

# Book reviews

## **A Field Guide to the Mammals of Borneo**

Junaidi Payne and Charles M. Francis. Illustrated by Karen Phillipps

Sabah Society, 1986, 332 pp, HB US\$16.50, SB US\$12.50  
Available from the Sabah Society, PO Box 10547, 88806  
Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia (price includes postage)

This book is the first of its kind for South East Asia. Every known mammal species of Borneo is described and almost all are beautifully illustrated in colour. There is an introductory section on how to identify mammals, and notes for each species on ecology, habitat and distribution. A considerable amount of information is published for the first time. There is an illustrated appendix on footprints, a list of parks and reserves, a gazetteer and a map. It is an essential acquisition for anyone with an interest in the mammal fauna of the region.

*Editor.*

## **Tiger: Portrait of a Predator**

Valmik Thapar, photographs by Gunter Ziesler and Fateh Singh Rathore

Collins, London, 1986, 200 pp and 170 photographs, HB £15

Nothing in the living world can match the awesome power of the tiger to arouse in us paradoxical feelings of dread and reverence. And yet, 15 years ago, this, the most beautiful of mammals, was on the brink of extinction in the wild. It is perhaps a wonder that the tiger has survived at all because sporting people had long declared open season on these mighty cats. The Maharaja of Udairpur accounted for 1000, and as recently as 1939, a former Viceroy of India bagged 120 during a 10-week expedition to the Chitawan Valley, Nepal. With a population of 40,000 at the height of the British Raj, tiger numbers fell relentlessly to fewer than 2000 in 1972. At the initiative of Guy Mountfort, the IUCN, WWF and the Indian Government set about restoring the fortunes of the royal Bengal tiger and identified nine reserves. Ranthambhore was one of them, and the 40 or so tigers that enjoy the protection of this national park are the subjects of Valmik Thapar's timely and attractive book.

Ranthambhore is literally one of India's natural

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jewels. Situated 300 km south of Delhi, in Rajasthan, this 400-sq km patch was once a hunting preserve for the Maharajah of Jaipur. Today, it abounds with 272 kinds of birds, 22 species of mammals, and tigers, which are brazenly active by day. *Tiger: Portrait of a Predator* is a delightfully illustrated account, which evokes the hot ambience of Ranthambhore and its bountiful wildlife. The focus is on the tigers, their prey, history and prospects. Not that they are easy subjects. As Thapar states, six hours of solid observation might reveal only 60 seconds of activity. However, he and his photographers have done well to secure rare glimpses of the tiger's courtship and to record the unique hunting technique of a male called Genghis. For a short period of time, he used to erupt from cover and surge in a cloud of spray into the lake to ambush sambar. Television naturalists saw this in Stan and Belinda Breedon's film 'Year of the Tiger' shown in the BBC's 'Natural World'. Thapar also reveals that male tigers may occasionally become involved with cubs.

'Project Tiger' has been so successful that the management of these big cats nowadays presents something of a challenge. Four thousand Bengal tigers need space, and so does India's burgeoning population of 730 million people. Thapar discusses these problems sensibly, with sensitivity for the needs of his fellow countrymen and for the tigers for which he has a driving passion. Alas, he sees no future for them outside wildlife refuges like Ranthambhore. An excellent book.

*John Sparks, Head of BBC Natural History Unit, Bristol, UK.*

## **Wildlife of China**

Chinese Wildlife Conservation Association

China Forestry Publishing House, Beijing, 1985, 134 pp, £19.50

Available from Collets, Denington Estate, Wellingborough, Northants NN8 2QT, UK

Charities are virtually unknown in Communist countries; the state takes care of everything. But in China, the bad effects in 1974–76 of the die-off of bamboo on the population of giant pandas—at least 138 died—brought into being the CWCA, the 'author' of this book. The book is