

# Book reviews

## **Conservation in Africa; people, policies and practice**

Edited by D. Anderson and R. Grove  
Cambridge University Press, 1988, HB £35.00 (US \$54.00)

*Conservation in Africa* is the title given to a collection of 16 papers originating from a multi-disciplinary seminar in Oxford and workshops in Cambridge. These meetings took forest, soil and water conservation within their remit and eight of the papers are concerned with livestock, pastoralism or range management; wildlife conservation is essentially subsidiary to these concerns in this book.

A recurrent theme of the eight central papers is the sorry fate of pastoralists in modern Africa. Several stress the compatibility of traditional pastoral systems with wildlife, and more than one detail unjust disinheritance of pastoralists in the name of wildlife conservation. However, these are but a part of the larger disinheritance of politically impotent societies by powerful central authorities. The final paper by Maknum Gameledinn of Ethiopia submits that the survival of pastoral societies and the designs of modern states are in practice mutually exclusive: 'in much of Africa the arguments of engineers and economists, quantifiable in financial terms, have been much more concrete and therefore more attractive than those of ecologists and social scientists who cannot offer exactitudes and certainty. This fatal and facile attractiveness . . . is proving to be destructive to land and wildlife and tragic for the people of Africa'.

In an interesting history of conservation in the British Empire, Richard Grove points out that it was the immediate experience or memory of famines and floods reinforced by the scientists' warnings of further environmental catastrophes and civil unrest that persuaded the imperial government to implement an integrated Forest Conservancy Policy for the whole of India in 1854. Grove and other authors show that the success or failure of many conservation initiatives since that time has hinged upon the immediacy or apparent remoteness of such threats or fears. In other words, governments act only under coercion.

Olusegun Areola, discussing political realities in Nigeria, also concludes that only 'crises' will

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coerce authorities to act, and conservation does not enter into the present order of priorities for Nigeria. It is clear that much the same could be said for a dozen other African states. By contrast, Richard Bell points to unsubstantiated and over-generalized cries of 'crisis' having become too much the stock-in-trade of conservationists. So much so that some central governments now justify autocratic intervention in the lives and security of rural peoples on the grounds of environmental crisis. This and other excellent papers offer penetrating case-studies to show that both the objectives and the methods of conservation carry political consequences and practical costs for particular communities of people.

Although I found the title of this volume misleading and more than one of the early chapters tedious in their attitudinizing, several essays have important implications for current thinking and policy in conservation. The essays confirm that the very varied expressions of conservation exert unprecedented pressures on contemporary societies, forces for which these societies are unprepared and with unforeseen after-effects. A major conclusion is that pastoral societies and large wild ungulates share the need to keep mobile, and that both are threatened by excessive restriction, fencing and the diversion of key lands and waters for other purposes. The authors of these essays and readers cannot evade some of the disturbing social consequences and political contexts of conservation policies, but reactions are very diverse. One author is enraged by a local wildlife department and all its works. Another would wish problems away with the notion that 'perhaps the Masai could confer the ultimate gift on humanity if the Parks were abolished; they could provide a model of man co-existing with wildlife'. Examining the failure of conservation to graft on to a changing Masai society (in Amboseli), Lindsay is less romantic and points to the need to address the nature of change itself. Bell also stresses that the processes of development and their implementation are as significant as their presumed material benefits and stated content and he calls for 'conservation with a human face'.

Pessimists will find ample confirmation of ever-increasing autocratic impositions 'from above' that frequently carry disastrous consequences.

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The more optimistic will hope that such essays signify movement towards greater awareness that rural people should participate in shaping their own environments and future.

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## **The Bird of Time: The Science and Politics of Nature Conservation**

N.W. Moore

Cambridge University Press, 1987, 290 pp., HB £27.50, PB £9.95

In the spring of 1977, the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) published its long-awaited policy statement *Nature Conservation and Agriculture*. The 1960s and early 1970s had seen the debate between the farming industry and conservation at its sharpest, particularly over the issue of persistent pesticides, so that the measured reception that was accorded the NCC report by both sides of the dialogue was all the more remarkable. The credit for keeping the dialogue going and for preventing the whole debate from degenerating into profitless polemics belongs largely to the author and chief architect of the document, Norman Moore.

In *The Bird of Time*, Dr Moore has now given us his own personal view of the achievements of nature conservation over the last 35 years. The book is essentially in three parts. The first, more or less covering the period when he was Regional Officer for SW England, explores how the Nature Conservancy evolved a policy for Britain's national nature reserves and SSSI designation, and includes an account of the author's own classic work on the use of ecological indicator species to assess the effects of fragmentation on the ecology of the Dorset heaths. The second part of the book is a fascinating and revealing account of the whole agriculture-conservation debate with which the author was so closely identified. Finally, Norman Moore shares with us his thoughts on the future. Here is much challenging stuff. For example, the conclusion that the only way in which the machinery of government can be made more effective about conservation is to abolish the agriculture

departments and set up a new Department of Land Resources. Not a new idea perhaps, but the source of the support gives one food for thought.

*The Bird of Time* is by far the best account that has appeared on nature conservation in Britain over the last 35 years. It is a balanced, objective story, uncluttered by scientific jargon, and provides an indispensable perspective for all those newly involved in the subject.

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## **The Ecology of Sumatra (Second Edition)**

Anthony J. Whitten, Sengli J. Damanik, Jazanul Anwar and Nazaruddin Hisyam.

Gajah Mada University Press, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 1987, 583 pp.

Available in Europe from Foris Publications, Dordrecht, Netherlands; Heffers Bookshop, Cambridge, UK. In Australia and New Zealand from Dutch Indonesian Books, Mooroodah Highway, Croydon, Vic. In Singapore and Malaysia from Select Books, Tanglin Shopping Centre, Tanglin Road Singapore. In the Americas from Sinauer Associates, Sunderland, MA 01375-0407, USA. Price US\$22 (PB), US\$35 (HB). In case of difficulty the publishers should be contacted: GAMA Press, PO Box 14, Bulaksumur, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

*The Ecology of Sulawesi*, a review of which appeared in The October 1987 issue of *Oryx*, is also available from these addresses. The price is US\$25.00 PB and US\$35.00 HB (except in the US where the HB costs US\$50.00).

For those who know the first edition of this book, published in 1984, the only new material in the second edition is a list of 74 references that have appeared since that date or were missed by the original literature search.

For those who do not know this book, it is divided into three parts. The first sets the geological, historical and biogeographical background to Sumatra. The second is devoted to discussion of the major natural ecosystems to be found. After the reputed dangers to fieldworkers of tigers, snakes and leeches have been dispelled, there follow detailed accounts of mangroves and other coastal ecosystems, rivers and lakes, various lowland rain forest formations, mountains and finally caves. The third part deals with the human impact on the ecology of Sumatra and includes suggestions of small pro-

*Oryx* Vol 22 No 3, July 1988