

Battle for the Elephants by Iain & Oria Douglas-Hamilton (Doubleday, London, 1992, ISBN 0 358 401922, 368 pp., HB £17.99)

To Save an Elephant: The Undercover Investigation by Allan Thornton & Dave Currey (Bantam Books, Toronto, 1991, ISBN 0 553 40260 9, 273 pp., PB £5.99)

The Douglas-Hamiltons wrote a best seller in 1975 about their study of elephants in Lake Manyara National Park in Tanzania. It provided a valuable insight into the behaviour and social life of elephants living in an undisturbed habitat. Their latest book deals with the catastrophic decline of elephants throughout much of Africa. There seems little doubt that much of this decline has been due to the demand for ivory, exacerbated by the breakdown of law and order in some places.

There is a long-standing disagreement between conservationists over the ethics of the ivory trade. On the one hand it provides employment for many people, from hunters to carvers, who might otherwise be destitute and gives a value to elephants in the eyes of those who suffer the risks to life and property posed by these animals. On the other hand, many of those involved in the ivory trade cannot be trusted to avoid grossly over-exploiting elephant populations, often aided by the venality of corrupt officials. The authors of this book sum up the dilemma fairly, although there is no doubt where their sympathies lie, for they were in the forefront of those involved in the successful campaign to have the elephant placed on Appendix I of CITES. The book is a valuable and authoritative documentation of the history of

elephant conservation over two turbulent decades.

The second book, written by two activists from the pretentiously styled Environmental Investigation Agency, describes some questionable tactics used to obtain information about the ivory trade, most of which was common knowledge anyway. The authors need villains, and there are plenty available, but their targets are indiscriminate and include men of integrity who have done much for elephant conservation. Such behaviour is no doubt great fun, but it is doubtful that the authors' activities have saved a single elephant, despite the title of their book.

S. K. Eltringham

Out of the Amazon, photographs by Sue Cunningham, text by Ghilleen Prance (London, HMSO, 1992, ISBN 0 11 250074 9, HB £18.95)

This is not 'yet another popular book on the Amazon'. Firstly, the people responsible for it have extensive first-hand knowledge – Sue Cunningham from many years of photographic documentation, Ghilleen Prance from his extensive botanical work in the region. Secondly, popular books on rain forests often concentrate on the photographs and the text is either minimal, ill-informed or just wrong.

Out of the Amazon is a popular rain-forest book with a difference. The text is informative and eloquently complements the photographs. Short chapters on the forest, its ecology, its products and the human uses to which they are put are interspersed with some 100 photographs, which range from the atmospheric to the poignant. Always there is the underlying

concern for the environmental impact of man's activities. One image I retain is of a tributary full of pale mine tailings drifting into the dark waters of a major river – a sickening mimicry of the meeting of the waters at Manaus. The captions do not just act as reference points for the text, but are biological or ethnographical summaries of their own. This means that one can learn a lot from just perusing the pictures.

The text concentrates on the Brazilian Amazon and tends to ignore some of the less extensive habitat types, but these are small complaints given the scope of the book.

Adrian Barnett

The Gardener's Guide to Plant Conservation by Nina T. Marshall (World Wildlife Fund-US, Washington DC, 1993, ISBN 0 89164 139 4, 187 pp., \$12.95 plus \$2 postage from WWF, PO Box 4866, Hampden Post Office, Baltimore, MD 21211, USA)

Since 1987, when the FFPS first started to tackle the issue of trade in wild plants, knowledge of the scale and scope of the problems has increased considerably. This book reflects this and is the first of its kind. It provides advice to gardeners who, often unwittingly, provide the demand for a huge range of plant species still collected from wild populations for the horticultural trade.

Focusing on terrestrial orchids, insectivorous plants, bulbs and North American wild flowers, it is specifically aimed at North American gardeners but contains much of relevance and interest to gardeners elsewhere. It is a timely book, beautifully produced and highly recommended.

Mike Read