

Book reviews

industrialization to name a few. Through analysis of the population dynamics of the grizzly, McNamee explains why the death of even one bear, especially of a female, is so critical to the survival of the remaining populations. Also, eloquently, McNamee lets us know why we should care about and strive to conserve an animal that can and does occasionally harm some of us.

It is a knowledgeable treatment of a fascinating subject, and I recommend it to anyone interested in grizzly bears, wildlife research and management, or the formulation of wildlife conservation strategy.

Don Moll, Associate Professor of Biology at Southwest Missouri State University

Among Predators and Prey

Hugo van Lawick

Elm Tree Books, London, 1986, 224 pp, £25

What a curious mixture is this book. There is a host of spectacular photographs, all of them in colour, and some of them in sumptuous colour. Several dozen of the photographs are outstanding, and at least 20 rank with the best ever. Van Lawick's forte is his eye for unusual action, and his kill sequences are remarkable. Another of Van Lawick's strong suits is his use of landscapes. Here we see African animals portrayed in their African environments, rather than zoo-type portraits presented in close-up isolation. Yet a further special skill of the author lies with his splendid, often superb, use of light: his back-lit shots are in a class of their own.

I write all this after living for 24 years in savannah Africa, and spending six of them as a professional photographer. It is against this background that I say this expensive book is worth every penny.

Of course one should not expect that every single shot is to be a show-stopper. A good number of them are too static, or even 'flat'. Some others are little better than interesting. When there are so many books available on African wildlife, certain of them being publications of superlative quality, it seems odd that this eminent photographer should include so many 'passenger' photographs. But it is worth saying again: his best efforts are way ahead of the field.

Book reviews

And yet, and yet. The book comes across as a trifle pretentious. There are plenty of shots of predators, and plenty of prey creatures. But only a few present predator-prey interactions. So why the book's title? The text purports to be somewhat scientific, yet the analyses and interpretations are often naive to say the least. Elephants plucking at tree foliage are described as 'grazing'. Even some scientists' names are mis-spelled. Perhaps worst of all, the conservation conclusions and recommendations are often unwarranted, given the exigencies of economic and political factors in developing Africa.

These shortcomings apart, this is a book of exceptional value. Whenever I want to indulge my sense of nostalgia for African savannahs, whether with their heat and glare of midday or their soft subtleties of twilight, I shall return to this volume, which I am sure will work its trick on me for years to come.

Norman Myers, Consultant in Environment and Development, Oxford, UK

The Rare Plants and Flowers of Western Sichuan

Chief Editor: Jian Tangjun

Institute of Biology, Academia Sinica, Box 416, Chengdu, Sichuan, People's Republic of China, 1984, 108 pp., 17 yuan (= about £3.50)

The province of Sichuan (spelt, until recently, Szechwan) is one of 26 Chinese provinces and lies in the south-west of China next-door to its equally botanically famous neighbour, the province of Yunnan.

This limp-back, 108-page volume is dominated by 115 colour photographs. The first 26 depict different botanical habitats from lowland forest to high-altitude grasslands (and include a shot of bamboo being eaten by the inescapable giant panda). The next 89 photographs depict plant species, from large and ancient trees to tiny—and no doubt annual—flowers. A large ginko tree *Ginkgo biloba* standing 30 metres tall and measuring 12.4 metres in girth is believed to be over 1700 years old. Evergreen trees endemic to China include *Picea purpurea*, *Abies georgei* and *Cunninghamia unicanaliculata*, the latter being also endemic to Sichuan as is the deciduous tree