

Book reviews

The author does not end on a note of optimism in spite of the book's subtitle, but concludes: 'I think it would be foolish to assume any whales will be given up while there is hope they can be taken'. The book should be viewed with more optimism because of the author's contribution to bringing together the facts on whaling, many of which are difficult to come by or to interpret from raw material, and for making them available to the public domain in a very readable form. Tropical forest destruction and the Antarctic minerals regime are among many other areas requiring a similar concise, factual and readable presentation—can he be persuaded to take these on?

John Rudge.

The Natural History of Domesticated Mammals Juliet Clutton-Brock

British Museum (Natural History) and Cambridge University Press, 1987, 208 pp., PB £9.95

This book is identical in content to the hardback volume published in 1981 by the British Museum (Natural History) under the title *Domesticated Animals from Early Times*. It provides a fascinating account of the animals with which we interact so closely today, the history of domestication and the identity and current status of the wild relatives of those domesticants. The publication in paperback is very welcome, but the new title is less appropriate than the old one.

There is a major contrast between those animals whose breeding humans have controlled to select for morphological, physiological or behavioural characters (domestic animals) and those which have just been tamed and controlled without intentional selection in breeding (domesticated animals). The former include dogs, sheep, goats, cattle, pigs and horses; the latter include elephants, camels, llamas, reindeer, Asiatic cattle and cats (who someone once suggested to be the one species that has domesticated humans!). There is a detailed description of each of these animals and the evolution of breeds, in relation to their wild ancestors, from the study of abundant archaeological remains. There is reference to small mammals such as rabbits and ferrets and to rodents and carnivores (guinea-pigs, rats, dormice, hamster, chinchilla,

muskrat, mink, fox) used at various times for food, fur or hides.

While the evidence for domestication stems from West Asia 9000 years ago, from when there are increasingly abundant and widespread relevant remains, it is clear that the human–animal relationship is of much greater antiquity. The hunting of red deer, gazelles and bison is well documented from the Palaeolithic onwards. As human populations increased so it became more economic to keep herds of animals to kill for meat when required, and to live a more settled existence, cultivating crops such as cereals; herbivores, such as sheep, goat and cattle, were attracted to these patches of luxuriance and subsequently controlled, often with the help of dogs, supposedly the first animal to be domesticated. At various times, especially nowadays, there have been experiments at domestication and game ranching, involving animals such as the manatee and dugong, deer, antelopes and the cheetah (the great Moghul emperor Akbar supposedly kept 9000 cheetah during his 60-year reign in the 16th century), but breeding success in captivity was often poor. Antelope such as the saiga (saved from extinction by the Russians early this century), the eland and musk ox figure prominently in such efforts today.

Only a small proportion of the vast array of animals have the right attributes for domestication: they need to be adaptable, breed easily and rapidly, be gregarious, have a hierarchical social structure rather than be territorial; only some of these have economic value. Humans can be blamed more for loss of plant and animal diversity, than for the outright extinction of large mammals. For example, the originally very fertile area of Western Asia has been transformed to desert more by over-grazing than by climatic change.

Thus, there is much for the conservationist to learn for the future by studying the past. Various species were perhaps extinguished naturally by the Pleistocene, while others became extinct in the last few hundred years as they became undesirable once their relatives were domesticated. Yet others are faced with extinction today, as their habitat becomes reduced and isolated. Apart from protecting habitat, efforts to save

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them often centre on the value of maintaining a wild stock for an animal of commercial importance, especially those whose breeding is difficult to control. It is a very complex subject, with almost as many problems and solutions as there are species, but Juliet Clutton-Brock's methodical analysis and stimulating assessment go a long way to providing a substantial base from which to tackle it.

David J. Chivers, Sub-Department of Veterinary Anatomy, University of Cambridge.

Forest Life and Adventures in The Malay Archipelago

Eric Mjöberg

Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1988, 201 pp., HB £4.95

Originally published in Stockholm in Swedish in 1928; first published in English by George Allen and Unwin Ltd in 1930.

In this age of excellent wildlife documentary films and superbly illustrated books, reprints of books by early natural historians and explorers might seem to be irrelevant (although first editions are valuable). They have a great fascination, however, in reflecting a time when words were the main medium of description—in illustrating the versatility of the English language—and to those interested in tracing the development of knowledge about exotic habitats and wildlife, and of achievements in exploration.

Eric Mjöberg spent eight years in the Orient, mainly on Borneo where he was head of the Sarawak Museum. He spent much time living rough as he wandered 1750 miles in all into the 'darkest recesses' of the island, his epic journeys being up the Baram river to Gunung Murud, and up the Mahakam river to Gunung Tibang, on the Sarawak–Kalimantan border, returning down the Kajan river. Rather than describe such journeys, he describes systematically what he has learnt about the animals and plants of these tropical forests.

Accompanied throughout by line drawings and interesting black-and-white photographs, he then moves on to primates—the orang-utan (about which 'he has nothing but good to say of this worthy forest philosopher', but which he ill-treats in collecting two specimens for the Sarawak Museum, according to his sordid

description of the hunt—not the only unsavoury aspect of the book), gibbons, macaques, langurs, the proboscis monkey ('a human caricature in flesh and blood'), slow loris and tarsier (which he perceives to be more closely related to monkeys than lemurs). He concludes his mammalian survey with the serow (goat–antelope) and pangolin, before moving on to birds where the argus pheasant ('proudest and most pugnacious bird in the Malay Archipelago') and edible nests are emphasized.

Lower vertebrates figure prominently: snakes (including cobras and a python that consumed a caged pig and then could not leave the cage), turtles (with 15,000 eggs selling for £15), a montane flying frog and various fishes, including one that walks on land and climbs trees. With invertebrates we learn about Mjöberg's painstaking unravelling of the mystery of the trilobite larvae, which had baffled people since their discovery in 1831, as well as about bees and honey, scorpions, millipedes, butterflies, gnats and mosquitoes (the worst pests of all in the forest!).

He waxes lyrical about the general characters of Borneo's primaeva forests, before describing pitcher plants, the collection of camphor and rubber and the 'most delicious fruits on earth'; like this reviewer his favourite is the mangosteen ('of which it is impossible to eat enough . . . a defect in the eater rather than the fruit') rather than the durian (also favoured by tiger and orang-utan), which smells of 'perspiring feet and rotten bananas'.

He concludes with a description of *Rafflesia* and advice to his successors, which includes being sound, healthy and adaptable, and consuming seven pints of water and two alcoholic drinks (but after the heat of the day) and taking two (not three) baths each day; various other 'dos and don'ts' are detailed but the key point is to be born under a lucky star! Thus, there is an host of intriguing information expressed succinctly and humorously with, regretfully, the odd dash of horror. Overall, a useful little volume complementing well the natural history studies of Hose (1929) in Sarawak and the more anthropological annals of Bock (1881), also reporting on travels in Borneo and Sumatra—both recently reprinted by Oxford University Press.

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