

Book reviews

supply and demand for what is, after all, a hard currency and a diminishing resource.

Despite its flaws, IUCN cannot afford to ignore this book.

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Nigerian Field: a special wildlife issue

One of the oldest African journals, the *Nigerian Field*, has recently published a special Wildlife Issue (Vol. 47, part 4). In view of the current interest in the rational utilisation of resources, as expressed in the World Conservation Strategy, it is particularly encouraging to read in the first paper by T.A. Afoloyan and S.S. Ajayi on '50 years of Nigerian Wildlife Resources' that:

'In 1948 the Secretary of the Fauna Preservation Society of London came to Nigeria to assess progress in wildlife preservation. He stated that one important obstacle to game preservation was that proposed wildlife conservation areas included large areas of traditional, ancient hunting grounds and therefore were indiscriminately used by local people. He suggested that to make game law enforcement effective, Nigerians should participate in game protection, since they are in the best position to convey conservation ideas to their people; that conservation should be limited to specific areas with no clash with local interests; and that all revenues from hunting licences and trophies should be used for wildlife conservation.'

Other papers include 'Domestication of Mammals in Africa', 'Wildlife Protein: Guinea-fowl', and 'The Economic Importance of Termites'. One of the authors of all these is Professor Sunday Ajayi, and many of the other papers are by his former students. As Dr Halstead, in his valedictory editorial points out, the fact that Professor Ajayi, and other Nigerians are now taking such a lead in conservation gives fresh hope for the future. Copies of the *Nigerian Field* are available from: L.B. Halstead, Geology Department, Reading University, Reading RG6 2AB, UK. Price £5.50 including postage.

118

Green Planet: the story of plant life on earth

Edited by David M. Moore
Cambridge University Press, 1982,
£12.50

Plant ecology and phytogeography provide the main theme for *Green Planet*. Anyone picking up the book will first be attracted by the numerous colour photographs which decorate every page. Their quality is excellent throughout, and maps and diagrams are equally clear and approachable. The narrative is written for the layman to an encyclopaedic format with each chapter subdivided into short headed sections for easy browsing.

The subject is introduced by a brief account of plant exploration and the resulting interest in plant geography and ecology, and a chapter entitled 'Tools of the trade' dealing with a number of peripheral topics such as taxonomy, nomenclature, description of ecosystems, and the relevance of fossil material. The central chapters discuss the evolutionary history of the earth and its vegetation, environmental factors affecting plant distribution, vegetation types, and modern distribution patterns. There follows a substantial chapter on man's impact on the landscape and his development and exploitation of its resources, ending with a discussion of the need for conservation, with special reference to plants of potential economic worth.

Green Planet is excellent value for anyone wishing to obtain a broad general knowledge of phytogeography. The text is substantial, easy to read and generally accurate, although diatoms are not 'unicellular green algae' (p. 197) but golden-brown. The book deals in the main with terrestrial habitats. Wetland and coastal communities are covered in detail but little is said of the vegetation of rivers, lakes or seas. For a book subtitled *The story of plant life on earth* it is surprising that the algae are barely mentioned. Those particularly interested in the cryptogams will be disappointed that little information is given about their rôle and variety. References such as 'Plants reproducing by spores (cryptogams) are abundant on the ground and on tree trunks' (p. 163) and 'only cryptogamic epiphytes' (p. 164)

Oryx Vol 18 No 2

Book reviews

are too vague to be useful. Few are mentioned by name. The fungal kingdom, though outside the scope of the book, plays an important role in most ecosystems in recycling nutrients, and this could have been dealt with more fully. However, the book is a fascinating addition to any bookshelf and provides many hours of interesting reading.

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Aboriginal/Subsistence Whaling (with special reference to the Alaska and Greenland Fisheries)

International Whaling Commission Reports, Special Issue 4, 1982, £8.00*

Consideration of so-called aboriginal/subsistence whaling has in recent years demanded attention by scientists and delegates to the IWC out of all proportion to its real economic, nutritional or cultural significance. Arguments about whether the Alaskan Eskimos should be permitted to take one more or less bowhead whale per year (on the basis of results from intensive and costly research) have delayed the entire annual proceedings of the Commission. Under the same term quotas for North Atlantic humpback whales—probably an even more endangered population—to be caught by Greenlanders, much of the meat from which is exported to Denmark (for consumption, it is claimed, by expatriate Greenlanders) are decided rapidly, on the basis of virtually no scientific evidence.

A book to put all this in perspective would be welcomed. Valuable though it is this is not such a book. 'Aboriginal/subsistence whaling' is defined here as

'whaling, for purposes of local aboriginal consumption carried out by or on behalf of aboriginal, indigenous or native peoples who share strong community, familial, social and cultural ties related to a continuing traditional dependence on whaling and on the use of whales'

*Available from IWC, The Red House, 135 Station Road, Histon, Cambridge CB4 4NP, UK. Price £9.25 including postage and packing.

Oryx Vol 18 No 2

—a definition that begs more questions than it answers. The book is constructed around reports of Panel Meetings of Experts, on Wildlife, Nutrition and Cultural Anthropology convened by the IWC in February 1979. The Reports are preceded by an introduction by Dr Ray Gambell, the Secretary of the IWC, who in a succinct, clear and informative way reviews the history of the treatment by the Commission of the problem of setting appropriate quotas for bowhead whales. This useful short essay is balanced by G.P. Donovan's 'Postscript' recounting developments from the close of the Panel Meetings through various meetings of Technical and Scientific Committees to the Annual Meeting of the Commission in July 1981. In between are sandwiched the three Panel Reports (all with useful short bibliographies) and a major working paper by Danish scientists F.O. Kapel and R. Petersen.

As the subtitle hints, only a few of the 'aboriginal/subsistence' whaling activities remaining in the world are considered; there is virtually no mention of the assorted patterns of whaling still pursued in Polynesia (Tonga), the Azores, the Caribbean (St Vincent), Eastern Siberia and Indonesia. This is a pity because a broader examination might have led to better definitions and, in turn, to a more useful management procedure than has so far emerged from the IWC. Instead, the Commission's scientists are now saddled with criteria for advice which they clearly cannot meet, with quotas consequently being set largely arbitrarily.

The Panel Reports contain summaries of facts about the subjects with which each group was concerned, but only with respect to the situation in Alaska, except for a glance at the nutritional status of Eskimos in Canada. The consideration of whaling and consumption of whale products in the broader context of the utilisation of wildlife, terrestrial and marine, is commendable. The three reports differ greatly in style and quality. The Wildlife Panel emphasised it had 'worked in haste at short notice' and was offering only 'a collection of ideas and a guide to literature and problems'; members were clear that management decisions should not be based on their work. Nevertheless, the scope of their work is impressive. The four members of the Nutrition Panel claimed they all had extensive practical