## The Natural History of Wild Cats

*Andrew Kitchener*
Christopher Helm, London, 1991, 280 pp., HB £17.99

Andrew Kitchener, Curator of Mammals and Birds at the Royal Museum of Scotland, has produced a welcome comprehensive review of the wild cats, making extensive use of rapidly expanding field research. It is not lavishly illustrated, but it does have a selection of good colour pictures devoted to the less-known, but very beautiful small cats. Drawings are used to illustrate features and behaviour, and there is a valuable array of tables and figures.

Kitchener covers the evolution of cats into supreme carnivores, followed by brief descriptions of all the wild felids, grouping them into the ocelot, domestic cat and pantherine lineages, and the *Panthera* group. Appended tables give details of body size and weights in different areas collected from the literature.

Driving forces of wild cat life are explained in a chapter on 'Killing and Eating', supplemented, of course, by one on that other driving force: reproduction. Under 'Cats and Humans' Kitchener reviews the domestication of the wildcat and the genetics that have produced such remarkable pelages. He touches on the commercial exploitation of wild cats before turning to conservation. Unfortunately, this is the weakest part of the book. A (presumably) printer's error puts the former tiger population of India at 140,000. The widely quoted figure is actually 40,000, which the late British naturalist E. P. Gee suggested was 'possible' at the turn of the century. Many Indian specialists think that figure too high.

The success of Project Tiger in India is rightly lauded. However, apart from the genetic threat to the isolated small populations, the grave menace of human population pressure needs emphasis: India's population has risen by nearly 50 per cent since Project Tiger was launched in 1973.

It is wrong to suggest that the success of Project Tiger has created a man-eating problem. It has been endemic in the Sundarbans for several hundred years, and the only other serious area of manslaughter has been around Dudhwa National Park, where sugarcane cultivation provides tiger habitat where people are present.

*Peter Jackson.*

## Arabian Mammals: A Natural History

*Jonathan Kingdon*
Academic Press, London, 1991, 279 pp., HB £59.00 ($130.00)

In spite of the fame achieved by the Arabian oryx as a symbol of the severe danger threatening much of our large mammal fauna, and of the success that can attend the determined efforts of conservationists, the diversity of mammals in Arabia tends to receive little publicity. The Arabian mammal fauna is in fact well documented, in the form of the meticulous volumes, *The Mammals of Arabia* by D. L. Harrison (Ernest Benn Ltd, 1964–72), and their recent thorough revision by D. L. Harrison and P. J. J. Bates (Harrison Zoological Museum, 1991). Jonathan Kingdon's volume provides a more concise account, enlivened by numerous pencil drawings. The area covered is the whole of Saudi Arabia, the Gulf and the southern Arabian states, southern Jordan and southern Iraq.

A brief introductory chapter sets the natural and human historical scene and discusses the drastic decline in much of the Arabian fauna as seen by both western and Arabian eyes. For the hundred or so species in the region the accounts range from two or three lines for many of the rodents, shrews and bats, to several pages for some of the larger mammals, covering a variety of topics such as ecology, behaviour and breeding, although it is not always clear which information actually derives from the Arabian part of the range. The accounts of domestic species are of especial interest since these are so often neglected in works of this kind but have a profound influence on the habitats of the wild species and on local attitudes to wildlife.

Colour plates depict 53 species painted by the author, each with an extended caption in Arabic and English. Although these form over a third of the book they are in a terminal appendix and are not referred to in the main species accounts. The addition of a small distribution map for each species greatly enhances the potential value of the book for reference but they are in places somewhat misleading. Most maps show actual localities plus postulated range. These are generally reasonable but the postulation is sometimes rather excessive in relation to the hard evidence, as in the Somali white-toothed shrew, with only one confirmed record, or the hoary fox, with one Arabian record, from Oman according to the text but appearing on the map as if from Yemen. Frustratingly it is among some of the better known species that the information on status is most elusive or misleading. The map for cheetah shows both closed and open symbols but

the significance of the difference is not explained.

Recent events in the region have no doubt had a profound effect on some species, yet to be documented. Other species continue to be discovered in the region: the African bushy-tailed mongoose *Bdeogale crassicauda* was recorded for the first time in Arabia in 1988 and published too late for inclusion. This volume is a timely reminder of the fragility of these arid habitats and the precarious status of many of their endemic mammals at a time when rain forests, at the opposite end of the habitat spectrum, are uppermost in the public mind.
*Gordon B. Corbet.*

## Elephant Life

*Irven O. Buss*
Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa, 1990, 191 pp., HB $49.95

Professor Irven Buss, a leading American wildlife zoologist, has devoted much of his career to study of the African elephant, largely in Kibale Forest Reserve of western Uganda and adjacent areas. This book, subtitled 'Fifteen Years of High Population Density', sets out his research findings.

It makes fascinating reading, dealing in detail with many aspects of elephant life, as manifested by the many individuals that Buss tracked over extended periods of time. Chapters deal with all aspects of behaviour, numbers and distribution, herd movements, reproductive patterns, food habits, life in forest habitats, indeed whatever makes elephants tick —especially when they become unduly crowded in protected areas. A concluding chapter considers the survival outlook for the Kibale elephants—not promising in the light of land-hunger pressures on the part of human communities in the environs.

Along the way Buss covers such topics as threat displays and fighting, ear flapping, 'rumblings', migration, and minerals in the diet. There are many illuminating accounts of elephants' responses when a member of the herd dies; methods of pushing over trees; tusk gouging and bark stripping and care of the young. Also there are detailed reports of phenomena that I have not previously come across in any detail, let alone such splendidly graphic detail, such as killing crocodiles. It all makes for a splendid compendium of sustained observations of elephants' lifestyles, with stacks of data-supported records. A fine publication that will appeal to both the professional zoologist and the elephant enthusiast.
*Norman Myers.*

## Dolphins, Porpoises and Whales of the World. The IUCN Red Data Book

*Margaret Klinowska (Compiler)*
IUCN, Cambridge, 1991, ISBN 2 88032 936 1, 438 pp., HB £30/$US55 postage and packing extra

This new book in the IUCN Red Data Book series reviews the status of the world's 79 species of cetaceans. While none has yet become extinct through man's activities some of the great whales and river dolphins have total populations of only a few hundred and many species of large or unknown size are probably declining rapidly. Detailed species accounts describe distribution, population size, threats and conservation measures necessary.
*Editor.*

## Extraordinary Animals Worldwide

*Karl P. N. Shuker*
Robert Hale, London, 1991, 208 pp., £15.95

This is one of those irritating titles that leaves you to guess what the book is actually about. The subject-matter is in fact zoological mysteries of the kind that have been dealt with more thoroughly by Bernard Heuvelmans in *On the Track of Unknown Animals* (1958). Inevitably, the author covers some of the same ground, as with the alleged South American ape *Ameranthropoides loysi* from the borders of Colombia and Venezuela, recorded once only, in 1929. He wisely avoids the well-trodden paths to the lake monsters and the bigfoot clan, but strays rather far in the direction of pure folklore and travellers' tales, for instance with the story of the so-called daisy dog, a pekinese alleged to have been shipwrecked in Cornwall in the 16th century. If you like reading about this sort of thing, then here is a good read.

To return to the South American ape, I was struck by the chapter of accidents that always occurs when a potential zoological specimen actually appears, as has so often been related by the bigfoot fans. The ape, a female, was shot by a party of geologists, but the specimen was reduced to a skin and a skull. The skull was used as a salt-container by the party's cook, so that it completely disintegrated, and the skin suffered 'a comparably regrettable fate', leaving only a striking photograph as evidence. All that zoologists ever ask in these cases is a physical specimen of some kind. In one way or another they are always denied it.
*Richard Fitter.*