

BOOK REVIEW

Historical mammal incidence in the Cape Province vol. 2: The eastern half of the Cape Province, including the Ciskei, Transkei and East Griqualand, by C.J. Skead

Second edition edited by André Boshoff, Graham Kerley and Peter Lloyd

Centre for African Conservation Ecology, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, 2007, xiii + 570 pages, ISBN 1-920176-08-X

review by Kees Rookmaaker

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There is a growing realization among ecologists and conservationists that an understanding of the past is essential for wise planning for the future. Ecology, animal diversity and landscapes show significant changes over time, which are often inconspicuous in the short term but nonetheless far-reaching in their effects. Historical zoogeography is a tough subject to research because of the wide variety of sources and the need to analyse each statement in detail to pinpoint localities and identify species, often from meagre information. Mammal incidence combined with an ecological perspective was the subject of Skead's research, which was published in two volumes in 1980 and 1987. Like 'Roberts Birds' or 'Fitzsimmons Snakes', 'Skead' deserves a place among the classics of South African biology, but the use of his books has remained limited to a relatively small number of specialists. Probably this was partly due to the bulk of the two volumes, 902 and 1121 pages respectively, reproduced from typewritten pages.

Cuthbert John (Jack) Skead (1912–2006) had a successful career as the director of the Kaffrarian (now Amathole) Museum in Grahamstown. After his retirement in 1972, he started to gather data from historical books and records to document the ecology and distribution of mammals, birds and plants in the

Cape region. This was a mammoth task, which he pursued with an increasing love for the subject and a remarkable tenacity. Skead persevered where others in retirement might have given up, showing emotion only when typing the final sentence of volume 2, having reached the 'end of this bloody index'. But the results of his labour will continue to bear fruit, guiding and stimulating young scientists in their understanding of contemporary wildlife and environment.

The second volume of Skead's magnum opus has now been edited and reissued by a team of ecologists and mammalogists. They have removed a few sections that are no longer relevant, but added new maps and topical photographs, and of course have given the book a more modern appearance. While there is no need to read the volume from cover to cover, it provides many opportunities to browse and to learn about particular regions or individual species. Skead started with the geographical and ecological background of nine sectors located in the Eastern Cape region, analysing all mammals, both large and small, that would have been found in each of them. In the third chapter each species is discussed extensively; it is followed by chapters on the abundance and movement of game animals, early human influence, interesting gaps, and patterns in the status of larger mammals. A final

chapter discusses the controversial black leopard and Cape lion. An extensive 15-page bibliography and an index provide many opportunities to reconstruct his sources and gain additional insights.

Skead would certainly have been the first to accept that there was still much to be learned and new documents to be discovered. He overlooked the article on the animals of the Eastern Cape published in 1857 by Henry Hall, who worked in the Royal Engineers Department and visited many parts of the Eastern Cape in the 1840s and 1850s. For a species like the black rhinoceros, Hall was able to record many occurrences that otherwise would have been lost. It would be advisable one day also to reprint Hall's zoological summaries with the addition of a historical commentary. Conversely, Skead was able to include a large amount of information from local newspapers and magazines, which otherwise would have been forgotten.

In conservation, in an age in which animals are easily transported from one region to another, it is a generally accepted fundamental rule that species should remain within their historical ranges. For instance, in recent guidelines on conservation strategies for the rhinoceros in southern Africa, it is clearly stated that 'the founder animals should of course be of a "subspecies" that occurred within the area prior to extinction or is the same as any surviving rhinos in that area' (du Toit 2006:51). Unfortunately, in reality this tenet is followed only when pragmatically or

economically viable, with the borders of the ranges of subspecies adjusted according to particular needs. It is certainly true that the historical range or classification of a particular species is rarely studied or documented in any detail before wide-ranging conservation actions are taken. I would argue that investigations on the historical distribution of mammals should be extended to the entirety of the African continent. Skead has done the work for the Cape region, it is for us to follow his example—to learn about the environment as it used to be and to understand how best to allow species to evolve naturally even if it must be in a managed environment.

The editors of this second volume of Skead's book must be congratulated on their undertaking. The book is priced at a very reasonable R490 (+VAT & PP); all proceeds will be added to a fund to produce the first volume of the original work. Enquiries should be directed to Dr André Boshoff, email: andre.boshoff@nmmu.ac.za.

References

- du Toit R. 2006. Guidelines for implementing SADC rhino conservation strategies. SADC Regional Programme for Rhino Conservation, Harare.
- Hall H. 1857. Notes on animal life in South Africa. *Cape Monthly Magazine* 1(1):3–11.

LETTER

Dear Samuel,
I have just been reading your interesting paper on in- and outbreeding of African rhinos published in *Pachyderm* no. 42 [Krummenacher and Zschokke, Inbreeding and outbreeding in African rhinoceros species: p. 108–115].

The lack of data or size of datasets is always a problem with animals like rhinos, which don't breed very quickly.

I was somewhat surprised that you, on the basis of Rookmaaker (1998) [author name misspelled], considered that I thought that there were 6 subspecies of the black rhino. In fact, I believe that the species needs a proper revision and until such time the latest revision by Groves should be fol-

lowed. See also my paper in IZN 2005: http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/index.php?s=1&act=refs&CODE=ref_detail&id=1165245183.

The recognition of conservation units, at present 4, is a valid exercise, but does not necessarily coincide with the actual subspecies, hence the use of scientific names for these units should be discouraged—but it doesn't seem that anybody heeds that message. Also, there seems to be no money for a proper taxonomic revision, and while this is pending, conservation decisions are taken on the basis of convenience rather than science.

Otherwise an enjoyable paper. Are you planning any further on the subject. There is an 'in press' in the text, but not mentioned in the references.

All the best, Kees [Rookmaaker]