

## REVIEWS

1. CONSERVATION BIOLOGY: A PRIMER FOR SOUTH ASIA by Kamaljit S. Bawa, Richard B. Primack and Meera Anna Oommen (2011). Universities Press, Hyderabad. 589 pp. Size: 24.2 cm x 14.6 cm. Paperback. Price: Rs. 595/-.

This book was first published by Sinauer Associates, Inc. in 2004 as A PRIMER OF CONSERVATION BIOLOGY. ATREE and Universities Press need to be congratulated for publishing the revised and updated version in the present form, mainly for students, field researchers and field managers. The book covers almost every possible topical conservation topic so there is something for every category of reader: from genetics of marine turtles of India to reserve size and characteristics; from reconciliation ecology to repairing the rain forest. The language is lucid with relevant references, wherever required. Topics that do not fit in the flow of the text are given as box items, which can be read along with the chapter or separately.

This voluminous book with 589 pages consists of only seven chapters but each chapter is divided into sub-chapters, sections, boxes etc. Each chapter ends with a Summary and Suggested Readings; the references listed under Suggested Readings too are explained in brief. I hope such minor details will greatly help students of conservation biology. The papers selected in the suggested readings (among thousands of papers published during the last 30-35 years) are chosen with great

care and should be read or referred to by conservation biologists, protected area managers and decision makers. Besides the suggested readings, the reference section runs to 77 pages, which itself shows the in-depth research done by the authors.

As the book is a primer, it has some basic information about biodiversity, food chain and food web, natural extinction rates, but at the same time the book contains information on new topics such as ecological economics, common property resources, environmental ethics, extinction vortices etc. Good black-and-white pictures are added for emphasis and they make the book very interesting. Captions to pictures and diagrams provide a wealth of information.

All in all, it is a good book particularly for students and young field biologists, but I think protected area managers, who may have undergone various trainings, will also benefit from this book. While reviewing it, I learnt many things from this book; it is indeed true that there is no limit to knowledge!

■ ASAD R. RAHMANI

2. THE VANISHING HERDS: THE WILD WATER BUFFALO, by Anwaruddin Choudhury (2010). Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, ATREE, Gibbon Books and The Rhino Foundation for Nature in NE India. Guwahati, Assam. 184 pp. Size: 18.0 cm x 24.3 cm. Hardbound. Price: Rs.1,250/-.

Dr. Anwaruddin Choudhury is one of India's most prolific natural history writers with an enviable credit of nearly 500 research papers and popular articles, and nearly 20 books and booklets. He is also a widely travelled naturalist, particularly in north-east India. Basically a geographer by education, his knowledge is reflected in his meticulous writings of areas, locations and habitats. Anwar also takes pictures, sometimes seemingly uninteresting at the time of photography, but he uses them very intelligently in his papers and books to emphasize a point. This book is a classical example of how good photographs can be woven into a story. In this book, one can get good information on the Wild Water Buffalo from the photographs and their captions.

The text is also a classical Anwar standard and style: meticulous research quoting even *Babur-nama* (1483-1531) to the latest papers (2009), including websites (latest download July 10, 2009), detailed personal observations (for

example see Table 11, page 93), interesting box items (see Box 5, p 47-48), and easy-to-read text.

The book is divided into seven chapters, excluding Appendices, Glossary and Bibliography. It is sad to see from the maps how the historical distribution of the Wild Buffalo has contracted from millions of sq. km, comprising areas from southern Iran, Pakistan, India, to the whole of East Asia, to present-day distribution in a few protected areas such as Manas, Kaziranga, Dibru-Saikhowa and a few others. From millions of animals a couple of hundred years ago, the total estimated population today is not more than 5,000 globally and in India, one time its main stronghold, the total suitable habitat left for the Wild Buffalo is only 2,500 sq. km. There are only two small areas in south-east Asia, one in Thailand and another in Cambodia, where currently Wild Buffalo are reported in very small numbers, not more than 30-40 animals each. Anwaruddin has also described the famous 'Wild'

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Buffaloes of Sri Lanka, but as he rightly says, they had originated from domestic animals, like the 'Wild' Buffaloes of Australia. Interestingly, the so-called Wild Buffalos of Australia are a fair 'game' and people pay hundreds of dollars to hunt them.

The fourth chapter *Ecology and Behaviour* is very interesting to read. Although Anwaruddin has not worked full-time on this species (he is a full-time government officer in Assam), he has collected and collated all the information on Wild Buffalo behaviour in this chapter, and added his own observations of the last 20 years. In the next chapter, he describes the controversy of wild, domestic and hybrid buffaloes. The sixth chapter, *Conservation*, makes sad reading of what we have done to this majestic animal. The Wild Buffalo is not only a majestic animal, but it is extremely important for our agricultural economy, as all the domestic

buffaloes have originated from their wild relative. If the Government of India implements the recommendations given in the final chapter of this book, it may possibly increase the number of Wild Buffalo and perhaps reintroduce it in the areas where it was lost, such as Dudhwa National Park in Uttar Pradesh.

In a nutshell, this is a very useful book on an economically useful animal. I hope the Government of India and other range countries will take effective measures to restore, protect and save the Wild Buffalo. For this to happen, we need inter-state and international collaborations. Looking at the false pride, strained inter-state relationships and geopolitics, collaboration for Wild Buffalo conservation appears more difficult than writing a well-researched book.

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