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## Review of *Carnivores of the World, Second Edition*, by Luke Hunter

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**CARNIVORES OF THE WORLD, SECOND EDITION.** Luke Hunter; illustrations by Priscilla Barrett. 2018. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, USA. 256 pages. \$29.95 (paper). ISBN: 978-0-691-18295-7.

Cracking open this fully revised field guide invites a new appreciation for the diversity of carnivores (members of the order Carnivora) in the world. Dig a little deeper and you'll uncover just how little we know about so many of them. This second edition of the *Carnivores of the World* features 250 mammalian species—from a species so tiny it can squeeze through a wedding ring to one weighing thousands of times more, the polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*). Each detailed species account includes an illustration of the species (and sometimes varying forms or subspecies), information on morphological and identifying features, distribution (including a map) and habitat, feeding ecology, social and spatial behavior, reproduction and demography, and status and threats. Compiling this global summary must have been a huge undertaking. Yet the author has managed to strike the right balance of breadth and depth, and has delivered a stellar reference. Title aside, this text focuses on terrestrial carnivores. Including primarily aquatic carnivores would have forced this handy (yet comprehensive) book into a multi-volume set, losing its nimbleness.

Taking a conservative approach, but alerting readers to potential changes afoot, the author treats the idea of unresolved species (and even the concept of what a species is) with dexterity. This new edition also includes a double-paged spread of updated details on the fluid status of grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) and coyote (*C. latrans*) hybrids. To give you an idea of how dynamic this situation is, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2019) just completed (post-publication of the second edition of *Carnivores of the World*) a review of one of these “hybrids”, the red wolf (*C. rufus*), and found that available evidence supports species status (not a subspecies or a hybrid).

The descriptions of carnivore families near the beginning of the guide are concise yet packed with interesting tidbits (e.g., which carnivore's society most closely resembles that of baboons [Cercopithecidae]). Whereas I enjoyed these family descriptions, it was easy while flipping through the book to accidentally stumble into a different family without realizing it, because there are no family demarcations between species accounts in the main body of the text. A clear break would have been handy but, nevertheless, you can always tell which family you are in by checking the family name by each page number.

I love that the opening sections of *Carnivores of the World* also include an emphasis on conservation. Anyone with an interest in carnivores is very likely to be concerned with their continued persistence, so the information is well placed and informative without being exhaustive.

As is the case with most field guides, the maps in this guide were on the small side (but useful for quick orientation), in one case not quite complete (the grey wolf [*Canis lupus*] also is found in the Pacific Northwest of the United States), and in another case a bit confusing (the text of the raccoon dog's [*Nyctereutes procyonoides*] distribution does not match the map). Of course, I think readers will appropriately understand the maps to be likely generalizations.

The abundant full-color species illustrations by Priscilla Barrett are beautiful and highly detailed. Also included are sketches conveying interesting behaviors (e.g., a giant panda [*Ailuropoda melanoleuca*] urinating in a ritualized handstand posture and an American mink [*Neovison vison*] attacking a swan). The behavioral descriptions in the text cleverly combine with the superb illustrations to help readers begin to move from merely identifying a carnivore to understanding how the species functions in its ecosystem.

The depictions of skulls near the back are a nice feature that one doesn't always find in such wide-ranging field guides. I imagine someone finding a dusty skull in a field and excitedly comparing it to these images. Because dentition formulae are lacking, positive identification might require referencing another source. Like the skull graphics, I appreciated the inclusion of the track plates. Again, because information on gait, stride, straddle, etc. are lacking, definite identification may require referencing another source. Nevertheless, skull and track information should serve to get the reader in the right ballpark and help with selecting the proper reference for confirmation of species identity. The brief glossary also is a terrific feature; the glossary takes away the intimidation factor of scientific jargon and makes this book accessible to anyone with a curiosity about carnivores.

*Carnivores of the World* would not only be of interest for the practicing wildlife biologist or conservationist (and aspiring students), but this field guide is compact enough to make a great gift for a globe-trotting eco-traveler. I could also see this field guide being a delight to pet lovers who are interested in discovering more about their pet's wild cousins.

I found the cost of the book to be quite reasonable, especially considering the numerous, brilliant drawings. A slight downside was that I generally found the print size to be small (even compared to the dozen or so field guides on

my bookshelf). I suspect this was out of necessity to create a travel-ready text while still being a thorough resource.

This is a terrific book to have in your personal library (and in your suitcase!). It will be hard to open *Carnivores of the World* without walking away with a rejuvenated sense of wonder and care for our world.—*Shannon M. Barber-Meyer, Research Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Geological Survey, Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, Ely, Minnesota 55731, USA.*

#### LITERATURE CITED

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2019. Evaluating the taxonomic status of the Mexican gray wolf and the red wolf. The National Academies Press, Washington, D.C. doi: <https://doi.org/10.17226/25351>.