

clear observational framework about the actual conditions that support the assemblages found. The book is very clearly laid out, supported by an enormous web-based resource, with tables of all the data presented in the book.

The book starts with brief summaries on methods and biological/ecological aspects. Next, it launches into the discussion of benthic foraminiferal distributions. Here, the text sometimes assumes the character of an encyclopaedia, listing somewhat 'dry' facts and statistics about benthic foraminifera in a range of different environments around the world. However, it is well organized and as a result easy to digest and follow from one section to another. Personally, I would have liked to see maps identifying the many geographic locations that are discussed, but this omission is easily dealt with by evaluating the book next to an atlas, or a web-based geographic resource. Once the reader hits Chapter 7, on the deep sea, the text becomes much more specific on the processes and controls that govern the distribution patterns. It is obvious that it is in the deep sea that the vast majority of such data have been obtained. Here, I find that the text excels in clarity, and that it provides an impressive synthesis of a vast array of studies. Even more than the preceding chapters, the deep-sea chapter delivers a truly essential starter to all who consider a career in benthic foraminiferal ecology or its use in reconstructions of (past) environments.

The final chapters summarize living distributions and the processes behind them, discuss the changes from live to dead and fossil assemblages (essential for down-core studies), and introduce applications of the observations that are brought together in the book in palaeoecological and palaeoceanographic studies. The latter two topics are not at the core of the book, and are mainly presented in the form of brief summaries and examples. Still, they convey the message well, and the reader is left with a positive impression of having been presented with a state-of-the-art introduction and overview in benthic foraminiferal ecology and its applications. This book is written by an acclaimed authority, and it shows.

The copy I had for evaluation was hardbound and very neatly printed. All figures are clear and well laid out, and the scanning electron micrographs are of excellent quality – it's a shame there were not a few more of those throughout the book. Good images can always be found on the web, but there's no substitute to having them within the main text volume. The reference list is as extensive as it could possibly be, and the volume of data that has been brought together from around the world is truly amazing. This is a very good reference volume for people working in the discipline, and a great introduction to those aspiring to do so. Now for a volunteer to integrate all these datasets into a Google-Earth-type framework...

Eelco J. Rohling

HOLMAN, J. A. 2006. *Fossil Salamanders of North America*. xv + 232 pp. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. Price US \$55.00 (hard covers). ISBN 0 253 34732 7.
doi:10.1017/S0016756808004743

Indiana University Press is producing an extraordinary variety of texts under their 'Life of the Past' series edited by James O. Farlow. They range between rather naïve, poorly edited books on dinosaurs and scholarly tomes written exclusively by acknowledged experts that have the 'air' of a more traditional monograph. This falls into the latter cat-

egory, and is the third to have been produced by Alan Holman (the first having been *The Fossil Snakes of North America*, the second *The Fossil Frogs and Toads of North America*).

As with the earlier volumes this is an impressively comprehensive survey of a comparatively obscure group of amphibians. Since these are ecologically extremely vulnerable in modern habitats, being able to survey their anatomy, taxonomy, history and distribution in exquisite detail is a valuable resource. In this respect Indiana University Press is to be congratulated in its altruism – this is not going to be a 'best seller' in any sense of that word, since it fits into the category of worthy (but comparatively dull).

Salamanders are biologically wonderful animals (as indeed are their cousins the frogs and toads), living as they do at the water–land interface. They combine fish-like and classical tetrapod adaptations with great facility since they can (and do) prosper in both environments. Early reports dating to the late 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries confounded the naturalists – in much the same way as the duckbilled platypus did. Were they 'fish' (aquatic)? or were they actually 'saurian' (crawlers on land)? – the combination of gills (some retained externally in the adult) and legs seemed to cut right across conventional wisdom on how to distinguish between the then-understood groups of animals.

Such developmental and anatomical plasticity, and ecological flexibility are part of the wonder of this underestimated group, and this volume that provides an insight into their evolutionary history and diversity is both timely and valuable. This is an excellent addition to the list provided by Indiana University Press. Unfortunately its audience will inevitably be rather limited given the non-prevalence of taxonomically oriented courses taught in biology departments at the present time; this is an indictment of the present state of our educational system.

David Norman

LOWRIE, W. 2007. *Fundamentals of Geophysics*, 2nd ed. x + 381 pp. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press. Price £70.00, US \$140.00 (hard covers), £35.00, US \$70.00 (paperback). ISBN 9780 521 85902 8; 9780 521 67596 3 (pb).
doi:10.1017/S0016756808004871

Are textbooks in their traditional form still relevant? Increasingly feedback from students reveals that they read fewer texts and spend more time reading online material. Textbooks have to compete for attention from instantly searchable material available on a computer screen anywhere in the world at the click of a mouse. The internet makes not just one point of view or explanation but tens, hundreds or thousands available in an instant. Academic staff have seen the development of the internet but learned the material they teach from textbooks, meanwhile the students they teach have now grown up in the internet age and have little concept of life without it. The staff and the students they teach gather information in different ways. Who is to say which is best?

As the influence of the internet has grown *Fundamentals of Geophysics* has been published and has established itself as one of the most widely used geophysics textbooks. It has recently been revised and published in a second edition. This new edition is similar to the first, with one major change: the contents of the final chapter on Geodynamics from the first edition have been incorporated into chapters one to five of the second edition. In my mind this is an improvement because much of this material now follows in context from the more introductory material in each