

BOOK REVIEW

Historical incidence of the larger land mammals in the broader Northern and Western Cape

Skead, C.J. Boshoff, A.F.; Kerley, G.I.H.; Lloyd, P.H., 2011.

2nd edition. Port Elizabeth, Centre for African Conservation Ecology, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
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Jack Skead (1912–2006) published his research on the historical incidence of mammals in the western, northern and eastern Cape regions of South Africa in two volumes dated 1980 and 1987. He collected as much data as possible on each mammal species to reconstruct their distribution patterns and their ecological requirements. The early literature produced by soldiers, adventurers, zoological collectors, hunters, settlers and others from many countries is not easily accessed. Each book has to be read from cover to cover to extract the records and to know where each observation took place. A new edition of the second volume was issued in 2007, and is now followed by that of the first volume, covering records of the western and northern Cape. This is the region that was first explored in the 17th century, and therefore contains much material on the first observations of African wildlife known to scientists in Europe. The book contains chapters on all mammals from monkeys to aardvarks, pachyderms and small antelopes, but also on the extinct blue antelope and quagga. There is much information on the elephants, which survived until recently in the Knysna area, but have not been

seen for the past fifteen years. The black rhino, first seen in the vicinity of the Cape of Good Hope in the middle of the 17th century, soon retreated to areas several days travel inland. The species was famously sketched and anatomized by Robert Jacob Gordon, and also seen by Sparrman, Thunberg and Levaillant. Skead extended his research through the 19th and 20th centuries, unearthing a wealth of otherwise inaccessible data. Historical records are useful to modern-day conservationists and ecologists. Much of the difficult and painstaking work has been done and is now presented in admirable fashion. The new edition does not merely repeat Skead's efforts, but it enhances them with the inclusion of more recent discoveries and insights, illustrations of old artwork and ecological landscapes, new maps of all records in the text, as well as summaries of the data pertaining to each species included in the volume. The editors who work at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth have done a great job. This is a large book (536 pages), well produced at a very reasonable price.