

Wildflight: a history of conservation

Colin Willock

Jonathan Cape, London, 1991, 143 pp., ISBN 0 224 02774 3, HB £14.99

This is certainly a good read, as one would expect from Colin Willock, with his unrivalled knowledge of active conservation as a producer and writer for Anglia TV's Survival films for 27 years. As a personal account of one man's experiences of wildlife conservation in the latter half of the twentieth century, with an introductory survey of the excessive slaughter of wildlife worldwide in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it can be thoroughly recommended.

Unfortunately somebody (I hope the publisher, not the author) has subtitled it 'a history of conservation' and this certainly is not. It is not even a history of conservation in the latter half of the twentieth century, for it leaves too much out. There is extraordinarily little on bird protection, the most active sphere of wildlife conservation between the 1880s and the 1950s, and almost nothing on the work of the RSPB or ICBP. Indeed, the author concentrates too much on the high-profile mammals, to the detriment of birds, reptiles and invertebrates. Even with the mammals a great deal is left out, e.g. an account of the vicuña saga in Peru.

What is more, while the work of the WWF is adequately acknowledged, there is virtually no reference to IUCN or its Species Survival Commission, which have been increasingly central to species conservation in the latter half of the century, and cannot be left out of any history of the subject. Sir Peter Scott, whom the author rightly praises highly, devoted just as

much attention to his chairmanship of SSC as to that of WWF.

One small point of especial interest to FFPS members: the author, like so many others, is confused about Operation Oryx (p. 43). It was not achieved by WWF with help from FFPS, but by FFPS with help from WWF, when the *Daily Mail* withdrew at the last minute. On p. 102, however, he does get it right, except about the *Daily Mail*.

What a pity that the publishers' pretentious title should have been allowed to mislead potential readers. For the book is well worth reading for its own sake, and I hope many people will read it.

Richard Fitter.

Neotropical Wildlife Use and Conservation

John G. Robinson and Kent H. Redford (Editors)

The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991, 520 pp., ISBN 0 226 72259 7, HB £49.50, SB £22.50

This is the latest in a number of books that have been published recently on the sustainable utilization of wildlife and its theme is in keeping with the philosophy that wildlife that is used is the wildlife most likely to survive. This will not find favour with all conservationists and, indeed, the pendulum has had a tendency to swing too far in the utilization direction.

Nevertheless, it must be recognized that wildlife exploitation is often a matter of survival for the local people, or at least a factor in the maintenance of a reasonable standard of living. Conservationists in the developed world must be understanding and sympathetic towards the needs of those less fortunate than themselves.

This book is of particular

interest in that it is confined to the neotropics, a hitherto neglected area in the wildlife utilization debate, and because the authors of many of the chapters come from the countries concerned. They also include social scientists as well as biologists, two groups that are often poles apart in their thinking, and it is good to see that here, each is at least listening to the other. The word 'conservation' in the title is important because it draws attention to the fact that wildlife can be utilized without endangering it and some of the chapters provide ample evidence of this fact. Unfortunately, others reveal the darker side of wildlife exploitation. The live bird trade is the greatest offender and its activities have little to do with conservation. It is also objectionable on animal welfare grounds. It is unfortunate that many projects for the exploitation of wildlife, while ecologically and economically sound, are unacceptable because of the animal suffering involved.

The chapters are too numerous to be detailed here, but they cover an extraordinary range, from reptiles to large mammals and from subsistence hunting to tourism. They form an authoritative and valuable addition to the literature.

S. K. Eltringham.

Great Cats: Majestic Creatures of the Wild

John Seidensticker and Susan Lumpkin (consulting editors)

Rodale Press, Emmaus, Pennsylvania, USA, 1991, 240 pp., ISBN 1 85391 189 5, HB \$US40.00

This is surely the finest book on the cats in general so far published. The title might mislead some to think it deals only with