

# Book reviews

## **The Marsh Lions: the story of an African pride**

Brian Jackman and Jonathan Scott  
Hamish Hamilton, 1982, £12.50

Personalised accounts of African wildlife abound. By 'personalised', I mean the first-person safari stories that tell the saga of a group or two of African animals, often focused on a lion pride, with zebras and wildebeest, cheetahs and wild dogs, elephants and rhinos, as walk-on characters. The protagonists are given names: in this case, the Marsh pride—a pride of lions in the Masai Mara Game Reserve in Kenya—the leading individuals are known as Scar, Brando, Notch, Shadow and so forth.

This book is at least as good as most of its kind on the market. Indeed, it is better than many. It describes five years of intermittent observations of a lion pride within a context of an entire wildlife community. The documented incidents are interesting and often informative. Regrettably they are not so illuminating to the professional biologist, since there is little attempt at systematised analysis of what goes on. But then, we should not expect that of a book of this nature. The authors set out to entertain rather than to instruct, an entirely acceptable aim which they attain in splendid manner. Much good material here—which makes it unfortunate, in this reviewer's opinion, that the story occasionally and explicitly wanders off into fiction, in order to fill 'gaps' in the epic story of the pride. Why not stick with what is known?

Moreover, the style sometimes becomes overflorid. Why should a hippo possess 'wickedly' jutting teeth, and why should a buffalo's horns feature a 'vicious' curve? And what is a 'nation' of wildebeest?

But most of the text is fine enough, as befits a writer of *The Sunday Times*. And many of the photographs, around 150 of them and all in colour, are generally sound, occasionally spectacular.

After spending 24 years in Kenya, this reviewer will treasure this book, for its style and spirit rather than for its substance.

*Norman Myers,*

*Consultant in Environment and Development*  
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## **A Wealth of Wild Species; storehouse for human welfare**

Norman Myers

Westview Press, 1983, \$11.95

(paperback) \$22.50 (hardback)

(distributed in UK by Bowker, Erasmus House, Epping, Essex CM16 4BU)

## **What's Wildlife Worth?**

Robert and Christine Prescott-Allen  
Earthscan, 1982, £3.00

It is nowadays well known and commonly accepted that we are causing the extinction of species. Whether we can or should do anything about it are still questions largely ignored outside conservation circles. Assuming that economic arguments for conservation are likely to be the most persuasive, *A Wealth of Wild Species* sets out both the actual and potential value of plant and animal species in hard-cash terms. Norman Myers reviews their contributions to agriculture, medicine, genetic engineering, energy and perhaps, most surprisingly—industry.

Already biochemical compounds such as oils, waxes, resins, gums, vegetable dyes, tannins, starch and hydrocarbons are widely used in industrial processes. With the ever-changing needs of industry, Norman Myers considers both the screening of wild plant species for new industrial products and for the development of appropriate technology. Of course one major advantage of plants is that they can be managed as a renewable resource by careful harvesting in the wild or bringing into cultivation. Norman Myers envisages a situation where we grow bio-fuels and replace petroleum by phytroleum. He feels that our current approach to procuring oil, gas and coal resembles the hunter-gatherer's lifestyle before agriculture.

The world-wide exploitation of wild fish proceeds along similarly primitive lines considering, as Norman Myers points out, fish-farming has been practised for over 4000 years. However, even if fish-farming does not realise its full potential we can turn to insects as a nutritious food supply, as yet scarcely contemplated in the developed world.

The book is useful in presenting the results of  
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current biochemical and biotechnological research in an enjoyable and thought-provoking way. The far-reaching ideas are most convincing and hopefully this book will be widely read. For more detailed reading a full reference section is included.

*What's Wildlife Worth?* by Robert and Christine Prescott-Allen has a similar theme but a more condensed style, providing a review of the many and varied uses of wildlife. Again the potential economic importance of wild species, particularly to the developing world, is stressed. As the authors state, 'Wild plants and animals make their greatest contribution to human survival and well-being precisely in those poor rural economies where their use is usually grossly underestimated.' In being all-embracing, coverage in parts is sketchy, but as a catalogue of wildlife resources, this book is invaluable. Again a useful reference section is included.

Thinking purely in terms of economic benefits offered by wildlife may be a little hard to accept for those already converted to conservation. But as the authors of these books imply, the intangible value of wild life to animal and plant-lovers is not enough to secure species conservation.

Sara Oldfield  
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### **Wild Orchids of Britain and Europe**

Paul and Jenne Davies and Anthony Huxley

Chatto and Windus, 1983, £9.95

### **British Red Data Books: 1. Vascular Plants, 2nd ed.**

F.H. Perring and L. Farrell (Compilers)  
Royal Society for Nature Conservation,  
£7.00

Not another book on orchids, one is inclined to groan on seeing the word 'orchid' in a title. But this one justifies itself by its excellence. Orchids exercise an extraordinary fascination on the public mind, many people believing them all to be rare, with flowers on the general pattern of the lady's slipper. (On the other hand I was once led to a colony of toothwort *Lathraea squamaria* which its finder believed to be bee orchids!) The

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very fine colour photographs in this book will appeal to those who like orchids and other wild flowers because they are beautiful—even the twayblade is made to look attractive by a cunning use of lighting. The text not only describes all the European species and subspecies of orchid, mentioning the numerous hybrids, but covers their ecology, their extraordinary biology, where to find them in Britain and Europe, and how to photograph them. One useful tip I gleaned: do not think that every bee orchid you find with a pointed lip is a wasp orchid; often bee orchid plants have both kinds of lip, but each flower starts off with the lip pointed and folds it down underneath. In the true wasp orchid, a variety of the bee, the lip never folds down.

Fourteen orchid species figure in the second edition of the *British Red Data Book* of vascular plants—flowering plants and ferns, which have tissues that are vascular, i.e. they contain channels for conducting liquids. It is good to see this valuable publication, first reviewed in *Oryx* (14, page 266), in a second and considerably revised edition. Since 1977 six species have been removed because they are now known from more than 15 10-km squares (the qualification for inclusion), one grass demoted for taxonomic reasons and one dandelion because it was wrongly identified. Two dandelions, one lady's mantle and one sedge, all recently discovered, have been added, and the native status of wall germander *Teucrium chamaedrys* has been recognised. There is no change in the total number of plants regarded as extinct (19) because the loss of lamb's succory *Amoseris minima* and thorow-wax *Bupleurum rotundifolium* and the realisation that the orchid *Ophrys bertolonii* was an ephemeral, have been balanced by the rediscovery of another *Bupleurum*, a fumitory and the brown bog-rush *Schoenus ferrugineus*. Let us hope that like that famous New Zealand bird, they will not be allowed to become extinct again.

Richard Fitter

Both *Wild Orchids of Britain and Europe* and the *British Red Data Book: 1 Vascular Plants* are available from ffPS at £9.95 and £7.00 respectively. The cost includes packing and 2nd class inland/surface mail overseas (printed matter) postage.

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