BIOLOGY OF THE LAND CRABS
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THE LAND CRABS

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Contents

List of contributors page ix    Preface page xi

1: BIOLOGY OF THE LAND CRABS:
   AN INTRODUCTION
   Warren W. Burggren and Brian R. McMahon
   1. Why study land crabs? 1
   2. Defining a “land” crab 2
   3. The scope and coverage of Biology of the land crabs 4

2: EVOLUTION, SYSTEMATICS, AND GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION
   Richard G. Hartnoll
   1. Introduction 7
   2. Levels of terrestrial adaptation 9
   3. Systematic account 11
   4. Phylogeny and evolution of land crabs 47
   5. Conclusions 53

3: ECOLOGY
   Thomas G. Wolcott
   1. Introduction 55
   2. Interactions with the physical environment: “limiting factors” 58
   3. Interactions with the biotic environment 65
   4. Competition for food and habitat 75
   5. Reproductive ecology 79
   6. Growth and longevity 88
   7. Role of land crabs in food chains: predators and human exploitation 90
   8. Effects of land crabs on environment 94

[v]
Contents

9. Directions for future research in land crab ecology 95

4: Behavior 97
David W. Dunham and Sandra L. Gilchrist
1. Introduction 97
2. Feeding behavior 99
3. Grooming by non-ocypodid crabs 108
4. Reproductive behavior 110
5. Agonistic and resource-related behaviors 120
6. Acoustic display 128
7. Locomotory behavior 131
8. Orientation 134
9. Summary and conclusions 137

5: Reproduction and Development 139
Rita G. Adiyodi
1. Introduction 139
2. Breeding seasons of land crabs 140
3. Programming of reproduction and molt 142
4. Sexual differentiation, sexual maturation, and mating 145
5. Reproduction in the female 151
6. Reproduction in the male 165
7. Development 180
8. Conclusions 185

6: Growth and Molting 186
Richard G. Hartnoll
1. Introduction 186
2. Molting in land crabs 188
3. Patterns of growth 197
4. Relative growth 201
5. Autotomy and regeneration 206
6. Conclusions 209

7: Ion and Water Balance 211
Peter Greenaway
1. Introduction 211
2. Water balance 213
3. Osmotic and ionic regulation 228
4. General discussion and evolutionary implications 246
### Contents

**8: RESPIRATION**  
*Brian R. McMahon and Warren W. Burggren*

1. Introduction 249  
2. Structure of gas exchange organs 250  
3. Ventilatory mechanisms 257  
4. Gas exchange and metabolic rate 263  
5. Ventilatory control mechanisms 265  
6. Oxygen transport by hemolymph 266  
7. Carbon dioxide transport by hemolymph 274  
8. Hemolymph acid–base balance 275  
9. Respiratory compensation for environmental change 278  
10. Ecological physiology of land crabs and the evolution of air breathing 283

**9: CIRCULATION**  
*Warren W. Burggren and Brian R. McMahon*

1. Introduction 298  
2. Cardiovascular morphology 299  
3. Cardiovascular physiology 313  
4. Gravity: a circulatory “problem” with terrestrial life 328  
5. Conclusions 330

**10: ENERGETICS AND LOCOMOTION**  
*Clyde F. Herreid II and Robert J. Full*

1. Introduction 334  
2. Feeding 334  
3. Digestive system 337  
4. Metabolism 345  
5. Animal energetics 353  
6. Locomotion 357  
7. Energy budgets 375  
8. Conclusion 376

**11: EPILOGUE**  
*Brian R. McMahon and Warren W. Burggren*

APPENDIX: Natural histories of selected terrestrial crabs 382
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>viii</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author index</td>
<td>447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematic index</td>
<td>458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject index</td>
<td>464</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Preface

This volume, detailing the biology of what are essentially subtropical and tropical animals, had its genesis during the winter of 1983–1984, during which time our home institutions in Massachusetts and Alberta were blanketed in snow. In spite of this unlikely environment (or perhaps because of it!), we turned our thoughts and research efforts once more to collaborative studies of cardiorespiratory physiology in land crabs. Although we felt we knew where to look for information on that particular aspect of their physiology, we frequently lamented the fact that there was no single source of information where we could learn about the other fields of biological research on land crabs that potentially impinged upon our physiological studies.

Having recognized the need for a scholarly volume on many different aspects of land crab biology, we then set about what we thought would be the straightforward task of assembling a group of experts to contribute to a “small” monograph on the biology of land crabs. After arbitrating (and contributing to) pitched battles among contributors about which animals were actually to be considered “land crabs” and how they should be classified, and, following the generation of several hundred pages of information and the collection of approximately one thousand references, there is now this single source of information on the biology of land crabs. Rather than suggest that this volume be regarded as the authoritative source, however, we must emphasize that contributors were constrained by book length to report only on selected aspects of their assigned topic. In fact, far more is known about land crabs than we had ever imagined at the outset of this project. Yet, paradoxically, far less is known about them than we had hoped for, and as most authors freely admit, there are many aspects of the biology of land crabs about which we know very little.

In retrospect (despite this being a preface), perhaps the single most notable achievement of this joint effort by ten authors has been to define clearly not only what we currently know about land crabs but, as importantly, to also indicate what we still need to find out. Land crabs represent a fascinating evolutionary chapter in the colonization
Preface

of land by aquatic animals, and as such will continue to be a focal point for biological research.

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