

# Book reviews

## **Encyclopedia of Indian Natural History**

R. E. Hawkins (editor)

Oxford University Press, 1987, 620 pp., HB £25.00

In order to celebrate its centenary in 1983 the Bombay Natural History Society initiated an ambitious programme of publications. The current work is the highlight of that programme and has been subsidized by the Indian Government so that it could be published as cheaply as possible. All concerned are to be heartily congratulated; it not only marks the coming of age of the BNHS, but also shows just how far both the study of wildlife and its conservation has advanced in the Indian sub-continent. The 600 pages crammed with information and illustrations will provide future generations of biologists with information relevant to their own environment. All too often, budding young biologists in tropical countries have to rely on irrelevant encyclopedias designed for students in Europe or North America. But now thousands of students will have access to a work of reference that relates to their own fauna and flora.

Conservationists in the wealthier countries of the world could do a lot of good by purchasing copies of the Encyclopedia to be placed in the libraries of every school and college in the Indian sub-continent. I am sure that BNHS would be only too willing to receive donations for this purpose.

*John A. Burton, Natural History and Wildlife Conservation Writer and Consultant.*

## **Conserving India's Natural Heritage**

Samar Singh

Natraj Publishers, Dehra Dun, 219 pp., HB Rs 150

At the beginning of 1987, India had a total of 60 national parks and 257 sanctuaries covering approximately 105,000 sq km, or 3.2 per cent of its land surface. Although still well below the internationally accepted norm of 5 per cent of a country's land surface designated as conservation areas, this represents a ten-fold increase since 1960 when some 10,640 sq km were protected.

Such changes bear witness to the momentum gained for conservation in India during the intervening period, with the introduction of the Wild

Life (Protection) Act in 1972, providing for the first time a legal framework for the protection of wildlife, and the Forest (Conservation) Act in 1980, the adoption of a National Wildlife Action Plan in 1983, and national campaigns to save India's tiger and three species of crocodile (both great conservation success stories), as well as numerous more local projects.

These and other topics are covered in *Conserving India's Natural Heritage*, within an international context, with chapters outlining the philosophy behind (i) The World Charter for Nature, adopted at the United Nations General Assembly in 1982, (ii) Unesco's Man and the Biosphere Programme, (iii) the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and (iv) the Corbett Action Plan, a strategy formulated at a working session of IUCN's Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas and directed towards the protected areas network within the Indo-malayan Realm. Samar Singh is well qualified to write about such matters, having served the Government of India as Joint Secretary of Forests and Wildlife, chaired the CITES Standing Committee and represented IUCN in a number of capacities. He pays particular tribute to the late Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi, who was instrumental in establishing a Department of Environment within the Government of India.

His book is largely a collection of personal papers, policy documents and speeches. Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, it suffers from much repetition. Much of the material on legislation, conventions and action plans would have been better presented as appendices. An index and bibliography would also have been useful, and I should have welcomed a concluding chapter reviewing more recent progress. For instance, there is no mention of the Government of India's Biogeographic Project, which is concerned with identifying habitats that are under-represented in the present protected areas network.

As an authoritative source of reference material, this book is very welcome, but it could have been more comprehensive in its scope and much more attractively presented.

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