

Book and CD-ROM Reviews

Silent Fields: The Long Decline of a Nation's Wildlife

R Lovegrove (2008). Published by Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP, UK. 404 pp Paperback (ISBN 978-0-1995-4815-6). Price £12.99.

Roger Lovegrove describes what he sees as a 450-year old war against the wildlife of mainland Britain, from Henry VIII's *Vermin Acts* to the present. He describes the assault in such uncompromising detail that the reader starts to wonder how any wildlife could have survived. The basis for the book is 1,429 parish records from England and Wales (Scotland is given its own chapter), and individual species account provide the heart. As a background to the species account, Lovegrove sets out a chronology of wildlife management laws, together with his views on changing attitudes to wildlife.

The book can be repetitive, making the same points over and over again, using different examples. Although some might suspect that, having spent endless hours poring over parish records the author was going to ensure every last detail got into his book, I think this view would be unfair. Lovegrove has provided a uniquely exhaustive review of wildlife management in Britain and has presented it in what I think is essential detail. It is for others to précis for their own purposes; Lovegrove's purpose was to present all the evidence he could find to demonstrate the stark reality of the British countryside. In this task he has done commendably well. Lovegrove is meticulous, wide-ranging and scholarly in his approach. We owe him an enormous debt of gratitude; without his painstaking analysis none of us would have been aware this widescale clearance of our wildlife had ever happened. Now things make sense — why some species are so rare, why our fields in autumn are dominated by exotic gamebirds, encouraged and protected to an extent beyond anything any native species ever had.

He does not set out to shock, yet no objective reader could fail to be stunned or even sickened by his portrayal of the relentless killing, decade-after-decade, century-after-century, of our native mammals and birds. Lovegrove does not dwell on the suffering of the individuals killed, but it is self-evident that millions of trap hours and shots fired must have wounded and caused great misery to untold numbers of animals. It is the sheer scale of the killing that really astounds, but the untold stories of suffering in hedgerows, woods and fields add poignant detail to the background of slaughter.

Lovegrove is to be commended for taking on this mission, for carrying it out with such diligence and for presenting it with such simplicity and clarity. His writing evokes a deep sense of loss and regret that we have been robbed of our greatest heritage. It is impossible to imagine the Britain of even a mere hundred years ago, or to think of wildcats, choughs and pine martens as once widespread and common. Today they are so rare as to have an almost mystical aura

about them, confined to the wilder, more remote corners of the country. Extermination was attempted and in at least two cases achieved — the sea eagle and osprey and, even today, the populations of many species are just starting to recover.

Times have changed. Most people are glad ravens, polecats and buzzards are seen with increasing frequency, and even more are pleased that otters might now be living a few miles away. In one way, persecution to the brink of extinction has had a beneficial effect. Rarity has caused people to look at some species with renewed wonder, and to treasure them for what they really are. Yet the lessons of the past have not been universally learnt. Those who thrill to the idea of a rejuvenated countryside are not those who, as soon a species starts to recover or a call is made to right a wrong through a reintroduction, start to fret about 'the balance of nature', and call for the right to 'manage' numbers. If Lovegrove's book tells us anything it is that we should view such calls more as the fading voice of an antiquated view of nature and man's role in it than as any sort of guide to a modern relationship with our countryside.

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Livestock Handling and Transport, Third Edition

Edited by T Grandin (2007). Published by CAB International, Wallingford, Oxfordshire OX10 8DE, UK. 386 pp Hardback (ISBN 978-1-84593-219-0). Price £75.00, US\$140.00, €110.00.

Now in its third edition, *Livestock Handling and Transport* continues to provide concise and structured information on animal behaviour, stockmanship and livestock transport, particularly across the main red meat species. This text proves to be a valuable source of information for a wide audience. At £75.00, this book may be out of the reach of some students but it should be a key publication on university and college library shelves and should certainly be listed as required or recommended reading on teaching courses concerned with stockmanship and animal welfare. The principles of livestock handling can be applied to any situation involving stock, from on-farm husbandry procedures through to handling during loading for transport and ultimately at the slaughterhouse. As such, this book is of value to anyone handling livestock. For students and researchers new to this area of science, the book provides a succinct review of the literature relating to the handling and transport of the main livestock species.

There are 21 chapters in this edition, three of which are new. There is a chapter specifically dedicated to a welcome review of the literature examining sheep transport, both by road and at sea. This complements the chapter on physiological responses of animals (including sheep) to transport and affords the same level of consideration to sheep transport as the previous editions already did for cattle and pig transport.