

arguments very convincing. His perspective is certainly a contrast with the standard view of the early settlement period, expounded by well-known and frequently cited authors such as Jock Marshall (1966), William Lines (1991) and Tim Flannery (1997), that the settlers exploited and destroyed the Australian environment. For example, Marshall (1966, p. 2) in *The Great Extermination*, wrote: 'The bush, to our great-grandfathers, was the enemy: it brooded sombrely outside their brave and often pathetic little attempts at civilisation; it crowded in on them in times of drought and flood. It, not they, was alien.' In contrast, Bonyhady (2000, p. 3) notes that 'While many colonists were alienated by their new environment, others delighted in it... many members of the First Fleet lauded the gum tree for its distinctiveness'. Bonyhady also notes that, thirty years later, there was no consensus on the gum trees. Although the native born youth 'appear to have admired the gum trees', 'most writers condemned the eucalypts. Far from delighting in their difference, colonists and visitors judged them against an English standard and found them wanting in even more extravagant terms' (p. 71). According to Bonyhady, the writers' criticisms soon became clichés, repeated in many influential books of the time (p. 73), but not all shared the disdain and Bonyhady documents the reappraisal of the gum tree through art such as Buvelot's and recognition of its utilitarian value during the mid-1800s.

Bonyhady also documents a story of failure: of environmental ideals sacrificed to political expediency and commercial self-interest—of innovative and enlightened laws ignored and broken. For example, he notes that the first environmental law in Australia was declared in April 1788, 'when Lieutenant Philip Gidley King protected plantain or banana trees on Norfolk Island, just four days after discovering them', and that 'by 1804 such laws were the norm' (p. 5). But the first officials were unable to enforce their laws and soon short-term economic advantage was put before long-term sustainability (p. 10). Nothing changes!

Bonyhady's research into the growth of an environmental conservation movement in Australia, in which he draws on art, poetry and other sources, provides a useful complement to the history of the Australian environment movement by Hutton and Connors (1999) whose first chapter also looks at the late 1800s. *The Colonial Earth* is also a worthy complement to Robert Paddle's (2000) *The Last Tasmanian Tiger* (reviewed elsewhere in this issue). Together they provide an alternative history of human perceptions and actions in the Australian environment.

This book should be essential reading for anyone interested in, teaching about, or studying the Australian environment. It is a great resource for teachers and tertiary students, and is of a suitable reading level for senior secondary students too. It could be a prescribed text for VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies in Victoria! According to a review in *The Australian* (3-4 February 2001) only 2000 copies were printed, so I hope that there are enough remaining for AJEE readers to enjoy. 🐾

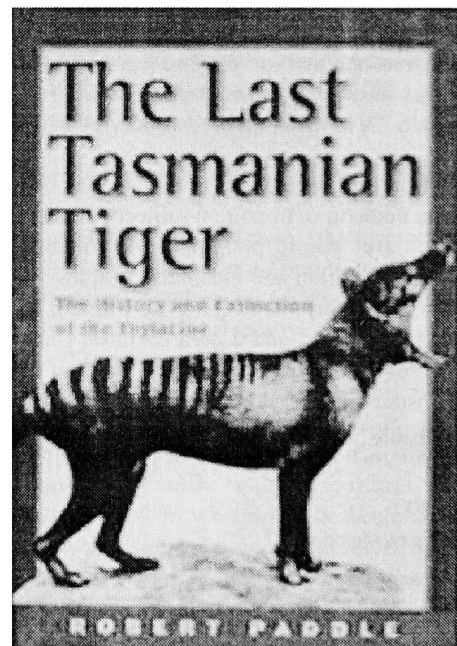
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Robert Paddle 2000, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger: The History and Extinction of the Thylacine*. Cambridge University Press, Oakleigh, Victoria.



Species finally depart the biota, not with a bang but a whimper. The thylacine, Tasmanian tiger or marsupial wolf, *Thylacinus cynocephalus*, is one of a handful of species where that whimper has a precise date. The thylacine became extinct on 7 September 1936 when the last known specimen died in captivity in the Beaumaris Zoo, Hobart.

So begins Robert Paddle's *The Last Tasmanian Tiger*, a critical history of scientific and popular thought about the thylacine

and the politics of its eventual extinction. Paddle's account achieves the rare double distinction of meeting the highest standards of academic rigour while at the same time speaking eloquently to a non-specialist audience. Thus it is no surprise that *The Last Tasmanian Tiger* was shortlisted for the 2001 Reed New Holland Eureka Science Book Prize (awarded to an Australian author for a book that brings science and the results of scientific research to the general public) and also was awarded the 2001 Whitley Medal by the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales.

Paddle begins with an historical account of how scientific ideas about the thylacine developed during 19th and early-20th-century Tasmania. His extensive archival research demonstrates how colonial scientists produced knowledge to fit their Eurocentric preconceptions. In part, the thylacine was a victim of what Paddle calls 'placental chauvinism', a widespread and strongly held belief that because the white races of humans were superior to all others, placental mammals (like us) were more advanced than marsupials and monotremes. Aborigines were seen as a primitive dying race and, similarly, marsupials such as the thylacine were assumed to be inferior to placental carnivores, and thus doomed to inevitable extinction.

Paddle details the history of specific misconceptions about thylacine behaviour, including early reports that portrayed it as a coast-dwelling marine marsupial that lived on crabs and others that claimed it was a blood-sucking vampire. European-based researchers who had never seen the animal or its environment usually compiled these 'scientific' papers. For example, the marine marsupial story came from early 19th century French and British scientists who argued that the thylacine's compressed tail indicated it must be a swimmer.

Paddle reveals previously overlooked evidence dating from the early years of European occupation that thylacines lived in family groups, made lairs, hunted cooperatively, established home ranges, and had a variety of vocalisations consistent with those of social animals. But the local naturalists who made these observations were silenced and ostracised by the metropolitan scientific establishment because they contradicted international 'expert opinion' about the thylacine's diet and feeding behaviours and the 'tiger' thus became the solitary hunters of popular imagination.

The deceit and treachery of pastoral interests compounded the early distortions of thylacine/human interactions produced by scientific ignorance and arrogance. Paddle reports that prior to 1829 there were few accounts of 'tigers' preying on sheep, but by 1830 the Van Diemen's Land Company had identified the thylacine as a convenient scapegoat to justify poor returns and high stock losses to its British investors. The company introduced a private bounty scheme, ostensibly to reduce the number of thylacines on its properties in northwest Tasmania. In the 1840s Australia's first major rural depression exacerbated the problem and the bounty scheme was extended. Although many scientists, politicians and rural landowners were sceptical about claims that the thylacine was a major threat to sheep, it continued throughout the 19th century to be

used as an excuse for poor farming practice. It became a pawn in a political struggle between the rural lobby and parliament and in 1886, during a period of shifting political alliances, the government sponsored a bounty scheme for the thylacine's destruction. From Paddle's perspective, the eventual extinction of the thylacine was a by-product of cynical political manoeuvring between rival interests in colonial society rather than a direct conflict between the needs of settlers and thylacines.

Paddle follows his account of the politics of extermination with an examination of the politics of wildlife preservation. The Tasmanian Game Protection and Acclimatization Society was formed in 1895 and by the early 1900s a growing conservation movement was fuelled by the difficulty of obtaining specimens of the island's unique fauna for overseas zoos and museums. However, it was not until 1936 that the Tasmanian Fauna Board declared the thylacine a protected animal. As Paddle dryly remarks: 'the species was totally protected for the last fifty-nine days of its existence'.

However, as the Great Depression set in, the Tasmanian government sought to reduce the expenses of the Beaumaris zoo in Hobart by cutting the number of employees and reducing the salaries of those remaining. At the time of losing the thylacine, mismanagement at the Hobart Zoo also lost two placental carnivores, a black leopard and a Bengal tiger. In effect, the zoo was being used as a work-for-the-dole scheme and the unqualified and inexperienced workers often neglected their charges. Many zoo animals died as a result of indifferent feeding and exposure.

The Last Tasmanian Tiger is a powerful and poignant case study of the ways in which political and bureaucratic manoeuvring in settler society had deeply regrettable consequences for the Australian biota. The fate of the thylacine was incidental to wider issues of rural depression, cost reduction and individual political careerism. Paddle demonstrates convincingly the value of bringing scientific studies of natural systems and species together with social, cultural and historical studies of the development of scientific ideas and their interaction with changing popular beliefs and political struggles.

One of the perennial practical problems of environmental education is communicating the subjectivity of scientific investigation and interpretation. *The Last Tasmanian Tiger* demonstrates that understanding how scientific knowledge is produced in conformity with prevailing social and cultural values and beliefs makes that knowledge more useful and useable than knowledge that is overlaid with false and futile claims to its 'objectivity'. This is the important educational lesson at the heart of Paddle's text, and the fact that his subject is now a creature of near-iconic standing and national guilt makes it all the more accessible and fascinating. 🐾

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