

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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