

The Conservation Handbook will be of relevance and importance to all those who work with wildlife (vertebrate and invertebrate animals and plants), especially if they are involved in the protection and management of species and habitats and the maintenance of biodiversity. It should also prove to be of interest to welfarists from different backgrounds — zoologists, ethologists, veterinarians and others. At a time when there is discussion about the apparent divisions between conservationists (who tend to be primarily concerned with populations) and welfarists (who are concerned especially with the well-being of individual animals), this book will help to explain what the former do and how their activities can affect animals, plants and the environment.

This said, it is surprising to find deficiencies that could so easily have been rectified if the author had shown drafts of chapters to colleagues in a wider range of disciplines. As far as animal welfare is concerned, it is disappointing not to find this topic indexed. In some parts of the book, such as that on the marking of animals, there is a clear awareness of the need to minimise pain and the author stresses the need for an ethical approach to field work. However, there is a disturbing section in the chapter on collecting in which a number of techniques that are described for killing animals must be questioned. Chloroform is advocated for small mammals, but the method (“Place ... in a container with an air-tight lid containing cotton-wool soaked in chloroform”) will cause asphyxia rather than anaesthesia. Benzocaine is mentioned for fish and amphibians but not for aquatic invertebrates. The most serious *faux pas*, however, are to suggest drowning in 15–25 per cent alcohol solution or warm (43–47°C) water as a method of destroying amphibians, and to state that reptiles are usually killed by freezing which simply reduces the metabolic rate and so, he claims, is considered reasonably humane. The author is clearly unaware of the controversy and research concerning lower vertebrates during the 1980s that drew attention to the unsuitability on welfare grounds of using techniques such as freezing, drowning and decapitation — culminating in the appearance and wide distribution in 1989 of the UFAW/WSPA Working Party Report entitled ‘Euthanasia of Amphibians and Reptiles’.

To continue to advocate such techniques for euthanasia nearly twenty years later in a book that is likely to be used by innumerable field workers, most of whom will have no veterinary or medical background, is at best an unfortunate error. At worst it may reinforce the views of those critics who believe that double standards apply in biological science, with only scant attention paid to the welfare of free-living wildlife.

In all other respects this is a very readable, comprehensive text that fills an important niche. A revised edition, paying attention to the deficiencies above, could help it to meet the requirements of conservationists and welfarists alike.

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Who Cares for Planet Earth? The Con In Conservation

B Jordan (2001). Published by The Alpha Press, Box 2950, Brighton, East Sussex BN2 5SP, UK. E-mail: edit@sussex-academic.co.uk. 128 pp. Hardback (ISBN 1 898595 35 6). Price £16.95/\$27.50

This book discusses the current strategies, beliefs and rhetoric associated with conservation, and looks critically at what is happening to the earth and what is supposedly being done to correct it. The tone of the book is set in the first sentence of the forward, written by Dr Richard Leakey: “Rhetoric, wild promises, bold statements ... there is a problem and we all

know that there is a global overload of statements which promise action but the good intentions are as far as it goes". The following chapters are written by a number of contributors, all of whom have had extensive experience with wildlife (both captive and free-range), animal behaviour, welfare and conservation, particularly in Africa or with African animals. The book is edited by Dr Bill Jordan, an internationally recognised wildlife veterinarian, founder of the charity Care for the Wild International and current Vice-President of the RSPCA.

A large part of the book focuses on Africa and many of the examples and recommendations refer specifically to this continent. This is not surprising, given the backgrounds of the authors, nor is it necessarily a drawback considering the conservation problems and challenges facing the countries and people in that part of the world.

The book begins by examining the impact of humans on the planet Earth and by challenging the notion that all development is sustainable. In chapter one, Dr Jordan discusses the big conservation threats and issues including chemical misuse, contamination of water supplies, deforestation, fishing, disease, consumerism and the constant drive for profit. He also criticises what he sees as our present attitude to animals, where they are regarded purely as items of trade and not as sentient beings.

These themes are taken up and expanded through the next two chapters. In particular, the concept that wildlife should pay its way through sustainable use is examined and criticised as being too simplistic, unenforceable and based on inadequate knowledge and understanding of the natural world.

The conservation of endangered species comes in for particular attention in chapters four, five and six. The strategies of captive breeding and reintroduction to the wild are discussed and the effectiveness of these conservation strategies reviewed.

The conclusions drawn make bad reading for zoos, with the authors claiming that their conservation actions are too few, overly expensive and generally ineffective. As Samantha Scott says: "Despite their protestations to the contrary, zoos are still menageries. The only difference is that their Public Relations are more efficient and some of them do a little serious captive breeding and research on the side". The authors suggest that there should be a greater emphasis on *in situ* rather than *ex situ* activities, and that zoos should become more innovative and creative in the ways in which they interest and educate their visitors about wildlife conservation.

This criticism is, I believe, unfair to zoos, and represents a somewhat narrow view. Although there is no doubt that captive breeding and reintroduction alone are unlikely to save many species, these strategies represent only one aspect of the increasingly important role that zoos are playing in wildlife conservation. Education and research are also key areas for them, as well as fundraising and support for field conservation programs in overseas countries. Many zoos nowadays are seeking to transform themselves into conservation centres rather than remaining simply as collections of wild animals. In so doing, they are already embracing new interactive and interpretive displays and presentations where the conservation message is an integral part of the visitor experience.

The final two chapters deal with the need to transform present day "Conservation" by changing the way we view and exploit the natural world. Some may regard these discussions as being idealistic, unrealistic and impractical in today's high-tech and profit-motivated world. But that is the point of this book — that we must change the way we think about conservation and what we are doing to planet Earth if we really hope to conserve what we

still have left. As Dr Leakey says in his forward: “This book sets forth some strong opinions which will not be shared by all who read them”.

It is a book I would recommend to anyone interested in conservation — not because it has all the answers, but because it challenges us to look beyond the rhetoric and to evaluate what is really happening and how we can more effectively tackle the problems.

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