

REVIEWS

1. THE WAY OF THE TIGER: NATURAL HISTORY AND CONSERVATION OF THE ENDANGERED BIG CAT, 2002. By K. Ullas Karanth. Centre for Wildlife Studies, Bangalore. Pp. 132, Size: 26 x 24 cm. Hardback, Price: Rs. 495/-.

The Tiger is an icon for the conservation movement in India. During the last 50 years, more than a dozen books have been written about this magnificent animal – fortunately books on saving tigers have replaced *shikar* books. Dr. K. Ullas Karanth is one of the leading experts on the Tiger and its habitat. An engineer by education, he has devoted more than two decades to unravel the mysteries of tiger life. He obtained his Ph.D. studying predator-prey relationships in the famous Nagarhole National Park in Karnataka. He is an employee of the Wildlife Conservation Society, New York, but lives and works in India.

THE WAY OF THE TIGER shows Ullas Karanth's erudition and love of his subject. It is full of profound statements, based on the sound scientific knowledge of the author. The book has 14 chapters, with catchy titles, for example, 'Dressed to Kill', 'Solitary, But Not Alone', and 'The Enemy We Admire'. The lavishly brought out book is profusely illustrated with pictures of the Tiger, but I suspect that many pictures have been taken in captivity. Nonetheless, they are admirable. My favourite picture is on page 41, of a Siberian Tiger walking cautiously on obviously thin ice. Is it completing its future?

The book ends with the predictable question: Can we save the Tiger? I quote from Ullas Karanth's statement in the

Introduction (p. 8) "There is no sure-fire way of predicting how successful we will ultimately be, but the more sensibly we act now, the greater is the chance that the tiger will survive the twenty-first century. Mere doomsday prophecies, however well-intentioned, discourage rational conservation action, and may be harming rather than helping the tiger's cause. My view is that, on the basis of biological facts and historical background, the tiger is not yet a lost cause". I think the Tiger (and other wildlife) can be saved on the basis of effective conservation measures based on good science. And, ultimately, when it comes to basics, Tiger and Tiger habitats have good reasons to be protected because when "we protect tigers forests from logging, overgrazing, fires and conversion to cropland, we are not indulging in a luxury that we cannot afford in a poverty-stricken, overpopulated world. We are, in fact, protecting the soil-water resources that sustain millions of people in Asia". This is enough reason to protect the Tiger and its habitats all over its distribution range. This book would help in securing the future of the Tiger, as the proceeds from its sale will be used for Tiger conservation.

■ ASAD R. RAHMANI

2. THE RETURN OF THE UNICORNS: THE NATURAL HISTORY AND CONSERVATION OF THE GREATER ONE-HORNED RHINOCEROS, 2003. By Eric Dinerstein. Columbia University Press, New York. Pp. 316, Size: 23 x 15.5 cm. Hardback, Price not stated.

This book is a part of the Biology and Resource Management Series, published by the Columbia University, USA. It praises the author for being "directly responsible for the recovery of the greater one-horned rhinoceros in Royal Chitwan National Park in Nepal". With such a statement on the dust jacket, it is to be expected that not much importance is given to the effective and praiseworthy initiatives taken by the Nepal government since 1954, much before Eric Dinerstein came on the scene in 1972. The language of the book is patronizing, and the underlying message is that if the great American scientists had not been to Nepal, the rhinoceros would have disappeared, because the poor Nepalese do not know how to take effective conservation measures. The fact is that despite poverty and pressure on land, the Nepal government has taken many conservation measures, setting

an example for many western countries.

As far as science is concerned, the book is fine. Eric has collated all the available literature on the Greater One-horned Rhinoceros and embellished it with his own research. It is interesting to know that in zoos, males are bigger, but no size difference is seen in nature (p. 77). Females have longer horns, and in males, the incisors are the major weapons of offence (p. 76). The book is well designed and edited. It has a separate method section, which does not interfere with the flow of the general text. Headings and subheadings also help in sectioning this 316-page book. Eric has combined passion with scientific vigour. However, his condescending attitude shows everywhere, especially in Part III of the book where he has suggested various conservation measures. On page 247, he mentions that the World Wildlife Fund-United States (the

USA section of WWF has not changed its name to World Wide Fund for Nature), in collaboration with the Wildlife Conservation Society (based in New York), has identified 159 tiger conservation units. Surprisingly, there is no mention of the studies done by the Wildlife Institute of India in identifying such conservation units. On page 248, he mentions the important role of multilateral and bilateral funding agencies, international conservation organisations, foundations, individual philanthropists, international zoo community, and national governments in financing large-scale conservation. He has failed to mention that if the Washington-based World Bank, which has been funding and still is funding some of the biggest nature destruction projects in the world (including Nepal), stops funding such projects and takes a more conservation-based approach to development, perhaps we would not require these multilateral and bilateral funding agencies and their 'experts' for conservation initiatives in

developing countries. I am sure the Nepalese are quite capable of looking after their Greater One-horned Rhinoceros. In one place, Eric has accepted that "a country like Nepal, extremely poor and lacking in infrastructure, is restoring endangered species populations. Other countries, both developed and undeveloped, have no excuse not to try." I hope Eric will spread the message of conservation of large mammals in his own country, which is incidentally the largest consumer of wildlife products, and where hunters and ranchers oppose the introduction of so-called dangerous animals, like the Timber Wolf, in wilderness areas. The consumer country in which Eric lives should also learn to live with nature – the way he wants the poor Nepalese to live with the Tiger and the Rhinoceros. In the revised edition, perhaps this could become the main message of this book.

■ ASAD R. RAHMANI

3. LIFE AT THE ZOO: BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE ANIMAL DOCTORS, 2004.

By Phillip T. Robinson. Columbia University Press, New York. Pp. 293, Size: 21.5 x 17.5 cm. Hardback, Price not stated.

LIFE AT THE ZOO seems to hold little promise in its initial stages of examination. There is every indication that this is just another first-person account of some retired director or veterinarian's experiences, the kind of book that I "inhaled", as one would a favourite food, when I was new to the zoo profession. But I am old now, and cynical, so chapters entitled "Intern at the Zoo", "Growing Pains", "Zoo Babies" give ME pains and I groaned every time I thought of actually reading the book before writing this review. So I put it off, and when I could do so no longer, tried my tested and true tricks for writing a book review without reading the book, tricks well practiced since high school. I read the last chapter, entitled "What a Zoo Should be". To my surprise, I couldn't put it down. Dr. Robinson has summed up almost everything I and a good part of the world's zoo community spent the better part of 18 months writing in a participatory manner for the World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy. Then I read the next to last chapter, entitled "Ethical Captivity: Animal Well-Being in Zoos", and again, found it to be very good reading indeed.

Then I sampled the Introduction where Dr. Robinson states his purpose for writing the book: "to share some hard-earned insights into the dynamics of caring for and conserving wild animals in captivity, as well as to consider a few broader implications for how we view nature and animals in our society," I realised then that Robinson was, of course, writing for the public, and it was necessary to explain many things about how it is with zoos, day by day, before going for the

kill: explaining zoos' take on ethics and welfare, and wildlife conservation in a way that would permit readers to understand the "big picture" of zoo management and its future, and perhaps change some of their biases and old ideas.

Robinson says "This book will not tell you how to run a zoo, but it may give you a better idea of what to be pleased or perplexed about when you visit one in the future." And that it does. I would say that many zoo managers and veterinarians and policy makers, particularly in regions of the world where the zoos are not very good, could learn quite a lot about how to run a zoo from this book. Certainly the public and even conservationists (who think they know all about zoos, but don't) will have an excellent background on which to base a zoo visit and a framework in which to shape their attitudes and opinions, if they are willing to learn. I learned something – many things – from this book, including particularly how very much veterinary medicine and animal welfare have improved in the latter decades. For example, Dr. William Hornaday, Director of the Bronx Zoo in the early years, objected to isolating newly arrived primates in a quarantine and acclimatization period upon their arrival, stating that "monkeys could be replaced when needed and did not justify the labour and expense of the proposal" (p. 23).

Although this volume may be of particular interest to Americans, having somewhat more about American zoo history and management than that of other countries, it is clear that most aspects of zoo management and politics are quite similar anywhere you go.