

## Book reviews

### **Expedition to Borneo**

David Macdonald  
Dent, 1982, £9.95

This book is a highly readable account of a three man expedition led by the then recently graduated author in 1972. Subtitled 'The search for proboscis monkeys and other creatures', the reader is warned at the outset that the book is a travelogue with a difference. What results is a collection of interesting natural history facets of the fauna and flora found in Borneo jungles, loosely bound together by the author's and his companions' often naïve and humorous day to day problems of survival and interactions with local people.

The book's strength lies in the gentle way in which Macdonald introduces the reader to the biological principles inherent in ecosystems in general and tropical rain forests in particular.

Although the author in his Foreword gives passing reference to the rapidly dwindling forests of south-east Asia, I personally found an underlying emptiness in the book which might have been improved by occasionally reiterating this theme, especially since some of the book was written with the benefit of hindsight. However, this attractive book gives some of the exotic flavour of Borneo and will appeal to amateur naturalists in particular and all those that aspire to travelling in one of the world's most beautiful places. The high price of the book will limit the number of people who are able to share Macdonald's experiences.

R.E. Stebbings  
Monks Wood Experimental Station,  
Abbots Ripton, Huntingdon, UK.

**Plant Extinction; a global crisis**  
Harold Koopowitz and Hilary Kaye  
Stone Wall Press, 1983, \$16.95

In an attempt to overcome the anonymity of rare, endangered and extinct plants, as compared with cuddly koalas and pandas, Harold Koopowitz and his journalist co-author Hilary Kaye have succeeded admirably with their case-history approach to plant conservation. They examine five subjects; plants useful to man, extinction in all major life zones, gene banks, the rôle of the

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amateur and conservation politics. The book is surprisingly accurate not only in species details but also in the names, addresses and activities of the conservation organisations it describes. It is not a balanced review. Instead it describes mostly the obsessions of Harold Koopowitz, director of Irvine Arboretum, University of California, attempting to justify cryogenic seed banks as a viable alternative to the maintenance of genetic resources rather than natural habitats. Consequently, it opposes established conservation organisations, such as the Botanic Gardens conservation co-ordinating body, with their pleas for the maintenance of natural ecosystems. Similarly, when reviewing CITES the authors provide a novel explanation that 'Appendix II' is a threat to species conservation because it affords no protection in native habitats. As much as I disagree with some of the views presented here the layout of the book is excellent. It is provocative and Hilary Kaye's journalism should jolt the most complacent laymen into thinking about the importance of plants. My only real misgivings are with the choice of certain case-studies. For example, despite the tenuous link of heterotrophic nutrition in heathland carnivorous plants with primates, I cannot for the life of me understand why the 'Venus fly-trap' should figure as a case-study example in a chapter entitled 'Feeding the World'! However, the book is well worth reading and I hope at least a few plant conservationists will do so.

C.J. Humphries  
Department of Botany,  
British Museum (Natural History)

### **Birds that Came Back**

John Gooders  
Andre Deutsch, 1983, £12.95

I am often challenged by the public to explain exactly *how* endangered birds really are. I'll admit that my answers have often been more emotional than informative. I now have the knowledge. The first half of this book gives a splendidly lucid historical account of the depletion of birds in Britain, dealing with prehistoric hunting, medieval cookery, falconry, the invention and development of firearms, and the ironical and vicious circles of dark Victorian days involving

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'sporting' gentlemen, skin and egg collectors and gun-toting naturalists; and, above and beyond all, the continuing 'sterilisation' of natural habitat by modern agriculture.

In a sense it is bleak, if fascinating, reading, but it is balanced by the optimism implied by the title. Birds *have* come back—many of them enticed by the comparative peace (for them!) of the Second World War, and increasingly encouraged by a growing national 'conservation conscience': an improvement which Gooders again sets in its sociological context—the coming of television, the growing influence of the RSPB, and the popularisation of bird-watching. John Gooders says of himself: 'No doubt I'm as guilty as anyone of publicising the bird cause' and yes, I suppose he is often looked on as something of a 'populariser'—but why feel guilty!? If popularisation means conservation, then let's have more of it; and may it rapidly spread to the Mediterranean, where millions of 'our' birds are slaughtered each year.

Meanwhile . . . this book is superbly informative and informed, clear, witty and entirely unemotional. I shall be recommending it and quoting from it often. And by the way, compared with much of Gooders' work, I certainly wouldn't call it 'populist' at all—but 'popular' it should be.

*Bill Oddie*  
Writer and broadcaster

### **Dynamics of Large Mammal Populations**

C.W. Fowler and T.D. Smith (Editors)  
Wiley (Interscience), 1981, £31.50

It is the mammals that are large, not the populations—in fact, many of the populations are lamentably small. Because of the long generation time of large-bodied animals, population turnovers are protracted, often exceeding the duration of short-term ecological investigations. Studies of large mammals, therefore, tend to provide information on the current status of particular populations rather than on their rate of change or productivity.

This book rectifies this deficiency. It comprises the published proceedings of a conference held at Utah State University in 1978, and includes 23

papers presented by 35 authors. Its main theme is the modelling of animal populations and how such models can be used both to predict changes in status and to manage populations, particularly of species of commercial value. The book contains an excellent mix of theoretical chapters, general overviews, and studies of specific animal species, ranging from seals and whales to lions and elephants, taking in deer, wolves and grizzly bears on the way.

The book is dedicated to Dr Richard Laws in recognition of his outstanding work on the biology of large mammals during the last 30 years. His chapter comprises a stimulating account of the regulatory processes that influence populations of large mammals in terrestrial and marine ecosystems based upon his personal experiences of seals, whales, hippopotamuses and elephants. Presented as the banquet address at the conference, it is also easily the most readable of the contributions.

And herein lies a warning to the lay reader. The book comprises a collection of scientific papers, chock-a-block with graphs, tables and assorted scientific paraphernalia. Mostly it is heavy, turgid, stuff designed for the serious student of wildlife biology, and is not at all the sort of place to look up the average life expectancy of the African elephant. But to the specialist it will be indispensable, forming as it does the only authoritative volume that deals with the population dynamics of this important group of animals. It is a pity we have had to wait so long for the conference proceedings to see the light of day, and then at a price few can afford.

*Robin Pellew*  
Physiological Laboratory,  
University of Cambridge

### **Collins Handguide to the Butterflies of Africa**

R.H. Carcasson  
Collins, 1981, HB £7.95, PB £4.95  
**The Butterflies of Northern Europe**  
Björn Dal (Michael Morris, Editor)  
Croom Helm, 1982, £5.95

These two handy guides are a welcome addition to the ever-increasing volume of publications

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