineus*) does, indeed, occur in Italy (lower reaches of the Isonzo river), but has been recorded from nearly 200 localities, mostly situated in Slovenia. Rather unnaturally, the specimens shown on page 17 lay on their back. The "one species (of caecilian) from south-east Asia (that) has a blue-black skin with a bright lemon-yellow stripe along its flanks" (page 27) is actually several: various *Ichtyophis* spp. have this coloration, as well as the South American *Rhinatrema bivittatum*. The ranges of dendrobatid frogs shown on pages 62-63 are almost all wrong. I know of no functional plastral hinge in any African tortoise (page 72; admittedly, the rear section of the plastron of old *Testudo graeca* is slightly mobile) -- it is the front lobe in Madagascan spider tortoises (*Pyxis arachnoides*) that really moves sometimes.

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