

To be clear, the issues I raised concerning species limits and taxonomy are largely the result of reading this volume, which contains a wealth of information. The authors present an account of the Honduran anole fauna that is more thorough than any previous summary of anole diversity for any country. *The Anoles of Honduras* is a must-have for any anole researcher in Central America and would be a good pickup for anyone with a general research interest on anoles. And I haven't even gotten to the best part—the price! Although one can order a hard copy for a very reasonable price, an electronic copy is free. The bar has now been set—it would be fantastic if someone could take on an even more challenging country such as Panama!

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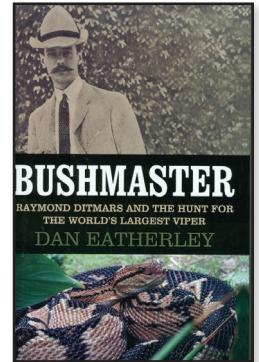
Bushmaster: Raymond Ditmars and the Hunt for the World's Largest Viper

Dan Eatherley. 2015. Arcade Publishing, New York (www.arcadepub.com). xxiv + 303 pp., 16 pp. pls. Hardcover. US \$24.99. ISBN 978-1-62872-511-7.

RAYMOND J. NOVOTNY

Ford Nature Center, Mill Creek MetroParks,
Youngstown, Ohio 44511, USA

e-mail: raynovotny@yahoo.com



JUST LIKE A COFFIN. So begins this part biography and part personal quest, sprinkled with just a bit of danger and death. Dan Eatherley immediately grabs the reader with his retelling of a scene from Raymond L. Ditmars' "Episode of the Bushmaster" from *Thrills of a Naturalist's Quest*, a 1932 classic I first read nearly 40 years later. In the prologue, "His Unwavering Grip," readers learn that the author is a British zoologist and filmmaker who discovered Ditmars while working on a project with Rom Whittaker in Costa Rica. He first wanted to make a film, but after 9/11 the industry changed drastically, eliminating that possibility. In his book, the bushmaster serves as a sort of "MacGuffin," the device filmmakers use to drive a story.

The author's approach, in fifteen chapters, each of which begins with a pithy Ditmars quote, is to alternate between his odyssey and a paraphrasing of stories Ditmars shared in his many books, or that appeared in *The New York Times* and other newspapers.

In "Working up Snakes" (the chapter titles are also Ditmars quotes found within the chapter. You'll have fun trying to find them!) a teenage Raymond L. Ditmars (RLD) meets "Professor George O'Reilly" at the Central Park Zoo. Is this perhaps his first introduction to the bushmaster? Eatherley accompanies Regina Alvarez of the Central Park Conservancy to Central Park and its Zoo, the first of many visits to Ditmars' haunts.

In "Pleased with a Rattler, Ticked with its Fang," in the library at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), Eatherley delves into how RLD's first association with science and scientists began. With several local herp enthusiasts, Peter Warny, Steve Ricker, and Erik Zeidler, he seeks snakes "within 50 miles of New York City" (also the title of RLD's first publication).

"Silent Death of the Black Night" begins with what is likely RLD's first long trip, by ship to Florida with John Bernhardt Smith, an entomological associate of his AMNH supervisor William Beutenmüller. RLD's family allows snakes in their new home, and he strives to fill up the attic. R. R. Mole of Trinidad, who would supply the original bushmaster, appears.

In "The Master of Snakes," after much difficulty, Eatherley succeeds in finding Edwin McGown of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission to escort him to Timber Rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*) dens RLD might have visited. The famous "Episode" is touched upon. RLD's fame begins as does his reporter position with *The New York Times*.

"A Snapping Turtle in a Tin Bathub" opens with the American Inter-Continental Exhibition of Reptiles, a large event RLD assisted in organizing, that might have been another reason William Hornaday offered him a position at the New York Zoological Park. The origin of what came to be called the Bronx Zoo encompasses the bulk of this chapter. Eatherley peruses the scant Ditmars material in the zoo library, disappointed about not finding a single reference to bushmasters.

"A Decided Awakening of Unbiased Interest" revisits opening day of the Bronx Zoo, 8 November 1899, and delves into the early years. Eatherley visits the Reptile House, now rebranded "World of Reptiles" with collections manager Chris Hutson.

In "Reptilian Devilry of the World," RLD and head keeper Charley Snyder recapture two immense King Cobras accidentally released by animal dealer William Bartels. They later force feed a python. At the "best Italian restaurant in the Bronx" Eatherley visits Bronx Zoo retiree Peter Brazaitis, who regales him with stories, probably also published in his memoir, *You Belong in a Zoo!* The next day Peter takes him to the New York/Connecticut border where RLD likely searched for *Crotalus horridus*. Eatherley discusses RLD's attempts at veterinary work.

"A Sort of Freemasonry" opens with RLD and his family, keeper Snyder, and several others in South Carolina. The Pinelands Club there served as the base for collecting southeastern species for the zoo collection. His two teen daughters stayed back at a cabin during the hunt and with their grandfather, end up catching the biggest diamondback! With Ed McGowan, Eatherley returns to timber country and almost steps on one. We learn about the bite that Ed's colleague, William H. "Marty" Martin, survives.

RLD, with Snyder's assistance, milks a Fer-de-lance (*Bothrops asper*), which introduces "A Messy Business," a chapter about snakebite and its treatment both now and years ago. In the zoo archives again, Eatherley now reads over bushmaster records in bulletins and reports. None survives long. Curator Don Boyer explains the success of keeping them now.

In "A Sympathetic Knowledge," after depicting a performance of the Bronx Zoo Reptile Circus at the Waldorf-Astoria, Eatherley sits in the New York Public Library and pores over articles featuring Ditmars, leading to a discussion of RLD's own writing, declaring it "precise, readable, and entertaining." He mentions something I've always cherished: President Theodore Roosevelt's praise for *The Reptile Book*, including an open invitation to the White House. Can you imagine that happening today? There's an overview of RLD's attempts at research in primate intelligence and his public speaking. His lectures, of course, always included live animals and photographic slides. Soon he would incorporate another medium.

"The Stage of Nature" begins with RLD, his wife Clara, and assistant "Andy," filming a Fer-de-lance at the Ditmars' residence. The scene, of course, goes awry with the serpent unexpectedly slithering off stage down to the floor. "Don't worry," laughs Clara struggling to her feet. "It missed!" Eatherley visits the Westchester County Archives where he studies a copy of the Ditmars' will: Approximately 270 cans of film, perhaps 300,000 feet and 150 hours of viewing, appraised at \$5000. Although few now survive, these enhanced his lectures and were even shown in movie theaters. "Andy" convinced RLD to add the emotion and humor the theaters demanded, resulting in "The Jungle Circus" eventually the ending of his six-reel masterpiece "The Book of Nature." Our author/filmmaker provides pages of details of RLD's work with film. He savors the existing films he views at the Library of Congress.

Finally to the tropics in "A Naturalist's Paradise"! The Ditmars family spends *muchas semanas en Honduras* battling mosquitos while searching for snakes. The author visits the Smithsonian's Museum Support Center and examines preserved specimens associated with RLD. He sees his first bushmaster, albeit pickled. After retelling the story of the Zoo's first-ever snakebite in 1916, which almost killed keeper John Toomey, he introduces the Antivenin Institute of America.

In "The Main Thing Is the Bushmaster," RLD searches successfully for vampire bats in Panama, accompanied by Arthur Greenhall, perhaps somewhat the son he never had, but yet again strikes out with *Lachesis*. Eatherley fares better during his visit with Dean Ripa at his Cape Fear Serpentarium in North Carolina, where he finally sees living bushmasters.

"Six Feet Long and Vicious" focuses on Trinidad. R. R. Mole had sent the bushmaster featured in the "Episode," and almost every other specimen exhibited at the Zoo, from there. Both RLD and Eatherley visit the island nation. Thanks to his colleague Friedrich William "Jangoon" Urich, RLD brings back the Zoo's first specimen in decades. Eatherley begins networking for advice about bushmasters. At the Emperor Valley Zoo, he talks with keeper Delbert Charleau, Jr. With his cousin's husband Ian, a native Trinidadian, they seek out Delbert's former supervisor, Hans Boos, author of *Snakes of Trinidad and Tobago*, and "Snake Man" Allan Rodriguez. No one offers a technique guaranteed to find a bushmaster.

Still on the island in "We Can Get All We Want Now," Eatherley rendezvous with long-time SSAR member John C. Murphy, a Chicago-based specialist of Trinidad and Tobago herps, his friends Gabriel Hast and Tom Anton, guides Mukesh Ramdass and Molly Calderon, and Abraham Diaz, a photographer for the *Trinidad Guardian*. They examine a recently killed bushmaster at the Asa Wright Nature Center and search for a live one. Were they successful?

In "Epilogue: My Happiest Hours" Eatherley overviews both the dubious future of the world's largest viper throughout its range and the remarkable career of its seeker.

To conclude, in "Author's Note: Meeting Gloria" Eatherley introduces us to RLD's only grandchild, describing her as inheriting her grandfather's physical features. She reminisces about her "Pop," ("...just *delicious*...A character, a dignified character.") playing at the zoo, and travelling to the West Indies.

I'm honored to be among the many listed people in the three pages of "Acknowledgements."

Toward the middle are eleven pages of contemporary color photographs of snakes and people, the final one is Gloria holding a large portrait of her beloved grandfather. Five more pages of black & white from RLD's era follow. I counted 17 similar images scattered throughout the text.

At the American Museum of Natural History, Eatherley discovers two letters written by RLD's father to curator William Beutenmüller about a position for his son. He rightly declares these documents as a defining moment in RLD's career. While I appreciate the word-for-word transcriptions (pp. 22 and 24), photographs of John V. H. Ditmars' "elegant flowing hand" would have been even better.

I learned several new words, including "gormless" (page 23) for "stupid" and the possible origin of the name bushmaster, from *bosmeester* coined by Dutch explorers (p. 50).

I found few misspellings or factual errors, although I've never heard of "green chicken snakes" (p. 9). The statement about the lack of hearing in snakes (p. 178) might have been updated.

Common names are not consistent: On p. xix, rat snakes, yet coralsnakes; on p. 27, watersnakes, yet garter snakes. Perhaps consulting Crother (2012) would have been wise.

Eatherley corrects the error of the only prior Ditmars biographer (Wood 1944), C. *Stover* Allen to C. *Slover* Allen, a physician interested in snakebites. While on the subject of errors, I would like to discuss the dilemma of the birthdate of Raymond L. Ditmars; I hope not too trivial a point.

His obituaries stated his birthdate as 20 June 1876, as did Albert H. Wright (1949). The death record instead lists 22 June (I have my suspicions about the disparity). His biographer, Laura Newbold Wood Roper (1994), Kraig Adler (1989), and Eatherley all repeated the 22nd. As recently noted by Adler (2014), I obtained a document from the New Jersey Archives that substantiates the correct birthdate as June 20. So we'll wish a happy 140th birthday to RLD on the Summer Solstice 2016!

When I was fervently "following the Ditmars trail" (p. 275) especially at the turn of the century/millennium, it took a couple of years and couple of hundred dollars to locate his only grandchild, Gloria. "Pop" dedicated *Confessions of a Scientist* to her when she was about six and half years old, and she may be the only person still alive who knew him. I put Eatherley in touch with Gloria and I'm so happy he devoted four pages to her. To my inquiry whether her grandfather had a New York accent, she had said no, so Eatherley's observation after viewing/hearing a "talkie" titled *Killing the Killer*; "the New York inflection obvious" (p. 200) was quite a revelation.

Eatherley and I were in touch off and on during his project, but now I lament we did not collaborate more. Although he quotes me correctly about the family throwing everything away, at a later point I learned some specifics of a book sale in the late 1960s. What a tragedy for posterity that so few of RLD's "papers" survive.

Eatherley suggested visiting me, but I discouraged him from devoting the precious time and money because I wondered how much insight I had to offer. Upon reflection, and after reading about the others he met, I too could have shown him some snakes, taken him out to eat, to bond as kindred souls, and filled him in about how I've tried to lead a Ditmar-seque life in a so much more modest way in my Rust Belt city [look how my byline copies the "cadence" of Raymond L.(ee) Ditmars], and shared my cherished complete book collection. That might have merited one of his color photos?

A list of illustrations is often standard companion to a table of contents, but is lacking here. I liked how Eatherley often included RLD's age at the time of a given narrative and would have much appreciated a timeline about his life. If provided, I would have referred to maps of significant places such as "within 50 Miles of New York" and Honduras, Panama, and Trinidad, etc. But of course, I have atlases and Internet access.

Eatherley uses a storyteller style and paraphrases Ditmars' writing, and that of others, throughout. And that of others. For example, I immediately recognized familiar passages such as Adler (1989, 2014) on p. 173 and Kate Swan's 1897 newspaper article (pp. 63–64) that I annotated a century later (Novotny 1999). I wish that all the others were cited with notes and a bibliography. I began to search, with some success, for those in my Ditmars collection and *The New York Times* online archives, but this painstaking process would have held up this piece until the next issue of *Herp Review*.

In 1989, Kraig Adler wrote, correctly, that Ditmars had influenced many herpetologists still active. A decade later I expressed

concern that Ditmars was being forgotten. Dr. Adler assured me that, because of the continuing availability of his books, that was not the case at all.

I'm not sure if he fully convinced me, but with Dan Eatherley's labor of love now published, Raymond L. Ditmars is back in the news, and I hope it leads to a resurgence of appreciation. I enjoyed this book immensely and recommend it to everyone interested in him, herpetology, or a good story. Buy one for yourself and for those on your gift list. Every library in the English-speaking world should own it. And despite the judgment that RLD's writing is "peppered with behind-the-scenes anecdotes too topical to stand the test of time" (Goddard and Swope 1995), admirers of *Bushmaster* may want to delve into RLD's original works, too.

Recall that this project originated with Dan Eatherley's idea for a film featuring Raymond L. Ditmars. I'm sure he could make a movie just as good as his book. But who should be cast as the bushmaster hunter? Chris Pratt starred in last summer's blockbuster *Jurassic World* and is the rumored successor to Harrison Ford in the next installment of the *Indiana Jones* franchise. In the meantime, would he be willing to grow a mustache and don some leather puttees?

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