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Walker's Mammals of the World

4th edition

Ronald M. Nowak and John L. Paradiso

John Hopkins University Press, 1983,

\$65.00 for two volumes

There can be absolutely no doubt about the importance of this work. *Walker's Mammals of the World* was first published in 1964, and is already established as possibly the most generally useful single work on mammals. The latest edition by Nowak and Paradiso is a real tour de force, 1362 pages, with almost every genus illustrated and a fact-filled text. I could lavish praise on many aspects of this work, but it is as a tool for conservation that it is important to review it here. There is probably no other published work which gives such a comprehensive review of the conservation status of the world's mammals. Although it is marginally out of date, inasmuch as its publication date precluded inclusion of reference to the *Red Data Book (Mammals) 1983 for the New World*, it is much more comprehensive than the *RDB* and gives information on species not mentioned there. Excellent value at under 3½p/page. The answer to almost all the questions most people will want to ask about mammals they had not even imagined existed.

John A. Burton

Special Offer to Members: This book is available by mail order from fFPS post free (send cheque for £55 to fFPS). This includes overseas post by surface mail. Airmail not available.

The Ivory Crisis

Ian Parker and Mohamed Amin

Chatto and Windus, 1983, £14.95

Although a practical, old game warden type by his own admission, Ian Parker walks, works, argues, and publishes with scientists, and clearly enjoys baiting conservationists on the side. Parker is a man of considerable experience and strong opinions. When he contends that the 1970s 'crisis' of ivory rush and elephant slaughter was at best a misjudgement on the part of over-eager conservationists, at worst a deliberate misrepresentation on their part, we are bound to consider the opinion seriously. Parker asks—if there

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are over a million elephants in Africa and if the trade can detect no decrease in supply of ivory, then how can conservationists claim there is an ivory crisis?

The book, which attempts to analyse the question is, admittedly, very readable, full of splendid anecdotes about wildlife management in eastern Africa. Amin's photographs are slick and possess a calendar-like beauty but are not very tightly tuned to the text. In fact, his photos seem to be only about half of those present, and curiously there are no photo credits at all.

The book's entertainment value, arising from Parker's personality and his own conservation credo, detracts from what should be a very objective look at the elephant and ivory question. His home-spun psychology applied to the motivations of conservationists and his personal problems with IUCN are somewhat irrelevant to the central theme and bring his own motivations into question. The book vacillates between a critique and a complaint: Parker's clear, autobiographical voice is too often self-conscious, more, it seems, to establish his credentials than to weave the logical fabric of his thesis.

Contrary to what the author contends, the exact number of elephants left is probably irrelevant. What is important is the rate of attrition, which, in the 1970s was in many parts of the African elephant's range disturbingly high by any standards. Parker's most contentious point—that the trade contributes hardly at all to the demand for ivory—needs to be quantified, to say the very least. He is undoubtedly correct, however, in pointing to increasing human populations as the greatest threat to elephants.

There is a point here as well as a point of view: all is far from well in the halls of wildlife conservation. We need less investment in swashbuckling, helicopter-supported exercises and more in understanding how the ivory trade works. Conservationists need to communicate with the trade, with the people who are increasingly spreading into 'elephant country', as well as with the national law-makers. Perhaps, as Parker suggests, the task has gone beyond the abilities of the conservation fraternity. The ecologists and game wardens, too, have gone about as far as they can go. We need advice on how to control both

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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.

Harvey Croze
Global Environment Monitoring System,
UNEP

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.

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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)

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