

Book reviews

living primates, the bulk of the book is devoted to a systematic description of the primates, outlining the main features of their natural history, biology (anatomy and physiology), evolution and conservation, with more detailed descriptions of their ecology and behaviour.

First come the prosimians (the 'almost monkeys')—the five families of the 'lemurs' of Madagascar and the continental bushbabies and their allies (nocturnal leapers and creepers). These are followed by the tarsiers—'the odd ones out'—dry-nosed prosimians with simian features. There is then a section on New World monkeys—the marmosets and tamarins ('little squirrel-like monkeys with claws') and the larger monkeys with complex societies and, in the largest, prehensile tails. The monkeys of the Old World also fall into two groups—the leaf-eaters of Africa and Asia ('pot-bellies and odd noses') and the generalists of Africa and Asia ('intelligent manipulators'). Finally the tailless primates—the lesser and great apes ('acrobats and singers, intellectuals and strongmen') and humans ('upright revolutionaries').

The final chapter on the prospects for primates emphasises the influences of humans, which are mainly deleterious. There is an appendix detailing the classification of primates, and indicating those species that are endangered; a short but useful glossary; a list of books for further reading, also rather brief; and an index, only for primate species cited.

Thus, it is a delightful book, packed with information—a must for the general reader, including those students embarking on courses involving primates. It may be authoritative for the specialist, but I cannot agree that it is sufficiently detailed, as claimed on the dust-jacket. In his excellent Introduction, Desmond Morris points out that this book represents a much-needed follow-up to the *Handbook of Living Primates* by John and Prue Napier. It certainly excels in containing so many colour photographs and in the abundance of new information, but it is lacking in the synthesis of quantitative information, so usefully presented in appendices by the Napiers but so much in need of updating. Furthermore, in treating primates genus by genus, the specialist cannot find the information he wants on species, especially for

genera such as *Cercopithecus*, *Papio*, *Macaca* and *Presbytis*, where colour illustrations of each species would be so useful, apart from a quantification of features of morphology, ecology and behaviour species by species. While many misconceptions common in general texts on primates have been eliminated, quite a few still remain that are irksome to the specialist; it is inappropriate to detail them here.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to satisfy both generalist and specialist in one manageable volume, and the author is to be congratulated on orienting, and executing, this important task of publicising so effectively the fascinating and complex diversity of our closest relatives.

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Conserving Sea Turtles

N. Mrosovsky

British Herpetological Society, 1983,
£5.00

For years there has been a pressing need for a critique of sea turtle conservation practices with objective and realistic suggestions for improvements. This book is a synthesis of a wide range of information, from genes to ecological communities and social systems. The topics of the 14 chapters flow smoothly one to the other, giving the reader an extensive discussion of: the political background; turtle life histories; a standard research technique (tagging); a common, yet controversial management procedure ('head-starting'); a widespread and now much questioned technique (incubation of eggs in styrofoam boxes); an expensive, technologically sophisticated, 'high profile' programme on the most endangered of sea turtles; the much disputed turtle farm; a policy problem with 'genetic mixing'; a conundrum of conservation categories; the case for credibility; the issue between attitudes and actions; a taxonomic problem with critical implications for conservation policy; and the relationship between biological conservation and economics. The book is relevant to more than turtles, providing a dispassionate, yet intimate, view of both specific and general problems in the conservation of natural resources.

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Mrosovsky's is at one level a personal account, but it is an exercise in the spirit of intellectual interchange—both Foreword and Preface should be read twice before starting the text. In his assessment of the 'conservation establishment' and conventional practices and attitudes he seems purposefully controversial at times, beginning with two startling photos on the cover: one of a winsome, bikini-clad lass kissing a baby turtle, and the other of a malnourished native child grinning under the strain of an awesome, bloody flipper. In the cover, with its many levels of symbolism, is the riddle of the book: can conservationists resolve the conflict between two extreme, mutually exclusive policies of wildlife management—protectionism and direct exploitation?

Despite poignant criticisms, there is a clear attempt to be balanced and discuss different points of view. Unfortunately, the treatment is inconsistent, for there is atonement to some senior conservationists but not to others. There is at times an uneasy balance between 'hard scientific reasoning', with its jargon ('randomize out', p. 31), and general descriptions comprehensible to the layman. Characteristic of North American sea turtle work, there are ample acronyms (IXTOC, p. 55) and special terms ('Recovery team', p. 53) which often go unexplained until a partial list of abbreviations at the end (p. 151). The style is curious, much like thinking aloud, with strings of 'what if' statements and series of sentences beginning with 'But' and 'Perhaps' (p. 54). Some sections ramble and diverge, and in several cases the points being made would have more impact if the discussion were shorter and tighter (e.g. 'the protracted account of permit problems in Florida', chapter 6). The general impression is that the book was hastily finished. Two major problems are: a paucity of citations of publications and reports not in English, especially Spanish; and an insensitivity to the complicated problems of field work, e.g. monitoring populations (p. 17) or enforcing management schemes (chapter 14). A production detail, frustratingly common to this publisher, is the senseless printing of *blank* numbered pages (nearly five per cent of this book).

At the outset the author does not seem to recognise that conservation is as much (or more) a political and social activity as intellectual and

biological—that the primary benefactors of conservation activities, parks and reserves, and wildlife management are not the wildlife species but the people that interact with them. Although this first impression is dispelled early on, he may have underestimated the depth of political convictions; the book (and its author) has been severely criticised in the 'turtle community', but more for its blasphemy than for its stated purpose. Time will tell if the lasting result is improved conservation practices or degenerated personal relations among the protagonists.

Few wildlife conservation establishments or conventions are impervious to his ink. The message is that conservation is for people, and to pretend that it is a sacred exercise is fruitless with the majority who are unconverted and/or hungry. Although many of his fine points are infinitely disputable, it will be a challenge for rational people to refute his main argument: biological conservation should be a respected profession, and thus, it must be credible and realistic to all involved.

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Man's Impact on Vegetation

Edited by W. Holzner, M.J.S. Werger and I. Ikusima

W. Junk, 1983, \$98.00

The editors have dedicated this collection of 27 essays to Makoto Numata, the distinguished Japanese plant ecologist who retired from the Chair of Ecology at Chiba University in April 1983. The volume is divided into three parts: General aspects of man's impact upon vegetation; Man's impact in the various vegetation zones of the earth; Long and severely influenced areas: special features of man's impact.

The first essay, 'Man's attitude towards vegetation' by Professor Westhoff is one of the most stimulating in the whole volume. He traces the evolution and development of the attitude of western cultures to vegetation from both the classical and Judaic-Christian traditions to modern technological societies. Anyone at all concerned with the philosophy of conservation

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