

The Soul of the Rhino: A Nepali Adventure with Kings and Elephant Drivers, Billionaires and Bureaucrats, Shamans and Scientists, and the Indian Rhinoceros. By Hemanta Mishra with Jim Ottaway, Jr. Forewords by Bruce Babbitt and Jim Fowler. Guilford, CT: The Lyons P, 2008. 256 pp. Cloth \$24.95. Paper \$16.95.

In the interest of full disclosure, let me state that I know this author, for I have had the privilege of doing research with Nepal's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation for over two decades. Yet there is much I did not know, as foreigners are kept from many Royal secrets. One we have heard about but never seen is *Tarpan*, a religious ritual dating to the Rajput Kings of India from whom Nepal's Royal Family descended. It is said that a new king must kill a male rhino and, after it is eviscerated, enter the animal's body. Mishra, then a young wildlife officer, describes the burden of choosing the proper rhino (an old crop raider), as well as the elephant driver's disdain as the author repeatedly checked over the course of several weeks to make sure the old male had testicles, for there would be serious repercussions if a female were accidentally killed. On the auspicious day, after the King ascended from the dead beast, others in the hunting party were asked if they wished to enter, and so Mishra acquired the Soul of the Rhino.

This book tells one conservationist's story in poignant detail, from his childhood, to his education and work with the government as a wildlife biologist, to his appointment as Member Secretary of Nepal's King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, where he met kings, presidents, and billionaires. But the book is far more reaching than that, for it also tells the story of rhino conservation, from near extinction in Nepal by the 1960s to great increases in numbers by 2000, to poaching and decline since 2000 as the political situation in Nepal deteriorated and the monarchy fell. Mishra also intertwines rich Hindu tradition with ease, as in his telling of how Lord Brahma created the rhino with spare parts from lesser beasts. There is humor in his accounts of the profanities of elephant drivers and the need to teach his daughters about the wild. On their first trip to Chitwan National Park, they approached the butt of a rhino with offerings of cabbage thinking it was a domestic buffalo; in the nick of time, a camp hand ran in and rushed them to safety. There is sadness in his portrayal of our colleagues who died in a Himalayan helicopter crash in 2006. The conservation story is equally remarkable. Mishra's vision led to a program in the 1980s to release rhinos from Chitwan into Bardia National Park, where they had been extirpated, and the

Bardia population eventually grew to over seventy-five animals before serious poaching began.

The story of Nepal's rhinoceros is not over, for we believe the situation is improving, and more books will likely follow. But this book is beautiful, and will be important to those interested in nature writing, conservation, and the history and culture of Nepal—a most fascinating place. I know I will be back, and in so many ways, like Mishra, I never really left.

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doi:10.1093/isle/isp039

Advance Access publication June 19, 2009

Between Earth and Sky: Our Intimate Connections to Trees. By Nalini Nadkarni. Berkeley: U of California P, 2008. 336 pp. Cloth \$24.95. Paper \$17.95.

Few can claim as intimate a connection to trees as Nalini Nadkarni. A pioneering scientist who has devoted her life to researching and teaching forest ecology, she has climbed trees on four continents, and seems as comfortable suspended in the canopy as most of us are with both feet on the ground.

Nadkarni reminds us that one must look at nature in multiple ways to understand it fully, and if she has omitted any possible perspective from which to consider trees, she can hardly be faulted. Interweaving the utilitarian with the scientific, the mythic, the symbolic, and the personal, she takes us from the goods and services trees provide (paper products, shelter, etc.) to the universal importance of trees in religious symbolism and spiritual practice. Primarily, however, as her book's title suggests, Nadkarni encourages us to consider the tree as *axis mundi*, an imaginary line linking heaven and earth (218).

Nadkarni's liberal use of poetry from sources as diverse as Percy Bysshe Shelley, Pablo Neruda, Wendell Berry, and lesser known contemporary American poets invites us to consider how the combined approaches of science, art, and the humanities can inform our perspective on trees—and by extension, other parts of nature. Some of her choices seem more apt than others, but overall the poems keep the reader's perspective moving between the narrative of science and the world of imagery and emotion in which a sense of something larger prevails.