



Book Review

Night Lizards: Field Memoirs and a Summary of the Xantusiidae

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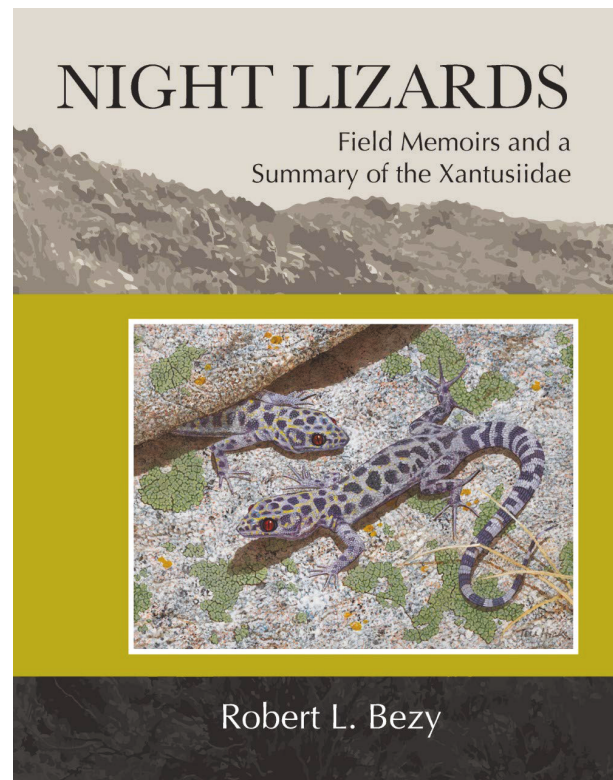
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Herpetologist Robert L. Bezy has produced a fascinating memoir of his life and the lives of night lizards. When reading about or researching night lizards, Bezy’s name comes up often. When Bezy began his career there were only a few night lizards known to science; now there are 35 living species in the family Xantusiidae. The book begins with a brief autobiography, detailing what motivated Bezy to pursue herpetology and what became a long and winding road full of exciting discoveries and working with some of the best herpetologists in the field. Some of my favorite sections are where Bezy divides his narrative into “locational highlights” and tells stories of some experiences that had significant impacts on his life. These stories are rich in landscape descriptions, wildlife encounters, and how the adventure—planned or not—influenced the way he views life. These sorts of reflections are priceless and allow the reader to reflect on his or her own life. As I read through these stories I found myself frequently reminiscing about my various encounters with night lizards and other wildlife.

Following the autobiography and locational highlights, Bezy delves into the historical perspectives regarding night lizards. A “must read” is the account of János Xántus and Spencer Fullerton Baird. Baird named the night lizard genus (*Xantusia*) and family (*Xantusiidae*) after Xántus and interesting enough Xántus later wrote to Baird that he didn’t even remember collecting the small lizard. Other important perspectives include those of John Van Denburgh, Edward H. Taylor, Hobart M. Smith, Jay M. Savage, Robert G. Webb, Richard G. Zweifel, and Charles H. Lowe. All of these men contributed to the natural history of the night lizards and Bezy does a splendid job recapping their contributions.

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Fig. 1. *Xantusia vigilis* from the Mojave Desert, Los Angeles County, California. Photo by Howard O. Clark, Jr.

Another highlight of the book is the “questions” section. Here, Bezy addresses a variety of natural history aspects of the night lizard—undoubtedly questions that he had over the years and now the reader has the opportunity to read the answers with Bezy as the messenger. Topics include rock crevice ecology of the *Xantusia* and *Lepidophyma*; night lizards in caves; island gigantism; the species concept; the idea of unisexuals; night lizard ecology; are night lizards nocturnal?; reproduction; sociobiology; diet and predators; helminth parasites; thermal and water ecology; movement, home range, and population density; and conservation status.

The last half of the book provides a detailed discussion about the night lizard family, Xantusiidae, followed by the night lizard species accounts. Originally, the family only had one species, *Xantusia vigilis* (Fig. 1), the small lizard János Xántus collected at Fort Tejon, California. But, eventually two other genera were added, *Cricosaura* (Cuban night lizards), and *Lepidophyma* (tropical night lizards). Bezy provides a detailed map that shows the distribution of the three genera and a diagram showing the phylogenetic relationships. From there, each species has its own detailed account, which generally includes these sections: identification; chromosomes; size; distribution and habitat; life history; sex ratio; etymology; conservation status; and discussion. Each account has a color photo of the lizard, a colored distribution map, and photos of representative habitat. With nearly 250 total figures and photos throughout the book, the reader is treated to a photo library that is unbeatable. Following the species accounts is a night lizard species key—complete with diagrams and photos. Also included are scale features for differentiating night lizard species. The book ends with a literature cited section which likely includes all the key papers ever written on night lizards.

Overall, Bezy’s book is a must read for anyone interested in the story behind the night lizard, or in tales of herpetological discovery and adventure in general. The storytelling alone is reason enough to buy the book; the photos, species accounts, range maps, etc., are a super bonus and make the book the best resource currently on this topic.



Howard O. Clark, Jr. has more than 20 years of professional wildlife and research experience. Howard is certified by the Ecological Society of America as an ecologist and by The Wildlife Society (TWS) as a Certified Wildlife Biologist®. His work as an ecological consultant has focused on the fauna and ecosystems of California and has included extensive baseline inventories, surveys for rare animals, and habitat assessments. He has conducted dozens of inventories, surveys, and assessments for Blunt-nosed Leopard Lizard, Western Burrowing Owl, San Joaquin Kit Fox, Giant Kangaroo Rat, and Mohave Ground Squirrel among many others. Howard developed his consulting skills while working for H. T. Harvey & Associates (Los Gatos, California) for 10 years and Garcia and Associates (Auburn, California) for three years. He currently works for Colibri Ecological Consulting, LLC, as a Senior Scientist in Fresno, California. Prior to working as a consultant, Howard spent seven years as a wildlife biologist with the Endangered Species Recovery Program (California State University, Stanislaus Foundation, Turlock, California). He completed his Master’s degree at CSU, Fresno in 2001. His thesis addressed the interactions between the endangered San Joaquin Kit Fox and the non-native Red Fox in Kern County, California. Howard is an instructor for TWS kit fox and small mammal workshops, and the Western Section of TWS awarded him the Raymond F. Dasmann Award for Professional of the Year in 2015. He is the Layout Editor for the Western Section’s journal, *Western Wildlife*, as well as three herpetological journals: *Amphibian & Reptile Conservation*, *Sonoran Herpetologist*, and *Herpetological Conservation and Biology*. During leisure time, Howard enjoys hiking, geocaching, and visiting places of historical interest with his daughter.