

Book reviews

The Preservation of Species

Edited by Bryan G. Norton

Princeton University Press, 1986, 305 pp, £19.80

This fine book has received all too little publicity on this side of the Atlantic. It contains papers presented at a conference at the Center for Philosophy and Public Policy of the University of Maryland, and it is edited by a leading 'species philosopher' in the United States. It aims for the middle ground between overly theoretical analysis of the value of species, and principles and practices of wildlife management. In the main, it does a good job: it explores the perspectives within which species supporters must make their decisions about how to set priorities, where to best allocate their limited funds, how to mesh save-species efforts with other environmental measures, and so forth. The contributors include a conservation biologist, a wildlife ecologist, a palaeontological biologist, an economist, a parks manager and several philosophers. The names include such eminent wildlife authorities as Professors Stephen Kellert of Yale and Lawrence Slobodkin of the State University of New York.

Not surprisingly, considering the contentious issues of the 'how and why' of species preservation, we do not find the book coming up with a consensus of best professional opinion, or some other confected outcome. Instead, we have some solid and unresolved argument about biological diversity (why, just why, is it a good thing?), about triage (since we practise it willy-nilly, how can we do a better job?), about public attitudes (becoming more informed, considered and sophisticated all round), about cost-benefit analysis as applied to threatened species (eminently helpful, up to a point), and about scientific responsibility in the face of an extinction spasm impending (shouldn't scientists spend more time out of their labs, and in the political arena?).

Altogether this is a dense book. For the most part, I could stomach no more than a single chapter at a time. Much to read, to ponder, to digest. Moreover, I am sure I shall return to certain chapters again and again for fresh stimulus. Of course the book is a bit 'heavy', with little anecdotal leavening of the conservation analyses. All very rational; perhaps a trifle too cerebral. But then much conservationist thinking has been,

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frankly, woolly. We have yet to tackle such key questions as 'How much public funds should be devoted to species safeguards, as opposed to other human benefits that can be obtained, over varying time horizons, through expenditures for alternative purposes that likewise promote human welfare?' So some hard, even harsh, appraisal of conservationist philosophy does not come amiss. After all, one can be cold-eyed and warm-hearted at the same time.

All in all, a splendid publication. If only it weren't so fearsomely expensive. Let's hope that, like many other PUP books, it will be re-issued in paperback, at a price that will allow it to enjoy the wide circulation it deserves.

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Animal Extinctions: What Everyone Should Know

Edited by R.J. Hoage

Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986, 192 pp, SB £9.25

Available from Eurospan Group, London WC2E 8LU, UK

Both the title and subtitle of this volume are decidedly misleading, and in combination they do not describe the book at all well. Only four chapters are specifically about extinctions (e.g. vulnerability to extinction, extinction in geological and historical perspective); the other eight concern methods and the value of preventing it (conservation, land management, reintroductions, etc.). The chapters are in fact just a collection of separate symposium papers differing much in style. Some are chatty and colloquial; others appear to be the authors' scientific research only partially revamped for a general audience. The book's title, apparently aimed at the non-specialist, may well obscure the fact that it contains some very useful papers. Conversely, the excellent review of the realities of protecting species in captivity is amplified by equations, but these are likely to undermine the appeal to the layman implicit in the book's subtitle. There is little attempt at linkage or synthesis. The introductory chapter reviews the papers that follow—just as in a Chairman's address at a Symposium, but a waste of space in a book. To my mind, 'what everyone should know' should at least include a review of how and when some of the most famous extinct species disappeared. Greenway's

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definitive *Extinct and Vanishing Birds of the World* should at least be mentioned in the introductory chapter, and there ought to be an index. *Oryx* ought to appear in the list of 'additional readings'. The few reference lists are heavily orientated towards the New World and misspell the name of one of the few British authors mentioned.

There certainly is a need for a readable, comprehensive and well thought out book with this title, but sadly this is not it.

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The Enchanted Canopy: Secrets from the Rainforest Roof

Andrew W. Mitchell

William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, 1986, 255 pp, HB £14.95

Andrew Mitchell was scientific co-ordinator on *Operation Drake* from 1978 to 1982. This book is a narrative picture of rain forest, inspired from his own personal experiences of using light-weight, portable walkways suspended between forest trees, which were erected during that expedition. Over a period of three years or so portable canopy walkways were constructed in three major rain-forest sites of the world: Aila river in the Darien of Panama, the eastern coast at Buso in Papua New Guinea, and at Morowali in eastern Sulawesi. Arguably they could be considered one of the more interesting achievements of the Drake expedition. This book is perhaps the best popular document to account for the activities of *Operation Drake*, but the more interested reader should refer to Mitchell's earlier book, *Operation Drake—Voyage of Discovery*, 1981, for a more formal treatment.

For me, the most interesting parts are the descriptions of research projects currently in progress around various forest sites around the world. Mitchell gives very accurate and detailed accounts of activities by the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Central and South America, the Institute of Evolutionary Science of Montpellier in French Guiana, and individuals such as the film-maker Wolfgang Bayer to mention just three. The photographs from these various projects are simply stunning and the selection of material for the book certainly steps

away from the usual photographic agency picture so frequently adopted in popular works. Worthy publicity for the arboreal naturalists around the world, and I thought the account of Andrew Field's PhD studies in Venezuela a fitting obituary for such a dedicated student of the rain forest.

I suppose deep down I am cynical about the aims and successes of projects organized by Colonel John Blashford-Snell. The publicity surrounding all of his expeditions has done much for the causes of tropical science around the world, but at the same time the amount and quality of the scientific work achieved in the expeditions is relatively small in terms of the amount of money spent on them. This book confirms my prejudices—it is a beautiful account written by an enthusiastic but somewhat amateur naturalist. It is a bit 'twee', to use one of my mother's old phrases, and it contains a lot of the old clichés about man swinging down from the trees and nature red in tooth and claw. However, it reads well and contains, amongst other things, fascinating accounts of bat behaviour, pollination mechanisms and primate communication. It is as good as anything written by perhaps the world's most famous naturalist, David Attenborough, and should therefore go a long way towards encouraging the next generation of rain-forest watchers.

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Wildlife and Wilderness: An Artist's World

Keith Shackleton

Clive Holloway Books, 1986, 120 pp, HB £15

Ship in the Wilderness

Jim Snyder and Keith Shackleton

Dent, 1986, 208 pp, HB £14.95

Art is the main element of these two books, each of which proves that there really is such a thing as wildlife art. In one it is the art of the painter, and in the other the art of the photographer. Keith Shackleton is one of the few British wildlife artists to have a reputation in the United States where there exists a great appreciation of paintings that show animals in their environment. His *Wildlife and Wilderness* is a collection of 49 paintings, whose subjects range from giant petrels to the men of No. 45 Commando Royal Marines on

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