

## Book reviews

### **The Natural History of Antelopes**

C.A. Spinage

Croom Helm, London, 203 pp, HB £14.95

This book is the latest of a series on mammals, produced in association with the Mammal Society. It would be more accurately entitled *Natural History of African Antelopes* because it deals only with the 74 species from that continent.

Although some of the chapters, particularly those dealing with physiology, go into considerable detail, the text has really been written for the well-informed general biologist, and it makes easy and interesting reading—almost certainly a volume that can be picked up at bedtime. It deals comprehensively with antelope taxonomy, adaptation to environment, the use they make of different habitats, predation, nutrition, territoriality and systematic physiology. The physiological information is particularly well dealt with, especially that on water requirements.

The book draws extensively on the work of many authors, although this is perhaps not made clear in the text. Like many books written for this type of readership, references are not included. This is understandable in that it makes the book more readable but, on the other hand, it can be frustrating if there is interest in following up a particular point.

The author himself has worked on a number of species in detail, notably on the waterbuck and impala. This is very evident in the text. There are a few rather contentious statements in the sections on physiology and taxonomy, but one has to remember that taxonomy of the antelopes, particularly of the smaller species, has been a highly contentious area for many years and remains so. There is considerable detail on predation and other population-limiting factors, on communications, colour and pattern in different species, and on the various forms of territoriality and its significance. The book ends with a discussion on whether farming antelopes for meat is a tool for conservation. However, little mention is made of the other economic values of maintaining healthy populations of antelopes such as the needs of local people, trophy hunting and tourism, and there is no mention of perhaps the most important thing—the 'value' of many

animals in local cultures. At the end of the volume is a series of short notes on the general biology of each of the major species, which forms a very valuable quick reference.

Although there are a number of comprehensive field guides to the antelopes of Africa, no other volume deals as comprehensively with the biology of these species, and the book is recommended reading for all those with an interest in this spectacular group of mammals.

*D. M. Jones, Director of the Zoological Society of London.*

### **The First Eden: The Mediterranean World and Man**

David Attenborough

Collins, London, 1987, 240 pp, HB £12.95

The human race does not come out well from David Attenborough's latest book. But then it does not come out well from the *Book of Genesis* either, so perhaps the title is not just evocative but accurate. Early workshop, superstition in sixth-century BC Egypt, the butchery of the Romans, the vandalism of the Vandals, the aggression of the Crusades, the greed of the Renaissance, and the callous indifference of today—the saga is always at the expense of plants and animals. Ultimately, of course, it is at the expense of man himself.

Readers of this journal will not be surprised that this is an ecological book. It is also a desperate, last-minute plea for sanity. It is not, however, preaching to the converted—few of us are so knowledgeable that we cannot learn from this incisive chronicle of man's insensitivity to his neighbours. And I defy anyone to resist the seductiveness of the book—first Sir David's wit and lucidity, then the ravishing pictures, which illustrate what we have inherited, or conquered, and lost.

The television series has already, and triumphantly, appeared, but the book must have been conceived first, so little evidence is there of the usual publisher's spin-off. An occasional over-insistence perhaps: the life-cycle of phylloxera will strike dread into the hearts of wine lovers, but may be too complex for ordinary mortals. And a

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little more independence from the text would have been welcome in the picture captions. But the scope is enormous and the shape is satisfying.

This is not just scholarly and accomplished writing, it is history and natural history in one—would they had always been so. It should be obligatory reading for every school in the land. Better, for every school in every land around the Mediterranean. I do not just recommend this book, I urge it upon you.

*Lord Birkett, Chairman of FFPS's Arts Support Group.*

### **Primate Conservation in the Tropical Rain Forest Monographs in Primatology, Volume 9**

Edited by C. W. Marsh and R. A. Mittermeier  
Alan R. Liss, New York, 365 pp, HB £61.00

At last we have a comprehensive volume on the world's most complex and endangered ecosystem—tropical rain forest. Although focused on its largest residents—primates—the broad, detailed approach enhances its value to all conservationists and tropical biologists. After eight years' gestation, 26 contributors have produced 14 chapters arranged in three sections; there is a mixture of old and new topics, but all are refreshingly clear, factual and concise—a credit to contributors and editors alike. The stated aim is to blend conservation theory with practical solutions, in view of the needs to compare problems faced by primates across the world and to examine directions for progress in practical conservation efforts. Hence the themes of relating the decline of tropical forests to primates as 'flagships' for their conservation, and recognition of the variation in threats and the need for research directly relevant to their elucidation.

In introducing the section on Problems, Myers emphasizes the nature of the developing tragedy and identifies the economically orientated solutions in his usual powerful and factual way. Then, Brockelman and Ali compare the aims and methods of surveys, censuses and intensive studies, with a full discussion of the problems involved and clear recommendations for the best approaches in each case. Happel, Noss and Marsh then examine variables of predictive value for species' rarity and endangerment, concluding, surprisingly, that reproductive variables, inde-

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pendent of body size, influence vulnerability to extinction. Marsh, Johns and Ayres detail the effects of different kinds of disturbance—from removal of plant products to large-scale clearance—on primate populations, a topic of increasing academic and practical importance. The role of hunting in depleting primate populations is examined by Mittermeier, with exploitation for food being most important in Latin America and Africa (west and central), and control of pests being a major factor in Africa and Asia. Kavanagh, Eudey and Mack review the trade in primates, much reduced over the last decade, for biomedical research and pets, identifying the countries involved and the few species threatened.

The section on Approaches starts with a thorough review of the concepts and practicalities of protected areas, in relation to island biogeography and population genetics, with reference to the 42 million hectares in 296 protected areas in 120 countries. Weber then describes the values of and threats to the Afro-montane forests of the Zaire–Nile Divide on terms of socio-ecology and economics. Aveling compares environmental with conservation education, spells out the approaches, and reviews worldwide the contributions of formal and informal education, foundations and education centres. The section is concluded by the one contribution on captive propagation, by Foose, Seal and Flesness, who detail the procedures (and theory) involved and discuss the selection of taxa and the capacity of zoos for this work—only about half of the endangered primate species are currently represented. While very appreciative of the role of captive propagation in conservation, I am bothered by the authors' claims that habitat protection is becoming increasingly difficult and unfeasible, and that the readaptation of reintroduced lion-tamarins to South-East Brazil is satisfactory.

The volume is concluded by a section on Priorities, with stimulating summaries of the Action Plans for each continent, compiled by the Primate Specialist Group of SSC/IUCN over the last few years—Mittermeier on Latin America; Oates, Gartlan and Struhsaker on Africa; Richard and Sussman on Madagascar; and Marsh on Asia. All identify the most threatened species and

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