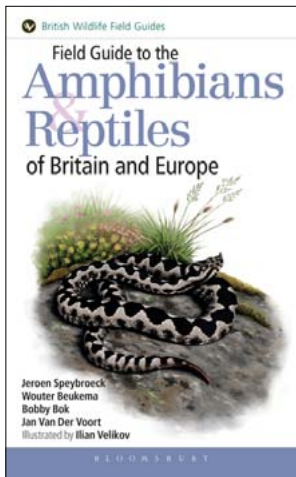


Field Guide to the Amphibians & Reptiles of Britain and Europe

Jeroen Speybroeck, Wouter Beukema, Bobby Bok, Jan van Der Voort, illustrated by Ilian Velikov

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At large the 'field guide' is an interesting type of book. Good field guides have always been the cornerstone of an interest in any branch of natural history and many have become legendary publications in their own right. Such was the case with Nick Arnold and Denys Ovenden's, Collins Field Guide to the Reptiles and Amphibians of Britain and Europe published originally in 1978 (co-authored with John Burton) with a second edition in 2002.

Like all good field guides, the Collins publications provided the illustrations and descriptions to help naturalists with the considerable challenge of identifying the reptiles and amphibians they encountered during their travels around Europe. However the world has moved on and the first port of call is now the internet. How we find the places to look for wildlife and how we identify what we find has changed fundamentally. With Wi-Fi and mobile phones signals available almost everywhere, even though I'm a 'baby boomer' not a 'digital native' when I go looking for wildlife I find Google Earth the best way to locate and get to suitable habitat (in many areas much better than dodgy local maps) and I rely on the internet for the many excellent images of the animals I'm looking for to help with identification.

However books are special and the Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Britain and Europe published by Bloomsbury under the British Wildlife brand is an exceptional field guide.

The layout of this guide is quite traditional with sort chapters up front on the diversity of reptiles and amphibians in Europe including species composition and conservation, how and where to find them, identification guides for amphibian early life stages and a checklist for all European amphibian and reptile species with tantalisingly empty tick boxes beside each species name.

The vast majority of space in the book however is taken up by the species accounts, colour coded into amphibians (which come first) and reptiles and organised into the obvious groups with simple identification keys that identify to a family level. The species are then grouped into families with identification keys to species level. Each species is described again quite traditionally; description, distribution, habitat and biology. The text in any field guide has to be quite succinct and clipped but throughout it is refreshingly readable with some nice detail to unravel similarities to related species. Based on the species with which I am most familiar, the accounts are extremely accurate and clearly based on real observation. Each species account is illustrated with an approximate distribution map and one or two photographs in addition to carefully prepared illustrations. Artist, Denys Ovenden's work in the Collins Field Guides is outstanding. The work of Ilian Velikov in this guide is breath-taking with all illustrations, but particularly the amphibians, incredibly life-like and accurate. I keep going back to the agile frog illustrations to check that they are actually not photographs.

This field guide describes 219 species and the accounts reflect up to date thinking on taxonomy which helps to unravel some of the more complex groups such as the Iberian wall lizards and the water frog group, *Pelophylax*. If you have not done so already, I urge you to buy this excellent field guide, it really is first class. It will rival the internet in its ability to help you in the field and it can happily sit alongside your Collins Field Guides (both editions) to help illustrate the worthy increase in knowledge as more and more field herpetologists share Jeroen Speybroeck's ambition (that he describes in his preface) to see all of the species of amphibian and reptile in Europe.

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