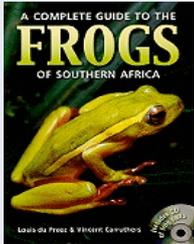


A field guide or a handbook?

Book Title:

A complete guide to the frogs of southern Africa

Book Cover:

Authors:

Louis du Preez
Vincent Carruthers

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Review Title:

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Thirty years ago, on an honours field trip, I was introduced to Neville Passmore's and Vincent Carruthers' excellent new book, *South African frogs*.¹ For me at least, this was a fortunate introduction: four years later, when it came to choosing study species for my doctorate on sexual selection, I chose to work on two local toad species. Thirty years and a revised edition (1995) on, Carruthers, together with Louis du Preez, has produced a successor, which extends the range to the whole of southern Africa.

There is a two-page entry for each of the 157 species covered, which includes photographs, a distribution map (presumably the 115 species occurring in South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland were drawn from the frog atlas²; the source of the remainder is anyone's guess), key identification points, a tadpole description and illustration, and a call description (sonograms are included in an appendix). An accompanying CD includes call recordings and a bibliography. The photos are of high quality, but are not always typical of the species under discussion – for example, the picture of Lemaire's toad fails to illustrate the species' most striking feature: a narrow pointed snout. In addition, there are 75 introductory pages on amphibian biology, including the excellent key to the frog genera published in the original volume, and an additional one for tadpoles.

The authors use Frost's³ taxonomy, which in itself is not problematic, but many readers will have difficulty in finding the genera with which they are familiar. For example, what was formerly *Bufo* now comprises *Amietophrynus*, *Poyntonophrynus* and *Vandijkophrynus*. What is problematic is that the authors have eschewed the convention of using brackets to indicate genera which differ from those used in the original descriptions of the taxon in question. This is an unwise step, in my view – particularly as Frost's designations have not been uncontroversial, and have already been revisited.⁴ But consistency with a single authority is sensible – except that they appear to have made an exception for two undescribed species of *Cacosternum* from KwaZulu-Natal, which is bound to cause confusion.

The introductory section is reasonably well written, but there are some errors. For example, not all 'explosive' breeders are found in areas with erratic rainfall (page 43). There are also some omissions: I found no discussion, for example, on sexual size dimorphism in anurans, although I really liked the way average lengths for males and females are separately indicated in the species entries. A phylogeny just to family level might have been useful too.

The problem with this book is that it is neither a field guide nor a handbook (the same authors produced an excellent field guide, *Frogs and frogging in southern Africa*⁵ in 2011). For a field guide, this volume is too bulky and heavy to carry around. Its predecessors sparked off a host of published studies on southern African anurans, only some of which feature in the bibliography. We now know enough about this group for a real handbook to be written. Now that their field guide is published, maybe the authors will consider taking on upgrading *A complete guide to the frogs of southern Africa* into a full-blown handbook?

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