

Book reviews

traders on four continents, Nichol offers a fascinating insight not available to the well-meaning newcomers who attempt surveys but are fobbed off by dealers who are suspicious of strangers. Yet Nichol 'shops' nobody and makes it clear that trade is not what it was. Legislation has forced many out of business and the survivors (in their own interests) often run high-quality operations. We are introduced to the people responsible for each stage of catching, collecting, exporting and importing live animals, based on examples from many countries. There are fascinating stories of ingenious methodology and even the use of dead parrots as a cover for drug smuggling. There is amusement too, like the conversation at a bird hospital in India run by Jains who would only cater for species that were vegetarian. The tales of unlikely entrepreneurs are worth reading too, like the one-eyed maggot man or the professional parrot pluckers of Calcutta.

It is often unclear whether events recounted were recent and represent a continuing situation or not, but the general time-frame seems to cover the last 20 years or so, and some material is right up to date. Inevitably there is a lot of hearsay, and few details and numbers that could be quoted with confidence. However, the author makes it clear that he is not writing for such readers; this isn't intended as a survey of official trade statistics (hardly any are given) but a first-hand story of what goes on. Some of his tales include all the graphic detail anyone could want and Chapter 3, on cruelty, is not for the squeamish!

So, should we stop wildlife trade or not? John Nichol suggests we probably should where it involves trade in inessential commodities, which requires animals to be killed. But for the trade in live animals he argues it would be a shame to eliminate a source of income and such excitement and interest as he describes. It is a shame too about the cruelty and squalor, but that can, and should, be eliminated by proper control rather than outright prohibition of trade.

The existence of laws and international agreements to control wildlife trade forms a backdrop to this whole story, but reading the book one becomes increasingly aware that the practicalities of enforcement make their existence

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seem unreal and almost irrelevant. In fact as I read on, savouring the descriptions of wonderful characters in the Indian bird markets and the behaviour of trappers in Thailand and Indonesia, I realized that this is a book about people and attitudes as much as smuggling and animals. People in Western countries simply think about animals in a way quite different from the inhabitants of others. This is especially true in Asia where our ideas and values are alien and often uncomprehended. Conservationists need this kind of insight into the minds of others if their message is to be put across effectively.

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The Mammals of Nigeria

D.C.D. Happold

Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987, 402 pp, HB £75.00

The 247 species known are described in the first 200 pages, and the second half of the book comprises more general surveys by habitat, together with appendices, including glossary, gazeteer, local names, distribution maps, and bibliography. The text is well illustrated with monochrome photos and line drawings, and diagrams. A useful addition to the library of anyone with an interest in mammal conservation, since regrettably so many of Nigeria's mammals are threatened. However, Dr Happold only gives the merest indication of the abundance of most species—usually only one or two lines.

John A. Burton, Natural History and Wildlife Conservation Writer and Consultant.

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