

The Red Book for All

By Ivor Montagu

THE RED BOOK: WILDLIFE IN DANGER by James Fisher, Noel Simon, Jack Vincent and others. Collins, 70s.

RED for Danger. A generation ago the word 'red' in a book title would merely have served as a mark of distinction, positive rather than otherwise, and 'Red Books' have been compiled about fairies, badges of courage, or the like. Now it immediately calls to mind the idea of peril. Would that in this particular peril it might also signal 'stop'!

This is a handsome volume of 368 pages, with 113 colour illustrations of species and 113 in black and white. The text may be taken as wholly authoritative, for it is based on material furnished by members and correspondents of the IUCN Survival Service Commission. I dare affirm that every reader of this journal will wish it, and indeed wish to do his best to make it achieve, the great success it deserves.

Every specialist-conservationist knows the *Red Data Book*. This consists of looseleaf sheets, one to a species, each outlining the latest news from the front and the survival status of the creature in question, and capable of being brought up to date by replacement as the raging battle fluctuates – here a small triumph for the conservationist, a more optimistic note about the possibilities of ensuring survival; there, alas more often, a setback to record, or even the final closing of accounts and transfer of the creature to a black sheet In Memoriam. These sheets are the tools of the conservationist, the basic data from which all his activities and calculations of priorities spring, all over the world.

On the other hand they could appear somewhat bare, dry and, as a set, expensive to the general reader. So the compilers of this volume have hit on the genial idea of adapting them for public consumption, outlining what is known not only of the present status of each threatened creature, by species or subspecies, but of how – so far as is known – it came to reach it. This is not a work only of condensation, but of adaptation, often, in the more spectacular cases, involving enlargement and resulting in an exciting and dramatic story.



PYGMY HIPPO
of west Africa

Nothing is more unfair to a book than to blame it for what it is not, nor was intended to be. If I note a few negative features of such a treatment, this is not as derogation, but rather to describe more clearly the positive value of what we do have. Such a book cannot give us, and is clearly not intended to, a balanced popular introduction to the conservation problem as a whole, with an examination-in-depth of the four 'fatals' – hunting (for food or sport) enhanced by modern weapons; slaughter for commerce (furs, skins, teeth, souvenirs, zoo specimens, etc); by-kill by agricultural poisons and industrial wastes; reduction of habitats by man's own population explosion, etc – nor exploration of the social implications, the pro-and-con features of various avenues of remedial action. It is not a survey in that sense. It necessarily leaves aside the immense dangers involved in the reduction of whole classes of organism from abundant to common – for the *Red Data Book* concerns itself only with declining species *after* they have become *uncommon*, that is, when the effort to close the stable door is sometimes already too late. There is an obvious sense in which what is happening to *all* turtles and *all* crocodiles is more important and needs attention much more urgently than the immediate risk of extinction to one race of crocodiles or turtle or, for that matter, a particular island race of an unthreatened genus, as genus, of bird. Again, deriving from the *Red Data Book*, the contents inevitably concentrate on mammals and birds (some 180 pages each), while reptiles and fishes must rest content with one-tenth that quantity each, amphibians get three, plants eight and invertebrates none – since it is with the first two groups that the work of the Survival Service Commission has necessarily been primarily concerned.

But these limitations should not be regarded as a defect. What we do have is not the overall strategy so much as the tactics of the fight to save, the news of how things are going, the front-line diary, so to speak, of the world-wide battle. It is a public relations exercise, bringing right to the forefront, for the notice of the hitherto unconcerned, the crimes of genocide against man's environment and the state of the combat against them, hitherto drily hidden in official communiqués now presented excitingly, dramatically and attractively. A splendid idea, excellently carried out. *The Red Book* is not cheap. It cannot easily be read through like a novel but it is eminently suitable for coffee-tables, to catch the eye of the great and startle him in a few pages; left about in his bedroom it will be dipped into



TAMARAU
Dwarf buffalo of the Philippines



**SOUTHERN
SEA OTTER**
of the Californian coast

and keep him awake. It should be in every school library – in every school-boy community there will be a few who will seek it out and devour it – and the ingenious teacher will find ample material for vivid lessons.

The drawings and paintings are first-class: where, as here, precise, distinctive appearance of species is more important than habits or surroundings, such illustrations are more suitable and informative than photographs. The introduction is well written, the geographical endpapers are a bonus. One complaint only: in a book of this kind, certain to serve as valuable propaganda in circles not well up in the subject, would it not have been desirable to devote a page to addresses and brief details of at least the principal conservation organisations, and another to citing other books as recommended follow-up?

The three drawings of endangered animals, all by D. W. Ovenden, are reproduced from the Red Book by kind permission of the publishers.

Red Book on Fish

A RED DATA BOOK on endangered fish species has now been published by IUCN – *Pisces*, volume 4 in the series, having beaten volume 3 (*Amphibia and Reptilia*) to the publishing post. Like its two predecessors, *Mammals* and *Birds*, it consists of looseleaf sheets in a strong binder. Among those who supported it was the Fishmongers' Company of London with a gift of £100. As much less is known about endangered fish than mammals and birds the collection of the data has been no easy task for the compiler, Dr R. R. Miller, of Michigan University, chairman of the SSC's (Survival Service Commission) Freshwater Fish Group. *Pisces* is obtainable from IUCN, Morges, Switzerland, or the FPS office in London, 50s. (\$6.00).

Wild Horse Sightings

PROFESSOR DASHDORJ, of Ulan Bator University in Mongolia, reports seven sightings of Przewalski wild horses made by local herdsmen whom he considers reliable, five last year and two in March and April this year. One report was of 17 horses and another of 27; in these two cases wild asses were seen at the same time. In the next ORYX we hope to publish details of these sightings, and of this summer's Mongolian expedition to look for the horse.

A correspondent in Mongolia quotes a guide whose home is in the Altai Gobi region, and whom he regards as reliable, as saying that wild asses were numerous there, wild camels dwindling, though a herd of about 40 is often sighted, and Przewalski wild horses as few in number but often seen.

Conservation in Tasmania

A Tasmanian Conservation Trust has been formed in Hobart, with Dr J. L. Davies as president and a starting membership of about 150.