

# Book reviews

## **Saving the Tropical Forests**

Judith Gradwohl and Russell Greenberg

Earthscan, London, 1988, 207 pp., PB £6.95

By way of gross simplification, there is a world view that holds that small and traditional developments are very wonderful and that we shall all live happily ever after, environmentally speaking, if we adhere to this philosophy. The opposing, simplified world view is that all things large and modern are very wonderful because they will make us rich and comfortable. The problem with *Saving the Tropical Forests* is that it could all too easily be dismissed as an example of the former philosophy by land-use decision-makers, who might then be immune to its valuable points, even if those same planners would not think of themselves as necessarily being advocates of the 'big and modern' approach.

In a lucid foreword, Michael Robinson explains that the book is intended to promote methods by which forests can be preserved in ways that are consistent with the continuing economic advance of tropical peoples. Local methods and species are to be emphasized where possible. So far, so good, but Gradwohl and Greenberg do succeed in pulling together a summary of (mainly Latin American) case studies, but I was left with the feeling that I was reading an uncritical desk review of inputs from a diverse collection of informants.

Arguments are put forward that are, in places, rather superficial. A chapter on sustainable agriculture, for example, scathingly dismisses large-scale agriculture as generally destructive and usually concentrating wealth in the hands of a minority. Even if this is true, then surely there is all the more reason to consider schemes such as those in Kenya (tea) and Malaysia (mainly oil palm, rubber and cocoa) that endeavour to spread wealth and

provide land for the landless on a large-scale. The experience of Malaysia at least suggests that if you can derive sustainable economic success and political stability from large-scale plantation agriculture, you might be in a better position to designate and manage areas of permanent forest in a tropical country. A book that seeks to review ways in which tropical forests can be conserved worldwide should not read as if this option does not exist.

The impression of superficiality continues in a chapter on natural forest management, in which the reader is cheerfully informed that 'it appears that the great dipterocarp forests of the Old World tropics, primarily found in Malaysia and Indonesia, can be managed fairly easily'. No doubt the forestry authorities of these two countries would like to know why it is that biological complexities, vast distances, inaccessibility, economic pressures, diverse human interests, etc., etc. make it all seem so difficult! To quote another example, this chapter refers, generally approvingly, to silvicultural techniques that involve the use of poisons without ever mentioning that these same poisons might have adverse environmental impacts (which they certainly do).

I would think that it would be difficult for anybody who is professionally involved in forest management in the tropics not to be irritated by this sort of thing, which brings me back to my original concern: will the people who make the decisions that will decide the future of tropical forests use this book? Directly, I think not. They could, however, be usefully influenced by it if the many interesting ideas that derive from the case studies reach them indirectly via workers in NGOs and universities who might read the book, get new perspectives and follow up through more detailed literature. To that extent,

the book is potentially useful; and in a similar vein, it could be a good teaching aid by getting students to grapple with new ideas and follow up references.

Michael Kavanagh, Director of Conservation, WWF Malaysia.

## **Conservation and Biology of Desert Antelopes**

Edited by Alexandra Dixon and David Jones

Christopher Helm, Bromley, 1988, 238 pp., HB £25.00

The 22 chapters of this book consist of the papers and posters presented at the Symposium to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the start of Operation Oryx. Nine of the chapters are specifically devoted to the Arabian oryx *Oryx leucoryx*, three to the scimitar-horned oryx *O. dammah*, one to the Kalahari gemsbok *Oryx gazella*, and three to the Hippotraginae in general. Most of the remainder deal with gazelles, which were the subject of several posters. There is one chapter summarizing discussion points from the Symposium, and another one that examines the attitudes to wildlife, particularly large mammals, in Arabia.

The listing above fails to give an idea of the flavour of the volume as a whole. There is no attempt by the editors to obtain consistency of treatment or of presentation of material, and this has resulted in a pot-pourri of considerable charm. Thus the volume begins with three chapters of narrative, which record the beginnings and the conduct of Operation Oryx, a compelling tale of remarkable perseverance against considerable odds. Then there is a solid core of well-referenced scientific papers to which all those concerned with the biology, social behaviour, reproduction, captive breeding, and management of large desert mammals will wish to refer. The discussion section, as is commonly the case, comes across as

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rather stilted, limited and disjointed, but it is followed by a further surprise in the form of a chapter on the social and cultural setting for conservation in Arabia. It is crucial to comprehend the Islamic perspective, for 'the role of the foreign conservationist in Arabia is essentially that of a short-term guest, contributing experience from elsewhere towards a uniquely Arabian and Muslim enterprise.' Maybe more Western conservationists should attempt to understand fully the local cultural norms before implanting their ideas elsewhere in the world.

This book is attractively produced and thoroughly readable. The colour photographs are an additional bonus, but surely someone must have good shots in the wild of the three species whose photographs were taken in captivity?

*John Barkham, School of Environmental Sciences, University of East Anglia, Norwich, England.*

## **The Birds of Africa. Volume III**

C. Hilary Fry, Stuart Keith and Emil K. Urban

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Ltd, 1988, 611 pp., £71.50.

This is the third of seven volumes of this monumental work on African birds, the first volume of which was reviewed in the July 1983 issue of *Oryx*. Meanwhile one of the primary protagonists, Leslie Brown, died before Volume II was completed and it is sad that this remarkable ornithologist did not live to see the completion of what he regarded as the culmination of his life's work in Africa. The new editors have done a fine job in maintaining the high level of production that Leslie sought and the present volume, which covers the families from parrots to woodpeckers, is authoritative. The illustrations by Martin Woodcock and Ian Willis are excellent, though some of the plates appear cramped.

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This is hardly a field guide and the extension of the series from four to seven volumes will push the price and weight beyond the pockets and carrying capacity of most ornithologists. Nevertheless, anyone with an interest in African birds should seek a mortgage and a forklift truck instantly.

## **An Introduction to Animal Law** Margaret E. Cooper

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Ltd, London, 1988, 213 pp., HB £17.50.

Animal law is a much broader topic than might at first be apparent, and one of the difficulties facing an author on the subject is either to be comprehensive and write an amazingly long book or be selective and risk being criticized for omitting important chunks of the law. Margaret Cooper acknowledges this dilemma in the introduction to her book and has, understandably, chosen the route of being selective and relatively brief.

The result is a book that will be useful to vets who need to know the procedures, for example, required by the law regarding scientific experiments on live animals and to lawyers who are asked to advise on liability when their client's dog bites the next door neighbour's child. However, the book's coverage of conservation law is very sparse, and to a biased conservationist like myself this is disappointing.

The book is primarily concerned with UK law, although there is a short section containing a few introductory sentences to animal law in some other countries. It covers questions of rights and responsibilities over animals—e.g. who owns an animal and who is responsible when it trespasses on to someone else's land. It also covers the law relating to the welfare of both wild and domestic animals, the use of animals for scientific purposes, the control of animal diseases and the treatment of animals

by vets. There is a rather curious chapter on health and safety law which has rather more to do with people than animals.

The chapter on conservation is good in parts – it provides a useful analysis of the sections of the Wildlife and Countryside Act dealing with 'protected birds' and other protected animals – but it is also frustrating because it does not even mention the Act's provisions relating to habitat conservation, although the latter is far more relevant to the plight of many of Britain's animals than the laws prohibiting their killing or capture.

Nevertheless, the book is a valuable introduction to a subject on which far too little has been written, and each chapter is followed by comprehensive references and excellent suggestions for further reading, which are always useful.

*Simon Lyster, Senior Conservation Officer (International), World Wide Fund for Nature, UK*

## **Natural History of Vampire Bats**

Edited by A.M. Greenhall and U. Schmidt  
CRC Press, Florida, 1988, 246 pp., HB £109.00

At the publication price, I am not sure who this book is intended for—it certainly will be out of the reach of many of the Latin American departments and offices that would find it useful. Notwithstanding, Greenhall and Schmidt have edited a first class work dealing with the three blood-feeding bats of Central and South America.

While there have been periods of intense study of vampire bats, due to their association with the spread of rabies in cattle, it would appear that this is no longer regarded as a major problem, indeed figures given in a chapter on economic losses due to the common vampire suggest that overall losses of about

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