

Book reviews

Walker's Mammals of the World

4th edition

Ronald M. Nowak and John L. Paradiso

John Hopkins University Press, 1983,

\$65.00 for two volumes

There can be absolutely no doubt about the importance of this work. *Walker's Mammals of the World* was first published in 1964, and is already established as possibly the most generally useful single work on mammals. The latest edition by Nowak and Paradiso is a real tour de force, 1362 pages, with almost every genus illustrated and a fact-filled text. I could lavish praise on many aspects of this work, but it is as a tool for conservation that it is important to review it here. There is probably no other published work which gives such a comprehensive review of the conservation status of the world's mammals. Although it is marginally out of date, inasmuch as its publication date precluded inclusion of reference to the *Red Data Book (Mammals) 1983 for the New World*, it is much more comprehensive than the *RDB* and gives information on species not mentioned there. Excellent value at under 3½p/page. The answer to almost all the questions most people will want to ask about mammals they had not even imagined existed.

John A. Burton

Special Offer to Members: This book is available by mail order from fFPS post free (send cheque for £55 to fFPS). This includes overseas post by surface mail. Airmail not available.

The Ivory Crisis

Ian Parker and Mohamed Amin

Chatto and Windus, 1983, £14.95

Although a practical, old game warden type by his own admission, Ian Parker walks, works, argues, and publishes with scientists, and clearly enjoys baiting conservationists on the side. Parker is a man of considerable experience and strong opinions. When he contends that the 1970s 'crisis' of ivory rush and elephant slaughter was at best a misjudgement on the part of over-eager conservationists, at worst a deliberate misrepresentation on their part, we are bound to consider the opinion seriously. Parker asks—if there

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are over a million elephants in Africa and if the trade can detect no decrease in supply of ivory, then how can conservationists claim there is an ivory crisis?

The book, which attempts to analyse the question is, admittedly, very readable, full of splendid anecdotes about wildlife management in eastern Africa. Amin's photographs are slick and possess a calendar-like beauty but are not very tightly tuned to the text. In fact, his photos seem to be only about half of those present, and curiously there are no photo credits at all.

The book's entertainment value, arising from Parker's personality and his own conservation credo, detracts from what should be a very objective look at the elephant and ivory question. His home-spun psychology applied to the motivations of conservationists and his personal problems with IUCN are somewhat irrelevant to the central theme and bring his own motivations into question. The book vacillates between a critique and a complaint: Parker's clear, autobiographical voice is too often self-conscious, more, it seems, to establish his credentials than to weave the logical fabric of his thesis.

Contrary to what the author contends, the exact number of elephants left is probably irrelevant. What is important is the rate of attrition, which, in the 1970s was in many parts of the African elephant's range disturbingly high by any standards. Parker's most contentious point—that the trade contributes hardly at all to the demand for ivory—needs to be quantified, to say the very least. He is undoubtedly correct, however, in pointing to increasing human populations as the greatest threat to elephants.

There is a point here as well as a point of view: all is far from well in the halls of wildlife conservation. We need less investment in swashbuckling, helicopter-supported exercises and more in understanding how the ivory trade works. Conservationists need to communicate with the trade, with the people who are increasingly spreading into 'elephant country', as well as with the national law-makers. Perhaps, as Parker suggests, the task has gone beyond the abilities of the conservation fraternity. The ecologists and game wardens, too, have gone about as far as they can go. We need advice on how to control both

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