

**Wildlife Wars, My fight to save Africa's Natural Treasures** by Richard Leakey & Virginia Morrel (2001), xii + 319 pp., St Martins Press, New York and MacMillan Press, London. ISBN 0 333 74566 3 (hbk), £16.99.

There is a saying in Africa that when bull elephants fight, the grass suffers. The importance that the media have placed on differences between Richard Leakey and his rival, David Western, have dominated the world's impression of conservation in East Africa. This is the long awaited account of the wildlife conservation intrigues of the last 13 years in Kenya's conservation circles. With refreshing candour Richard Leakey reflects on the challenges he faced during the height of the poaching of elephants for the ivory trade, and describes the life-changing events that influenced his perception of conservation challenges in Africa today.

Although Leakey is known as a no-nonsense, even, logical man, he tells a surprisingly personal story of his transformation after spending time with elephants in the wild. In moving reflections on elephant sentience he reveals how he became driven by a moral responsibility towards protecting this species from extinction at the hands of the international ivory trade. An international awareness campaign led to the ban on ivory trade through CITES Appendix 1 listing. The respite was short lived however, and within one quarter of an elephant's life time, three southern African countries were granted limited re-opening of the ivory trade. It troubled Leakey that relaxation of the ivory trade ban was supported by some of the same conservation groups that only a few years earlier had concluded that ivory trade threatened the very survival of elephants. With international concern waning so quickly, *Wildlife Wars* is a timely if brutal reminder of what the front line was really like – a fierce and tragic bush war in which many men died unnecessarily. He asserts that elephants, Kenya and Africa cannot afford to go back there should efforts to lift trade restrictions succeed.

*Wildlife Wars* is co-authored by Virginia Morrel, a meticulous journalist. It opens with powerful imagery of the 1989 decision to burn Kenya's ivory; it was symbolic of Kenya's renewed commitment to conservation. The first four chapters reflect on the significance of Leakey's personal background to his success. Much of the book focuses on the period before 1995, capturing a historically important period for elephants and Kenya

with the birth of the Kenya Wildlife Service. Based on his diaries, it is a series of challenges and how they were resolved. The remaining chapters follow the chronological order of events until 1999.

Although the cover of *Wildlife Wars* depicts elephants, *Wildlife Wars* is much more than another appeal for this species. To Leakey, elephants symbolize the enormity of conservation challenges, the political delicacy, and the lonely personal battles. Much of this book is about what can be achieved in Africa by Africans, and he gives credit to many outstanding Kenyan women and men for the transformation of what was arguably Kenya's most corrupt and inefficient government department into one that became the envy of the public service. These achievements, however, came at a price, and one cannot help but feel profoundly touched by this intimate account of the challenges, the victories, and the tears he shared with his family, friends and colleagues.

Leakey is explicit about his extraordinary relationship with Kenya's president Daniel Arap Moi, and describes the frustrations of having to respond to outrageous rumours that damaged his standing with the most powerful man in the country. He also discloses his disappointments with politicians, donors and Kenyans, and provides an interpretation of events that at times seem comical or absurd until viewed through a window to political change in Kenya. By drawing on his understanding of Kenya's political development, Leakey successfully puts his aspirations and achievements into historical context, and finally breaks his silence by addressing allegations against his integrity. He relates his experiences with humour and without regrets, revealing a ceaseless conviction for a better Kenya.

For those who followed the effects of the conflicting conservation visions of Leakey and Western, this book provides a candid account of the events that led to Leakey's resignation in 1994, and an interpretation of his differences with Western. This book sets the record straight, and leaves a historical record. Although it may not have been intended, in *Wildlife Wars* Richard Leakey provides a powerful insight into the consequences of government decisions for the success and permanence of conservation efforts in an economically fragile country. This book will not go unnoticed by the world's conservation community, grappling for long term solutions to the global biodiversity crisis, particularly in

light of the situation in Africa. Leakey believes that he was prevented from completing the implementation of what could have been a model for successful conservation in Africa. In *Wildlife Wars*, Leakey sends a stern warning to conservationists around the world about the threat that poverty poses to wildlife conservation in Africa. It is this that he considers to be the real enemy of conservation.

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**Threatened Birds of Asia. The BirdLife International Red Data Book**, editor-in-chief Nigel Collar (2001), 2 Parts, 3038 pp., BirdLife, Cambridge, UK. ISBN 0 946888 442 (hbk), £55.00.

After attending the 1933 London Conference on African Wildlife, John Phillips, chair of the American Committee for International Wildlife Protection, realised that there was a need to compile knowledge on extinct and vanishing species if the preservation of wildlife was to be intelligently planned. He commissioned the first series of bird and mammal reviews (published during 1942–1958); his idea was relaunched in the 1960s by IUCN, who coined the term Red Data Book. The present book covers Asia (including the India subcontinent, China, Indochina and South-east Asia) and constitutes the 3rd volume of the 3rd edition of the bird Red Data Book. The volumes covering Africa and the Americas were published in 1985 and 1992 respectively

This is the most comprehensive and scholarly account of threatened bird taxa to date. The book concludes that 323 species (c.12% of the Asian avifauna) are globally threatened with extinction. Of these, 41 species are classed as Critically Endangered, 65 as Endangered and 217 as Vulnerable. For each species the book presents an account that follows a standard format and ranges in length from three to 30 pages. Each account is headed with a vignette of the species and a summary of its status. A detailed narrative follows, structured with seven headings: distribution, population, ecology, threats, measures taken, measures proposed, and remarks. The first two headings present the evidence for the threat categorisation. These are the results of a huge data-gathering exercise by the BirdLife Asia partnership. Records were compiled from the literature, museum skins and personal testimony. Distributional records are grouped according to countries, and each record is referenced to the source and a locality in a gazetteer, and plotted on an accompanying map. Mapped locality points are shaded according to three categories: recent, fairly recent, and historic, which

facilitates a visual overview of changes in status. The remaining sections present a synthesis of information from the peer-reviewed and grey literature, and opinions of ornithologists in the region. Introductory chapters cover topics such as Red Data Book principles, the data gathering approach, an explanation of Red List categories and criteria and their application, and a summary analysis and overview of the main conclusions. To make the information more accessible BirdLife intends to publish it on a searchable CD-ROM.

The amount of literature reviewed and information compiled, the consistency of standardization of information, the quality of production and the effort involved in producing this book are awesome. It is a major ornithological land-mark. It is also a monument to the high standards of knowledge, scholarly networks and organisational ability present amongst ornithologists. Nonetheless, Red Data Books are intended as a tool to guide conservation policy, and practitioners will want to know what these large and costly volumes bring to 'intelligent planning' that the *Birds to Watch* series and recently published *Threatened Birds of the World* do not.

It is asserted on page 2 that the added value offered by this book is the comprehensive documentation of primary information. This explains the enormous amount of space devoted to listing all known locality records for each species. While there is merit in archiving this information in specialist libraries and journals, wider distribution in this form seems unnecessary. The value of locality records to development plans lies in the field of systematic conservation planning, in particular the modeling of conservation priorities based on geographical analysis of species distributions and environmental overlays. Such modeling requires locality records to be in digital form, and to be scored according to precision of geographic positioning (i.e. confidence that a record is within a certain distance of the locality stated). These important steps appear not to have been taken, and constrain the potential value of this huge data-gathering exercise.

It is unclear whether the 'measures proposed' sections represent a summary of measures that have previously been proposed or the measures that BirdLife recommends based on this review of literature. I recommend caution if the latter is true, because good conservation recommendations need to combine literature review with analyses of policy, socio-political context, and past conservation actions. This may be an achievable next step for the 41 Critically Endangered species. My concern is that a book of this weight will be received as the 'last word' and create the impression that successful strategies to save birds can be devised within the confines of the discipline of ornithology. This is not so, and

ornithologists need to be encouraged to take a holistic view of conservation context. Paradoxically, less focus on detail might benefit bird conservation.

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**Britain's Mammals: The Challenge for Conservation** by David W. Macdonald & Fran Tattersall (2001), ix+295 pp., People's Trust for Endangered Species. ISBN 0 9540043 1 0 (pbk), £25.00.

This publication is a much-needed review of the context for the conservation of Britain's mammals, and as such provides a valuable complement to the existing mammalian literature. It presents a thoughtful framework in which threats to mammals, tried and tested approaches to their conservation, and opportunities for the future are considered. This approach may make it interesting to those beyond the immediate fields of mammalogy and British conservation.

*Britain's Mammals* provides an extensive (although by no means comprehensive) background to the issue, presented in a well written and refreshing way, and much enlivened by the regular use of examples. For a book that claims a preparation time of three months, the information presented is impressive. However, it is the inclusion of so much detail that is both the essence and the downside of this book. The integration of a structured justification for conservation, with detailed explanation, left me uncertain as to the intended audience. The text is littered with examples and boxes providing further background, which became, to me at least, increasingly distracting. This was particularly unfortunate because the sheer volume of information overwhelmed, and thus detracted from, an essentially convincing and eloquent argument for mammalian conservation. It would be a wasted opportunity if this argument were not re-expressed in other forms more accessible to those who are not already converted to conservation.

Despite the wealth of different examples and experiences brought together in this book, some may question the essentially personal view and agenda presented. The book is clearly designed to provoke debate, and I hope that it will succeed in leading to wider discussions of the role of society and scientists in intervening to protect the future of mammalian diversity in the UK.

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**Important Bird Areas in Uganda** by A. Byaruhanga, P. Kasoma & D. Pomeroy (2001), ii+166 pp., Nature Uganda, Uganda. ISBN 9970 714 00 7 (pbk), £16.00.

The publication of *Important Bird Areas in Uganda* is a contribution to efforts to conserve Uganda's bird populations and other fauna and flora that inhabit key bird areas. The book begins with information about the Important Bird Areas (IBA) programme, general information about Uganda, and a chapter on conservation in Uganda. It continues with a description of the criteria for designation of an IBA – a place of global significance for bird and biodiversity conservation. The main part of the book comprises detailed descriptions of 30 sites in Uganda that meet the criteria for IBAs. Each site description includes a list of key species and other wildlife, as well as a summary of the conservation issues for the area and further reading suggestions. The primary purpose of the book is for conservation advocacy within the country, but it will also provide a source of information for people visiting Uganda, especially those who wish to seek out places off the beaten track.

**How Green is the City? Sustainability Assessment and the Management for Urban Environments** edited by D. Devuyst, with L. Hens & W. de Lannoy (2001), xxii+457 pp., Columbia University Press, New York, USA. ISBN 0 231 11802 3 (hbk), £47.00/\$70.00; 0 231 11803 1 (pbk), £20.00 / \$30.00.

*How Green is the City?* introduces 'sustainability assessment', a new concept that aims to help steer societies in a more sustainable direction, and applies this concept to cities. The book addresses the environmental problems associated with increased urbanization and deals with practical ways to reach a more sustainable condition in urban areas, so that people can maintain or improve their health, productivity, and quality of life in harmony with nature.

**World in Transition: Conservation and Sustainable use of the Biosphere** by H.-J. Schellnhuber, J. Kokott, F.O. Beese, K. Fraedrich, P. Klemmer, L. Kruse-Graumann, C. Neumann, O. Renn, E.-D. Schulze, M. Tilzer, P. Velsinger, H. Zimmermann (2001), xxvi+451 pp., Earthscan, London. ISBN 1 85383 802 0 (hbk), £50.00/\$85.00.

*World in Transition* presents an authoritative and alarming analysis of the state of the biosphere. The scientists of the German Advisory Council on Global Change show that the time remaining for remedial action is fast disappearing, and they set out a range of initiatives to be undertaken at different levels. The council presents

five 'biological imperatives' that cover the need to preserve existing biological diversity, its integrity, function and potential for the future. They make a series of urgent recommendations including: the protection of 10–20% of the global land area an 'Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity' to provide scientific advice, a legally-binding agreement on the protection of forests, and conservation of the diversity of cultivated as well as wild plant species.

**Human Nature and the Natural World** by Alan Hamilton (2001), xii + 427 pp., New Millenium, London. ISBN 1 85845 302 X (pbk), £14.95.

*Human Nature and the Natural World* deals with the social, economic and environmental problems posed by

the continuing expansion of the human race, and aims to contribute towards the search for a more stable relationship between people and their planet. The book uses an interdisciplinary approach and explores the interconnections between psychological, social and ecological systems.

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#### Other publications received at the Editorial Office

**A Field Guide to the Rattans of Lao PDR** by T.D. Evans, K. Sengdala, O.V. Viengkham & B. Thammavong (2001), 96 pp., Scientific Publications Department, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Surrey, UK. ISBN 1 84246 009 9 (pbk), £15.00.