

Book reviews

Extinct Birds

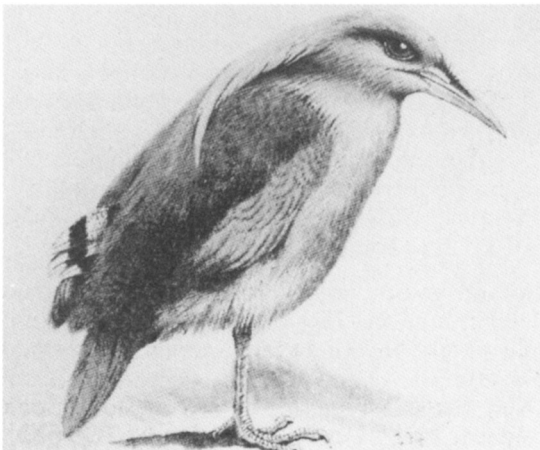
Errol Fuller

Viking/Rainbird, London, 256pp., HB £20.00

Firstly, I must make it absolutely clear that this is a very useful, and well-researched book, which deserves to find a place on the shelves of any reasonable conservation-orientated library. The author may well have cringed when he read the publisher's jacket 'blurb' claiming it to be the first complete survey since Walter Rothschild's classic work of 1907, which was no doubt in deference to Miriam Rothschild who wrote the foreword. In his preface the author correctly acknowledges the importance of J. C. Greenway's *Extinct and Vanishing Birds of the World* (1958)—although he appears to be unaware that a revised edition was published in 1967. A similar anomaly is that the clearing up of the mystery of *Aplonis mavomata* as recently as 1986 is included—an obscure starling from the Pacific—but the much more widely noticed rediscovery of Jerdon's courser in 1985 (photos published in 1986) is missed. However, anyone who has ever tried to compile similar data will know that it is a never-ending task, impossible to keep completely up to date. Fuller is to be complimented on his comprehensiveness and detail.

There are descriptions of some 75 species that have become extinct since 1600. Nearly all have colour illustrations, with a wide range of sources, including splendid examples of the work of artists such as Lear, Wolf and Keulemans.

John A. Burton, *Natural History and Wildlife Conservation Writer and Consultant.*



Kagu *Rhynochetos jubatus* from the book *Extinct Birds*.

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Ivory-billed woodpeckers *Campephilus principalis* from the book *Extinct Birds*. This species will probably be extinct by the end of the century.

The Animal Smugglers

John Nichol

Christopher Helm Ltd, Kent, 1987, 208 pp., HB £14.95

There is an important debate among conservationists about trade in wildlife. Some say it should be stopped because making animals worth money literally 'puts a price on their head' and poses a threat to their survival. Others, including the author of this book, argue that animals must be seen to be worth money or poor people have no incentive to help conserve them. This is particularly true in Third World countries where most wildlife trade begins, but where income now is a more pressing problem than long-term conservation issues.

As a film maker and one-time animal trader himself, John Nichol offers a uniquely authoritative personal view of wildlife trade. His book is written in a chatty colloquial style and recounts many tales of animal trading—sometimes amusing, sometimes nasty, always interesting and thought provoking. The book is not an exposé, a condemnation, or an apology. Stories are told, facts are revealed and left to speak for themselves. As an insider, personally known to many key

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traders on four continents, Nichol offers a fascinating insight not available to the well-meaning newcomers who attempt surveys but are fobbed off by dealers who are suspicious of strangers. Yet Nichol 'shops' nobody and makes it clear that trade is not what it was. Legislation has forced many out of business and the survivors (in their own interests) often run high-quality operations. We are introduced to the people responsible for each stage of catching, collecting, exporting and importing live animals, based on examples from many countries. There are fascinating stories of ingenious methodology and even the use of dead parrots as a cover for drug smuggling. There is amusement too, like the conversation at a bird hospital in India run by Jains who would only cater for species that were vegetarian. The tales of unlikely entrepreneurs are worth reading too, like the one-eyed maggot man or the professional parrot pluckers of Calcutta.

It is often unclear whether events recounted were recent and represent a continuing situation or not, but the general time-frame seems to cover the last 20 years or so, and some material is right up to date. Inevitably there is a lot of hearsay, and few details and numbers that could be quoted with confidence. However, the author makes it clear that he is not writing for such readers; this isn't intended as a survey of official trade statistics (hardly any are given) but a first-hand story of what goes on. Some of his tales include all the graphic detail anyone could want and Chapter 3, on cruelty, is not for the squeamish!

So, should we stop wildlife trade or not? John Nichol suggests we probably should where it involves trade in inessential commodities, which requires animals to be killed. But for the trade in live animals he argues it would be a shame to eliminate a source of income and such excitement and interest as he describes. It is a shame too about the cruelty and squalor, but that can, and should, be eliminated by proper control rather than outright prohibition of trade.

The existence of laws and international agreements to control wildlife trade forms a backdrop to this whole story, but reading the book one becomes increasingly aware that the practicalities of enforcement make their existence

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seem unreal and almost irrelevant. In fact as I read on, savouring the descriptions of wonderful characters in the Indian bird markets and the behaviour of trappers in Thailand and Indonesia, I realized that this is a book about people and attitudes as much as smuggling and animals. People in Western countries simply think about animals in a way quite different from the inhabitants of others. This is especially true in Asia where our ideas and values are alien and often uncomprehended. Conservationists need this kind of insight into the minds of others if their message is to be put across effectively.

Pat Morris, Department of Zoology, Royal Holloway & Bedford New College, University of London.

The Mammals of Nigeria

D.C.D. Happold

Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987, 402 pp, HB £75.00

The 247 species known are described in the first 200 pages, and the second half of the book comprises more general surveys by habitat, together with appendices, including glossary, gazeteer, local names, distribution maps, and bibliography. The text is well illustrated with monochrome photos and line drawings, and diagrams. A useful addition to the library of anyone with an interest in mammal conservation, since regrettably so many of Nigeria's mammals are threatened. However, Dr Happold only gives the merest indication of the abundance of most species—usually only one or two lines.

John A. Burton, Natural History and Wildlife Conservation Writer and Consultant.

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