

Book reviews

Mrosovsky's is at one level a personal account, but it is an exercise in the spirit of intellectual interchange—both Foreword and Preface should be read twice before starting the text. In his assessment of the 'conservation establishment' and conventional practices and attitudes he seems purposefully controversial at times, beginning with two startling photos on the cover: one of a winsome, bikini-clad lass kissing a baby turtle, and the other of a malnourished native child grinning under the strain of an awesome, bloody flipper. In the cover, with its many levels of symbolism, is the riddle of the book: can conservationists resolve the conflict between two extreme, mutually exclusive policies of wildlife management—protectionism and direct exploitation?

Despite poignant criticisms, there is a clear attempt to be balanced and discuss different points of view. Unfortunately, the treatment is inconsistent, for there is atonement to some senior conservationists but not to others. There is at times an uneasy balance between 'hard scientific reasoning', with its jargon ('randomize out', p. 31), and general descriptions comprehensible to the layman. Characteristic of North American sea turtle work, there are ample acronyms (IXTOC, p. 55) and special terms ('Recovery team', p. 53) which often go unexplained until a partial list of abbreviations at the end (p. 151). The style is curious, much like thinking aloud, with strings of 'what if' statements and series of sentences beginning with 'But' and 'Perhaps' (p. 54). Some sections ramble and diverge, and in several cases the points being made would have more impact if the discussion were shorter and tighter (e.g. 'the protracted account of permit problems in Florida', chapter 6). The general impression is that the book was hastily finished. Two major problems are: a paucity of citations of publications and reports not in English, especially Spanish; and an insensitivity to the complicated problems of field work, e.g. monitoring populations (p. 17) or enforcing management schemes (chapter 14). A production detail, frustratingly common to this publisher, is the senseless printing of *blank* numbered pages (nearly five per cent of this book).

At the outset the author does not seem to recognise that conservation is as much (or more) a political and social activity as intellectual and

biological—that the primary benefactors of conservation activities, parks and reserves, and wildlife management are not the wildlife species but the people that interact with them. Although this first impression is dispelled early on, he may have underestimated the depth of political convictions; the book (and its author) has been severely criticised in the 'turtle community', but more for its blasphemy than for its stated purpose. Time will tell if the lasting result is improved conservation practices or degenerated personal relations among the protagonists.

Few wildlife conservation establishments or conventions are impervious to his ink. The message is that conservation is for people, and to pretend that it is a sacred exercise is fruitless with the majority who are unconverted and/or hungry. Although many of his fine points are infinitely disputable, it will be a challenge for rational people to refute his main argument: biological conservation should be a respected profession, and thus, it must be credible and realistic to all involved.

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Man's Impact on Vegetation

Edited by W. Holzner, M.J.S. Werger and I. Ikusima

W. Junk, 1983, \$98.00

The editors have dedicated this collection of 27 essays to Makoto Numata, the distinguished Japanese plant ecologist who retired from the Chair of Ecology at Chiba University in April 1983. The volume is divided into three parts: General aspects of man's impact upon vegetation; Man's impact in the various vegetation zones of the earth; Long and severely influenced areas: special features of man's impact.

The first essay, 'Man's attitude towards vegetation' by Professor Westhoff is one of the most stimulating in the whole volume. He traces the evolution and development of the attitude of western cultures to vegetation from both the classical and Judaic-Christian traditions to modern technological societies. Anyone at all concerned with the philosophy of conservation

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would find time on Professor Westhoff's thoughtful analysis well spent. Some of the other contributions to Part 1 are less successful partly because the subjects reviewed, such as atmospheric pollution, fire and eutrophication, are now too large to be adequately covered in a short review.

On the whole the essays in Part 2 provide concise and authoritative accounts of the effects of man's activities on the major vegetation zones and habitat types of the earth and it is good to see a contribution on the urban environment by Sakopp and Werner.

Appropriately enough much of Part 3 is concerned with Japan and for European readers the last four chapters provide a valuable introduction to the problems of land use and conservation in that part of the world. On the other hand, the essay on Central Europe by Komars will be found to be disappointing and over-laced with unnecessary jargon. Terms like *synanthropization*, *hemerophilous*, *anthropophyte* and *ephemero-phyte* are really not very illuminating.

The volume is well produced and the editors have clearly worked hard to harmonise the contributions and to produce a coherent whole. There is a great deal of value in this book and it can be recommended to anyone seriously wishing to broaden their horizons and conception of the subject. However, having regard to the price it is more likely to be borrowed than added to the private library.

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The Natterjack Toad

Trevor Beebee

Oxford University Press, 1983, £9.95

By comparison with the number of books on British birds and mammals there are very few dealing with British amphibians and reptiles. Thus, the appearance of a book dealing with just one species, the natterjack, must warm the hearts of many herpetologists.

Dr Beebee is an active conservationist and a member of the British Herpetological Society

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(BHS) Conservation Committee, so it is not surprising that *The Natterjack Toad* deals as much with conservation aspects as with the animal's biology.

There is an interesting chapter on the natterjack's habitat requirements that reviews much of the European literature, supplementing the rather sparse data from Britain. The conclusion is that the natterjack is closely associated with 'hot' sandy soil and is limited in its distribution to heathlands and sand dunes.

A chapter on the conservation of the natterjack details its decline in recent years, which is mainly due to its dependence on a restricted habitat that has suffered much from human activity in Britain; from urban development and changing farming practices on inland heathland sites to development of golf courses and holiday camps along the coastal sand dunes. Now only 18 dune sites and two heathland sites are known to remain in use by the natterjack. A note of optimism is indicated, however, with the natterjack being given full protection from disturbance under the Conservation of Wild Creatures and Wild Plants Act (1975) and the increase in habitat management for the natterjack by the BHS seems to have halted its very rapid decline.

Dr Beebee brings together what information is known on the behaviour and ecology of the natterjack, but these chapters are rather sparse on hard facts, as there is still a great need for detailed studies on amphibians in Britain.

Chapters on classification and anatomy round off a complete review of the information currently available on this overlooked animal. There is a final chapter on ideas for amateur studies of amphibians that should fire the imagination of young and old herpetologists alike, although because of the protected nature of the natterjack most of the recommendations for study refer to the commoner British amphibian species.

The book is written in a pleasant style that allows one to gain the facts with little effort. The book will be welcomed by herpetologists and conservationists alike and should be useful to anybody interested in British natural history.

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