

Review by James B. Murphy

The Lizard Man Speaks

The Lizard Man Speaks. by Eric R. Pianka. 1994. 16 color and 32 black-and-white photographs, 4 figs., 4 maps. University of Texas Press, Austin. Cloth: ISBN: 0-292-76552-5. 224 pages. \$24.95.

More years ago than either of us would care to remember, I met Eric Pianka. He had published several papers on the ecology of Australian monitor lizards, which was a group of great interest to me. Since he had spent some years in the Great Victorian Desert located in central Western Australia, his observations on the lizard assemblage there would be of inestimable value in setting up suitable habitats for captive saurians at the Dallas Zoo where I was employed. As he told me about his experiences there, it was clear that lizard diversity in his study area was as great as any region in the world: forty-seven species in five families. In addition, his love of field work vividly surfaced and his intent on returning to Australia whenever possible was evident.

In 1989, I attended the First World Congress of Herpetology in Canterbury, England. As I was strolling along the path toward the dormitory, a tall figure wearing an embroidered shirt with the image of a pygmy monitor lizard, *Varanus eremius*, was walking ahead. It had to be Eric as this species was his favorite lizard in the world. We retired to a pub to down a few pints and his enthusiasm for returning to Australia was evident. Eric was honored as one of the plenary lecturers for the conference and his presentation can be read in its entirety (Pianka, 1992).

Reading his book is bound to be a great pleasure as his love for the remote regions of Australia and its lizard fauna is reflected throughout. The first chapter recounts his childhood during which he was severely injured by an exploding bazooka shell which he found on a National Guardsman firing range. The agony of his brush with

death and the efforts to reconstruct his badly damaged leg with surgery are told in chilling detail. He describes his college career as an undergraduate student at Carleton College in Minnesota. Curiously, a high school friend of mine was a student there at the time and told me during our summer break that I had to meet Eric as he was also interested in herps. We didn't meet until years later. After graduate school where he investigated lizard diversity in western North American deserts for his Ph.D. dissertation, he was awarded a post-doctoral stipend to work with the late Robert MacArthur, a prominent ecologist at Princeton University. Eric wished to do

Australia. In chapter six, he recounts an amusing series of misadventures as the locals feared that he and his ex-wife were lost in the "outback." The press coverage was extensive and a number of press clippings have been reproduced which demonstrates how misinformation can increase dramatically as each article builds on the errors of its predecessor.

So you want to do fieldwork in Australia, eh? The chapter on bush flies might change your mind. The density of these pests is overwhelming as the photographs on pages 121 and 122 demonstrate. Other sections cover the importance of bush fires on ecosystems, Australian Aborigines and a comparison between Australian and African deserts.

The book is an enjoyable read for any fancier interested in herpetological fieldwork. The modest price is an added bonus.

The book may be purchased from University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin TX 78713-7819. The toll-free telephone number is 1-800-252-3206, FAX (512)320-0668.

Additional Titles by Eric R. Pianka

1966. Convexity, desert lizards, and spacial heterogeneity. *Ecology* 47:1055-1059.

1967. On lizard species diversity: North American flatland deserts. *Ecology* 48:333-351.

1968. Notes on the biology of *Varanus eremius*. *Western Australian Naturalist* 11:39-44.

1969. Notes on the biology of *Varanus caudolineatus* and *Varanus gilleni*. *Western Australian Naturalist* 11:76-82.

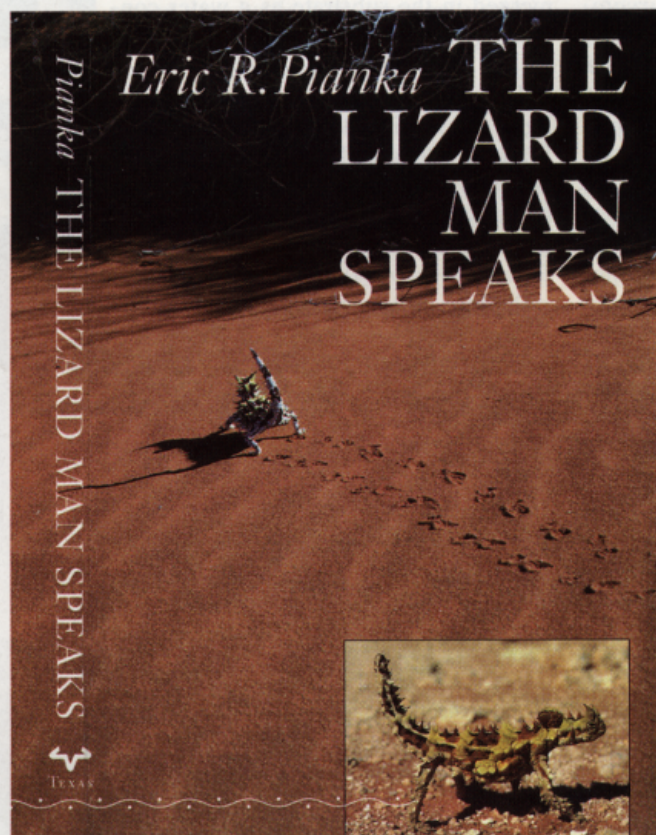
1973. The structure of lizard communities. *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 4:53-74.

1982. Observations on the ecology of *Varanus* in the Great Victorian Desert. *West. Aust. Nat.* 15: 1-8.

1986. Ecology and Natural History of Desert Lizards: Analyses of the Ecological Niche and Community Structure. Princeton University Press.

1992. The state of the art in community ecology, p.141-162. In: K. Adler (ed.), *Herpetology: Current Research on the Biology of Amphibians and Reptiles*. Proceedings of the First World Congress of Herpetology. Soc. Study of Amphibians and Reptiles, Oxford, OH.

1995. Evolution of body size: Varanid lizards as a model system. *Am. Nat.* 146(3): 398-414.



a comparative study of lizard diversity in Australia so he and his ex-wife Helen set off for the Land Down Under. The next two chapters describe his travels throughout Australia and his herp collecting adventures.

Chapter four should be of considerable interest to the herpetoculturist as Pianka describes lizard natural history. Topics such as use of time and space: thermal relations, feeding ecology, adaptive suites, reproductive tactics, and escape from predators are included. The next chapter describes the biogeographical history of

