

# Book reviews

## **The Preservation of Species**

Edited by Bryan G. Norton

Princeton University Press, 1986, 305 pp, £19.80

This fine book has received all too little publicity on this side of the Atlantic. It contains papers presented at a conference at the Center for Philosophy and Public Policy of the University of Maryland, and it is edited by a leading 'species philosopher' in the United States. It aims for the middle ground between overly theoretical analysis of the value of species, and principles and practices of wildlife management. In the main, it does a good job: it explores the perspectives within which species supporters must make their decisions about how to set priorities, where to best allocate their limited funds, how to mesh save-species efforts with other environmental measures, and so forth. The contributors include a conservation biologist, a wildlife ecologist, a palaeontological biologist, an economist, a parks manager and several philosophers. The names include such eminent wildlife authorities as Professors Stephen Kellert of Yale and Lawrence Slobodkin of the State University of New York.

Not surprisingly, considering the contentious issues of the 'how and why' of species preservation, we do not find the book coming up with a consensus of best professional opinion, or some other confected outcome. Instead, we have some solid and unresolved argument about biological diversity (why, just why, is it a good thing?), about triage (since we practise it willy-nilly, how can we do a better job?), about public attitudes (becoming more informed, considered and sophisticated all round), about cost-benefit analysis as applied to threatened species (eminently helpful, up to a point), and about scientific responsibility in the face of an extinction spasm impending (shouldn't scientists spend more time out of their labs, and in the political arena?).

Altogether this is a dense book. For the most part, I could stomach no more than a single chapter at a time. Much to read, to ponder, to digest. Moreover, I am sure I shall return to certain chapters again and again for fresh stimulus. Of course the book is a bit 'heavy', with little anecdotal leavening of the conservation analyses. All very rational; perhaps a trifle too cerebral. But then much conservationist thinking has been,

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frankly, woolly. We have yet to tackle such key questions as 'How much public funds should be devoted to species safeguards, as opposed to other human benefits that can be obtained, over varying time horizons, through expenditures for alternative purposes that likewise promote human welfare?' So some hard, even harsh, appraisal of conservationist philosophy does not come amiss. After all, one can be cold-eyed and warm-hearted at the same time.

All in all, a splendid publication. If only it weren't so fearsomely expensive. Let's hope that, like many other PUP books, it will be re-issued in paperback, at a price that will allow it to enjoy the wide circulation it deserves.

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## **Animal Extinctions: What Everyone Should Know**

Edited by R.J. Hoage

Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986, 192 pp, SB £9.25

Available from Eurospan Group, London WC2E 8LU, UK

Both the title and subtitle of this volume are decidedly misleading, and in combination they do not describe the book at all well. Only four chapters are specifically about extinctions (e.g. vulnerability to extinction, extinction in geological and historical perspective); the other eight concern methods and the value of preventing it (conservation, land management, reintroductions, etc.). The chapters are in fact just a collection of separate symposium papers differing much in style. Some are chatty and colloquial; others appear to be the authors' scientific research only partially revamped for a general audience. The book's title, apparently aimed at the non-specialist, may well obscure the fact that it contains some very useful papers. Conversely, the excellent review of the realities of protecting species in captivity is amplified by equations, but these are likely to undermine the appeal to the layman implicit in the book's subtitle. There is little attempt at linkage or synthesis. The introductory chapter reviews the papers that follow—just as in a Chairman's address at a Symposium, but a waste of space in a book. To my mind, 'what everyone should know' should at least include a review of how and when some of the most famous extinct species disappeared. Greenway's

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