

Wildflight: a history of conservation

Colin Willock

Jonathan Cape, London, 1991, 143 pp., ISBN 0 224 02774 3, HB £14.99

This is certainly a good read, as one would expect from Colin Willock, with his unrivalled knowledge of active conservation as a producer and writer for Anglia TV's Survival films for 27 years. As a personal account of one man's experiences of wildlife conservation in the latter half of the twentieth century, with an introductory survey of the excessive slaughter of wildlife worldwide in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it can be thoroughly recommended.

Unfortunately somebody (I hope the publisher, not the author) has subtitled it 'a history of conservation' and this certainly is not. It is not even a history of conservation in the latter half of the twentieth century, for it leaves too much out. There is extraordinarily little on bird protection, the most active sphere of wildlife conservation between the 1880s and the 1950s, and almost nothing on the work of the RSPB or ICBP. Indeed, the author concentrates too much on the high-profile mammals, to the detriment of birds, reptiles and invertebrates. Even with the mammals a great deal is left out, e.g. an account of the vicuña saga in Peru.

What is more, while the work of the WWF is adequately acknowledged, there is virtually no reference to IUCN or its Species Survival Commission, which have been increasingly central to species conservation in the latter half of the century, and cannot be left out of any history of the subject. Sir Peter Scott, whom the author rightly praises highly, devoted just as

much attention to his chairmanship of SSC as to that of WWF.

One small point of especial interest to FFPS members: the author, like so many others, is confused about Operation Oryx (p. 43). It was not achieved by WWF with help from FFPS, but by FFPS with help from WWF, when the *Daily Mail* withdrew at the last minute. On p. 102, however, he does get it right, except about the *Daily Mail*.

What a pity that the publishers' pretentious title should have been allowed to mislead potential readers. For the book is well worth reading for its own sake, and I hope many people will read it.

Richard Fitter.

Neotropical Wildlife Use and Conservation

John G. Robinson and Kent H. Redford (Editors)

The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991, 520 pp., ISBN 0 226 72259 7, HB £49.50, SB £22.50

This is the latest in a number of books that have been published recently on the sustainable utilization of wildlife and its theme is in keeping with the philosophy that wildlife that is used is the wildlife most likely to survive. This will not find favour with all conservationists and, indeed, the pendulum has had a tendency to swing too far in the utilization direction.

Nevertheless, it must be recognized that wildlife exploitation is often a matter of survival for the local people, or at least a factor in the maintenance of a reasonable standard of living. Conservationists in the developed world must be understanding and sympathetic towards the needs of those less fortunate than themselves.

This book is of particular

interest in that it is confined to the neotropics, a hitherto neglected area in the wildlife utilization debate, and because the authors of many of the chapters come from the countries concerned. They also include social scientists as well as biologists, two groups that are often poles apart in their thinking, and it is good to see that here, each is at least listening to the other. The word 'conservation' in the title is important because it draws attention to the fact that wildlife can be utilized without endangering it and some of the chapters provide ample evidence of this fact. Unfortunately, others reveal the darker side of wildlife exploitation. The live bird trade is the greatest offender and its activities have little to do with conservation. It is also objectionable on animal welfare grounds. It is unfortunate that many projects for the exploitation of wildlife, while ecologically and economically sound, are unacceptable because of the animal suffering involved.

The chapters are too numerous to be detailed here, but they cover an extraordinary range, from reptiles to large mammals and from subsistence hunting to tourism. They form an authoritative and valuable addition to the literature.

S. K. Eltringham.

Great Cats: Majestic Creatures of the Wild

John Seidensticker and Susan Lumpkin (consulting editors)

Rodale Press, Emmaus, Pennsylvania, USA, 1991, 240 pp., ISBN 1 85391 189 5, HB \$US40.00

This is surely the finest book on the cats in general so far published. The title might mislead some to think it deals only with

lions, tigers and other big cats, but it ranges over the whole felid spectrum from the mighty Amur or Siberian tiger, largest of all the family, to the tiny rusty-spotted cat in India and Sri Lanka. Thirty-eight of the world's top specialists have contributed to this magnificent, spectacularly illustrated celebration of cats, 16 of them members of the Cat Specialist Group.

Starting, appropriately, with the evolution and biology of cats in general, with a special section on the awesome sabretooths, *Great Cats* looks at each species in turn with an account of their appearance, size, habitat, distribution, reproduction, social system and diet. Paintings by Frank Knight show the 37 species in characteristic poses, and small maps provide a general picture of their range.

The contributors have produced highly-readable text, which should absorb the attention of all interested in the cats. Scientific terms are clearly explained. A chapter entitled 'How cats work' shows how specialized and efficient cats are as killing machines. Hunting techniques are well presented, and are matched by dramatic pictures.

Inevitably, the big cats, plus the puma (also big in size) and the lynx, get more coverage than the small because they have been easier to study—easier, but not easy. The highly secretive life of the small cats in forests, grasslands and deserts makes research a formidable challenge and little is known of their life in the wild. Nevertheless, there is much to learn from the observations of small cats in captivity. It is a delight to see photographs of the rare Andean cat and the kodkod of southern Chile. But there isn't one of the Bornean

bay cat—it is known from only a few skins and a mere handful of sightings.

An interesting section on wild cats and feral cats leads on to chapters on the place of cats in human history and culture, including a review of the evolution of domestic cats.

There are some gory pictures of victims of man-eating cats and discussion of the problem of reconciling conservation with the natural concern of local people living close to dangerous large predators. Unless this problem can be solved, or at least reduced to manageable proportions, the future of cats and other large animals appears gloomy.

The chapter on 'Cats in zoos' explains the efforts being made to ensure species survival in captivity. After taking a look at the growing need to manage wild populations, it predicts that wildlife reserves will become megazoo and concludes with the 'not too futuristic' scenario of tigers being tracked by satellites by way of injectable microchips carrying the animals genealogy and other biological information for integration with ecological, climatic and political variables in a centralized, map-linked data base. This data base would provide politicians and worldwide conservation leaders with information on which to formulate decisions about the economic growth of a country with due consideration of the impact on animal conservation.

The World Conservation Union's Chief Conservation Officer, Jeffrey McNeely, manages to be optimistic about the future of wild cats, even after detailing the survival problems they face. Let us hope that his optimism is justified, for the survival of the wild cats can only continue if the diverse animal and plant life on which

they depend is conserved. Preservation of the big cats is the best recipe for conserving biodiversity in their ranges.

There is a serious omission for a book of such high scientific quality—neither a bibliography nor references—but it is likely to be a long time before it can be matched, let alone bettered.

Peter Jackson.

The Mammals of Arabia

David L. Harrison and Paul J. J. Bates.

Harrison Zoological Museum, Sevenoaks, 1991, 354 pp., ISBN 0 951 73130 0, HB £65 or \$US120

The first edition of David Harrison's *The Mammals of Arabia*, published in three volumes from 1964 to 1972, was indeed a 'first' in documenting the Arabian mammals in a comprehensive way. A reviewer of the first volume wrote that '... as a standard reference work on its subject it will undoubtedly last out the century'. He may not have envisaged that a substantially revised and updated edition would be needed to achieve this. But here it is, in a single volume of 350 pages replacing the 670 pages of the previous edition.

Although the geographical scope is unchanged, the title, as before, is a little misleading because the area covered is much more than the Arabian peninsula, extending northwards to include Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. The 150 species dealt with, therefore, include a considerable number that are very peripheral to Arabia, such as the lynx and brown bear in Kurdistan and several other northern species like the badger and beech marten, which reach their southern boundary in the