

The Natural History of Wild Cats

Andrew Kitchener

Christopher Helm, London, 1991, 280 pp., HB £17.99

Andrew Kitchener, Curator of Mammals and Birds at the Royal Museum of Scotland, has produced a welcome comprehensive review of the wild cats, making extensive use of rapidly expanding field research. It is not lavishly illustrated, but it does have a selection of good colour pictures devoted to the less-known, but very beautiful small cats. Drawings are used to illustrate features and behaviour, and there is a valuable array of tables and figures.

Kitchener covers the evolution of cats into supreme carnivores, followed by brief descriptions of all the wild felids, grouping them into the ocelot, domestic cat and pantherine lineages, and the *Panthera* group. Appended tables give details of body size and weights in different areas collected from the literature.

Driving forces of wild cat life are explained in a chapter on 'Killing and Eating', supplemented, of course, by one on that other driving force: reproduction. Under 'Cats and Humans' Kitchener reviews the domestication of the wildcat and the genetics that have produced such remarkable pelages. He touches on the commercial exploitation of wild cats before turning to conservation. Unfortunately, this is the weakest part of the book. A (presumably) printer's error puts the former tiger population of India at 140,000. The widely quoted figure is actually 40,000, which the late British naturalist E. P. Gee suggested was 'possible' at the turn of the century. Many Indian specialists think that figure too high.

The success of Project Tiger

in India is rightly lauded.

However, apart from the genetic threat to the isolated small populations, the grave menace of human population pressure needs emphasis: India's population has risen by nearly 50 per cent since Project Tiger was launched in 1973.

It is wrong to suggest that the success of Project Tiger has created a man-eating problem. It has been endemic in the Sundarbans for several hundred years, and the only other serious area of manslaughter has been around Dudhwa National Park, where sugarcane cultivation provides tiger habitat where people are present.

Peter Jackson.

Arabian Mammals: A Natural History

Jonathan Kingdon

Academic Press, London, 1991, 279 pp., HB £59.00 (\$130.00)

In spite of the fame achieved by the Arabian oryx as a symbol of the severe danger threatening much of our large mammal fauna, and of the success that can attend the determined efforts of conservationists, the diversity of mammals in Arabia tends to receive little publicity. The Arabian mammal fauna is in fact well documented, in the form of the meticulous volumes, *The Mammals of Arabia* by D. L. Harrison (Ernest Benn Ltd, 1964–72), and their recent thorough revision by D. L. Harrison and P. J. J. Bates (Harrison Zoological Museum, 1991). Jonathan Kingdon's volume provides a more concise account, enlivened by numerous pencil drawings. The area covered is the whole of Saudi Arabia, the Gulf and the southern Arabian states, southern Jordan and southern Iraq.

A brief introductory chapter sets the natural and human historical scene and discusses the drastic decline in much of the Arabian fauna as seen by both western and Arabian eyes. For the hundred or so species in the region the accounts range from two or three lines for many of the rodents, shrews and bats, to several pages for some of the larger mammals, covering a variety of topics such as ecology, behaviour and breeding, although it is not always clear which information actually derives from the Arabian part of the range. The accounts of domestic species are of especial interest since these are so often neglected in works of this kind but have a profound influence on the habitats of the wild species and on local attitudes to wildlife.

Colour plates depict 53 species painted by the author, each with an extended caption in Arabic and English. Although these form over a third of the book they are in a terminal appendix and are not referred to in the main species accounts. The addition of a small distribution map for each species greatly enhances the potential value of the book for reference but they are in places somewhat misleading. Most maps show actual localities plus postulated range. These are generally reasonable but the postulation is sometimes rather excessive in relation to the hard evidence, as in the Somali white-toothed shrew, with only one confirmed record, or the hoary fox, with one Arabian record, from Oman according to the text but appearing on the map as if from Yemen. Frustratingly it is among some of the better known species that the information on status is most elusive or misleading. The map for cheetah shows both closed and open symbols but