

Book reviews

A Field Guide to the Mammals of Borneo

Junaidi Payne and Charles M. Francis. Illustrated by Karen Phillipps

Sabah Society, 1986, 332 pp, HB US\$16.50, SB US\$12.50
Available from the Sabah Society, PO Box 10547, 88806
Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia (price includes postage)

This book is the first of its kind for South East Asia. Every known mammal species of Borneo is described and almost all are beautifully illustrated in colour. There is an introductory section on how to identify mammals, and notes for each species on ecology, habitat and distribution. A considerable amount of information is published for the first time. There is an illustrated appendix on footprints, a list of parks and reserves, a gazetteer and a map. It is an essential acquisition for anyone with an interest in the mammal fauna of the region.

Editor.

Tiger: Portrait of a Predator

Valmik Thapar, photographs by Gunter Ziesler and Fateh Singh Rathore

Collins, London, 1986, 200 pp and 170 photographs, HB £15

Nothing in the living world can match the awesome power of the tiger to arouse in us paradoxical feelings of dread and reverence. And yet, 15 years ago, this, the most beautiful of mammals, was on the brink of extinction in the wild. It is perhaps a wonder that the tiger has survived at all because sporting people had long declared open season on these mighty cats. The Maharaja of Udairpur accounted for 1000, and as recently as 1939, a former Viceroy of India bagged 120 during a 10-week expedition to the Chitawan Valley, Nepal. With a population of 40,000 at the height of the British Raj, tiger numbers fell relentlessly to fewer than 2000 in 1972. At the initiative of Guy Mountfort, the IUCN, WWF and the Indian Government set about restoring the fortunes of the royal Bengal tiger and identified nine reserves. Ranthambhore was one of them, and the 40 or so tigers that enjoy the protection of this national park are the subjects of Valmik Thapar's timely and attractive book.

Ranthambhore is literally one of India's natural

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jewels. Situated 300 km south of Delhi, in Rajasthan, this 400-sq km patch was once a hunting preserve for the Maharajah of Jaipur. Today, it abounds with 272 kinds of birds, 22 species of mammals, and tigers, which are brazenly active by day. *Tiger: Portrait of a Predator* is a delightfully illustrated account, which evokes the hot ambience of Ranthambhore and its bountiful wildlife. The focus is on the tigers, their prey, history and prospects. Not that they are easy subjects. As Thapar states, six hours of solid observation might reveal only 60 seconds of activity. However, he and his photographers have done well to secure rare glimpses of the tiger's courtship and to record the unique hunting technique of a male called Genghis. For a short period of time, he used to erupt from cover and surge in a cloud of spray into the lake to ambush sambar. Television naturalists saw this in Stan and Belinda Breedon's film 'Year of the Tiger' shown in the BBC's 'Natural World'. Thapar also reveals that male tigers may occasionally become involved with cubs.

'Project Tiger' has been so successful that the management of these big cats nowadays presents something of a challenge. Four thousand Bengal tigers need space, and so does India's burgeoning population of 730 million people. Thapar discusses these problems sensibly, with sensitivity for the needs of his fellow countrymen and for the tigers for which he has a driving passion. Alas, he sees no future for them outside wildlife refuges like Ranthambhore. An excellent book.

John Sparks, Head of BBC Natural History Unit, Bristol, UK.

Wildlife of China

Chinese Wildlife Conservation Association

China Forestry Publishing House, Beijing, 1985, 134 pp, £19.50

Available from Collets, Denington Estate, Wellingborough, Northants NN8 2QT, UK

Charities are virtually unknown in Communist countries; the state takes care of everything. But in China, the bad effects in 1974–76 of the die-off of bamboo on the population of giant pandas—at least 138 died—brought into being the CWCA, the 'author' of this book. The book is

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an assembly of colour photographs of Chinese mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fishes and birds, and is arranged group by group in that order with an introduction and three pages of text.

It is the first book of its kind and is very interesting. Some of the creatures depicted are wild and free, most are tame or captive, and a few appear to be stuffed specimens placed in natural settings. Double-page studies of creatures obviously in the wild include an impressive shot of three distantly silhouetted Tibetan antelopes, a herd of Asiatic wild asses also on the Tibetan-Quinhai plateau, and a flock of the near-endemic Chinese black-necked crane. Another rare crane, the Siberian, nests in the eastern USSR and winters in China on the middle reaches of the Yangtse. From there the book has a photograph with about 10 per cent of the world population in one shot! A demoiselle crane is shown swimming, not a common feature of crane behaviour. Two of the five cranes in a picture captioned red-crowned cranes are white-naped cranes, and one of those is pinioned. This picture must have been taken at Zhalong nature reserve in north-east China. None of the photos are provenanced; none of the photographers are credited, either individually or collectively. The captions, written by a panel of authorities, do tell us where in China each animal lives and a couple of facts about its biology.

Endemics featured include the inescapable giant panda, the golden monkey that shares the panda's forest habitat, the takin and Thorold's deer, both of which live above the tree line, and the two freshwater lowlanders, the Chinese alligator and the Chinese river dolphin. Swinhoe's pheasant, confined to Taiwan, is also there. Most, if not all, of these creatures are endangered, as are others like the white crested ibis, the last remaining colony of which nests in China, and the eastern white stork, a race so well marked that some experts consider it a different species from the bird found at the western end of Eurasia.

Essentially, however, this is a book of photographs, and among the most striking portraits are a Temminck's tragopan in the full frenzy of his extraordinary display, a pleasing study of a long-eared owl in a pine tree, an otter by an ice-fringed river, a golden monkey (in Chengdu zoo) and a lesser panda up a tree.

The photograph on p. 109 of the Chinese merganser could easily be the only published photograph of the species, which is a rare duck that I searched for in vain in the Changbaishan nature reserve on China's border with North Korea a few years ago. I am glad to have its photograph, and all the others in the book, to remind me of three visits to the world's most populous and third-largest country. There, 22 per cent of mankind lives on 7 per cent of the earth's arable land. Significantly, within China 95 per cent of the people live on 55 per cent of the country's surface. This means that vast areas in the west and north of China are very sparsely populated. It is here that many of the 350 nature reserves that have been established since 1956 exist. And it is in those sanctuaries that many of the creatures depicted in this book have their best hope of survival.

Jeffery Boswall, BBC Natural History Unit, Bristol, UK.

The Atlas of Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland

Edited by Peter Lack

T. and A.D. Poyser for the British Trust for Ornithology and Irish Wildbird Conservancy, 1986, 447 pp, £19.00

A reviewer of this splendid book has to beware lest he lay himself open to a charge of hagiography—an accusation difficult to avoid, since there is so much in it to praise.

Indeed, this new volume may eventually be recognized as an even greater contribution to ornithological literature than its predecessor, *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland* (1976), for which it is designed as a companion, since, unlike the latter, which is selective for breeding birds only and is concerned solely with a species's absence or presence within each 10-km square, the new work includes all species seen during the period of the survey and assesses their abundance in each square. Compiled from the reports of some 10,000 observers who together spent a total of nearly 180,000 man-hours in the field during the winters of 1981–84, the various species accounts—each illustrated by a charming line drawing contributed by 23 artists, and complemented by a detailed distribution map—have been written by a team of more than 100 special-

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