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wise husbandry. Indeed the opening paragraphs deplore our willingness to rely on just three species of bovids — cattle, sheep, and goats, while ignoring the study and fate of the many others. Indeed the choice of actual types domesticated was a consequence largely of the limited range of species available in the Middle East, an area poor in bovid diversity. A section on conservation is also added as an Appendix.

These books are a celebration of zoology and it is a great pity that their high price will make them available to so few.

Jane Thornback,
Compiler of IUCN's *Red Data*
Book: Mammalia

The Gibbons of Siberut

Tony Whitten (Foreword by Sir Peter Scott)

J.M. Dent, £9.50

This book is the result of several years of dedicated study by Tony and Jane Whitten, aided by botanist Alan House, in a remote Indonesian island off the west coast of Sumatra. The title is misleading, in that the book is not just about the ecology and behaviour of the endemic species of gibbon—the subject of his doctoral dissertation—nor the other rare primates found there, but about the local people and their struggle to survive and to maintain their cultural traditions (evolved in harmony with the tropical forest ecosystem) in the face of political and economic pressures from central government (and multinational companies). One can perhaps forgive the frequent interruption to the delightful descriptions of the forest and its primates, because of the fascinating insights he gives of the people and their way of life. Tony Whitten's affection for, and admiration of, these resourceful, stoical and friendly people comes across strongly, as does his pragmatic approach to nature conservation allied with sustained human development.

He describes their early days on the island—getting to know the forest and the people and starting his gibbon study—followed by the main problems and successes in studying the elusive gibbons, all interlaced with tales of the local people and their folklore. Then they go on

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survey, which takes them to other, more remote parts of the island, and finally he weaves together the plight of wildlife and the people.

Siberut is facing the crisis now confronting all forested regions in the tropics—drastic degradation for short-term economic gain to the detriment of the local people and wildlife. The crucial role of forests in these ever-wet regions in soil and water balance and in ameliorating climate are being appreciated almost too late, as is their long-term potential for food, medicine and other chemicals and living materials. The remoteness and compactness of Siberut offers unusual opportunities for conserving the rain forest and improving the standard of living for the local people. This book should do much to help promote such aims; it is essential reading for anyone interested in rain forests, primates (and other wildlife) and people.

David J. Chivers,
Sub-Department of Veterinary Anatomy,
Cambridge University

The IUCN Amphibia — Reptilia Red Data Book. Part 1: Testudines, Crocodylia, Rhynchocephalia Brian Groombridge (Compiler)

It would be extremely easy to write a glowing review of Brian Groombridge's compilation. There is absolutely no doubt that the 400 pages are thoroughly and accurately researched, and that the data are presented in as lucid a manner possible within the constraints of the RDBs. I could not praise it enough. But I would like to take the opportunity to look beyond the present volume.

This volume deals with Testudines, Crocodylia, and Rhynchocephalia — some of the largest, best documented species of reptiles; there are also only a few species. It will be impossible to treat the rest of the reptiles and amphibians of the world with the same degree of detail. This means that effectively the compilers of the RDBs are performing 'triage' for the conservation world. There may be dozens, if not hundreds of tropical frogs becoming extinct every year as forests are cleared, but because a decision has been made to

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concentrate on the larger, more spectacular species such as crocodiles etc., some of the smaller reptiles and amphibians will become extinct before they are listed.

There are three possible solutions to this problem. First, continue with the present appraisal, and accept that the more spectacular species will get more attention; second, develop a less detailed, but more comprehensive approach; third, develop an entirely new, perhaps ecosystem-oriented approach. Whichever of these strategies is adopted I believe that a radical examination of the concept of endangered species listings will be needed. At present, the RDBs are extremely comprehensive and presumably aimed at well-informed scientists — but are they the ideal target? Perhaps they should be aimed at journalists, politicians, lobbyists or the general public. Whichever groups are defined as being important, they should be clearly identified and the product designed to meet their requirements.

But none of the above is intended to denigrate the current RDBs in general or the first of the Herps. in particular; it is an invaluable document, highly recommended to all conservationists. It is also pleasing to note that the price is extremely modest for such an important work, of over 400 pages.

John A. Burton

NB, this volume is available from ffPS price £12.50 inc. surface postage.

Man and Fisheries on an Amazon Frontier

Michael Goulding

Developments in Hydrobiology 4

Dr W. Junk, The Hague, Dfl 90,

US \$47.50

Despite the rather high price for 137 pages, this book is an important one for all those concerned with economic development in the Amazon rain forest. Although the Amazon is the largest river system on earth, with by far the largest freshwater fish fauna, until recently the biology of the commercial fishes was little known. Mainly catfishes and characoids (with giant Arapaima, some cichlids and others), the large size of many of them and their long migrations through complex and relatively unexplored river systems has made

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them difficult to study. Goulding's own work has now brought out very clearly the intimate relationships between the fishes and the forest (see also his 1980 book *The Fishes and the Forest*, University of California Press). Many species are dependent on the flooded forest for food and sheltered nursery grounds, while certain fishes have important roles in dispersing tree seeds. This present book concentrates on the Rio Madeira, one of the main Amazon tributaries and itself one of the world's major rivers. After looking at the prevailing physical and biological conditions it gives a fascinating portrait of the opening up of the Madeira basin (with its railway to bypass rapids, initiated in the rubber boom, and later highway development) and the effects of this on protein flow and fishery development. Clear diagrams illustrate the fishing methods; numerous black and white photographs show the fishermen at work and the main food fishes. A section summarises what is known of the biology of each of these. Goulding concludes by examining the relative productivity of these fisheries, problems to be faced, and management possibilities. It is clear that the destruction of the Amazon floodplain forest will inevitably have profound effects on the commercial fishes.

R.H. Lowe-McConnell,

Fish Section, British Museum (Natural History)

Antarctic Wildlife

Photographs: Eric Hosking

Text: Bryan Sage

Croom Helm, £12.95

The Antarctic has long been a focus of attention for sealers, whalers, great explorers and scientists, but more recently it has had a new invader — the cruising tourist. Cost will probably prevent many of us from joining the tourists, but for a little less we can enjoy Eric Hosking and Bryan Sage's book on Antarctic wildlife which was born from Eric's invitation to join a tour on *Linblad Explorer*.

This is a pleasing book with many excellent photographs of the kind we would expect from an old master like Eric Hosking. Bryan Sage's text is competent and informative, if perhaps rather uninspired in places. There are chapters on the history of the area, general ecology of the land/ice areas, the ecology of birds and seals, and an

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