

REGIONAL
CONSERVATION

The Conservation Atlas of Tropical Forests: Africa
edited by Jeffrey A. Sayer,
Caroline S. Harcourt and N.
Mark Collins (Macmillan for
IUCN, 1992, ISBN 0 333
57757 4, 288 pp., HB £75)

This atlas is the second (the first focused on Asia and the Pacific) in a series planned to cover tropical rain forest throughout the world. In the Foreword, Martin Holdgate, Director General of IUCN – The World Conservation Union, says that is aimed at all concerned with conservation and sustainable living in the forested zone of Africa, particularly the emerging generation of African conservationists.

The book is divided into two parts. The first contains 10 overview chapters covering history of the forests and climate, biological diversity, case studies in conserving large mammals, forest people, the effects of human population pressures, the timber trade, forest management, protected areas and the future.

Part II has chapters devoted to individual countries or groups of countries within the scope of the Atlas's coverage, which is closed canopy moist forest between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, from Ethiopia in the north-east and Senegal in the north-west to Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Angola in the south as well as the islands of Madagascar, Seychelles, Comoros, Mauritius and Réunion.

The country accounts each include a map or a series of maps at the scale of 1:3 million or 1:4 million, showing the known extent of the forests and the distribution of protected

areas. The accompanying text follows a standard format for each country, with a preliminary overview, a detailed account of the forests and their management, deforestation, biodiversity, conservation areas and a description of existing conservation initiatives. The text is enlivened with tables, coloured photographs of forests and wildlife and boxes containing summaries of important conservation projects.

The overall impression is of a great wealth of knowledge contributed by hundreds of specialists and compressed into a relatively small space. There are extensive references for those wishing for more information. The spatial data recorded in the book are stored in digital form at the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, Cambridge, UK and the Centre will be pleased to collaborate with organizations wishing to apply the data in the interest of nature conservation.

For a reference source the index could have been more comprehensive: for example, searching for reference to the Bwindi Forest (where it is mentioned in passing) one is directed to page 20, and from there to Chapter 31 (no page nos.) where Bwindi is treated in depth (p. 266). The index gave no reference for the rolaway monkey (p. 40), although one could track it down to the previous page where it was referred to only as the eastern subspecies of the Diana monkey *Cercopithecus diana rolaway*. It is a pity that the chapter on conserving large mammals dealt only with elephants and primates (and why no mention of the African elephant's listing on Appendix I of CITES when urging that the ivory trade be controlled or shut down?).

Such quibbles aside the book is an immensely valuable con-

tribution to promoting the conservation of Africa's threatened forests and I hope that its high price does not prevent it reaching those who need it most.

Editor

Wild Indonesia: The Wildlife and Scenery of the Indonesian Archipelago by Tony and Jane Whitten, photographs by Gerald Cubitt (New Holland, London, in association with World Wide Fund for Nature, 1992, ISBN 1 85368 128 8, 208 pp., HB £24.99)

Embracing some 13,000 islands spread over nearly 4000 equatorial kilometres, covering an area of nearly 2 million sq km and containing 180 million people (with 60 per cent living in 7 per cent of the nation's land area: Java), Indonesia offers a unique spectrum of scenery, habitats and wildlife – a photographer's paradise. Indeed, everyone should be able to find their corner of paradise there. Along with Brazil and Zaire, Indonesia has been coined a 'megadiversity country' (by American conservationists of course!) because of the diversity of habitats and wildlife.

These three countries contain more than 50 per cent of the planet's tropical rain forests, but Indonesia bridges two continents – Asia and Australasia – and in spanning Wallace's Line, it contains the intriguing mixture of Asian continental wildlife (elephants, tigers, rhinoceroses, monkeys and apes) and Australian marsupials, with an amazing spectrum of invertebrates, fishes, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals. And all this in dramatic volcanic scenery, spanning the length of the country, and in the most complex evergreen forest vegetation in the

west, drier seasonal forests in the centre, and different evergreen forests in the east, with the full range of altitudinal vegetation zones throughout.

The photographs are exquisite, the text clear, concise and very informative, full of important and/or interesting facts. There are introductions to Sumatra and Kalimantan, Java and Bali, Sulawesi, the Moluccas, the Lesser Sundas and Irian Jaya, followed by a focus on each of the islands (or groups of islands), illustrating in detail the plants and animals of the national parks in each area, with good maps throughout. There are numerous nice touches, such as a *Rafflesia* bud early in the volume, one in full flower in the middle and a decaying flower at the end.

The scenic shots – of islands, volcanoes and views from mountains – are especially spectacular; the Indonesian people are featured throughout. In highlighting the treasures of Indonesia, there is a powerful conservation message, with the authors pleading for their salvation, for a more powerful international effort to support the sustainable activities of the Indonesian people, respecting their traditions and life-styles, so that their threatened ecosystems survive.

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Biotic Diversity in Southern Africa: Concepts and Conservation edited by B. J. Huntley (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1989, ISBN 0 19 5705491, 380 pp., HB £17.50)

The issue of declining biodiversity has rapidly risen to prominence as a global issue that has captured not only the attention of the scientific community. Following the recent

Rio Earth Summit it has become an important political and economic issue as well. But what is biodiversity? Why do we need it? How much do we need? How do we look after it? These obvious questions make many natural scientists uneasy, and it is encouraging to find a book that makes a bold stab at providing some answers.

Brian Huntley has a reputation for his abilities as a coordinator, catalyst and editor, and this book is proof of those abilities. The book is based on invited review papers presented at a conference at the University of Cape Town in June 1988. The book does not read like a standard compilation of conference proceedings, however, and the papers have been refereed by an internationally respected team of conservation biologists. The papers are grouped into six parts: the first three consider the dynamic nature of biodiversity, human dependence on biodiversity, and the survey, evaluation and monitoring of biodiversity; the last three cover the conservation status of terrestrial, riverine and marine biotas, and review national policy on and corporate involvement in South Africa's natural environment.

My main criticism is that, while the title suggests coverage of southern Africa, the book is very much limited to South Africa. Furthermore, there is scant consideration of the growing international awareness that biodiversity can be best conserved if it can be shown to yield financial and material rewards through sustainable utilization. Zimbabwe can offer some innovative ideas in this department. The title should have been more specific or the book's geographical coverage extended over the entire southern African subregion.

Nevertheless, for wildlife conservationists working in South Africa or with interests in South Africa's biota, I can highly recommend this book. It contains clear explanations of key concepts relevant to the biodiversity issue, reviews the relevant methodology, and provides status reports for the major ecosystems.

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CONSERVATION HISTORY

Fraser Darling in Africa: A Rhino in the Whistling Thorn edited by John Morton Boyd (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1992, ISBN 0 7486 0368 9, 307 pp., HB £25)

John Morton Boyd has edited the African diaries of Sir Frank Fraser Darling, adding a summary and some excellent colour photographs. The book will be enjoyed by all serious naturalists, particularly those who have an interest in the areas of Africa covered in his studies: Zambia, Kenya, Northern Tanzania and the Sudan.

Having been privileged to accompany Sir Frank on one of those surveys, I experienced at first hand the wealth of wisdom he had to offer. All the more pity, then, that these journals are mainly diaries of events and observations. The gems of wisdom that do appear are few and far between, although the editor has helped to highlight them explicitly.

The journals were written mainly as letters to his wife and therefore do not always bring out the efficacy of his findings. They do, however, provide an insight into his immediate reactions to the African scene as it