

Book reviews

The New Environmental Age

Max Nicholson

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, 232 pp., HB £15.00

Anyone who thinks about the environment sooner or later has to consider Max Nicholson's views, which are presented in his characteristic, vigorous, forceful and positive style in *The New Environmental Age*. Essentially the author has chosen his examples and facts with care in order to produce a cogent, logical, constructive and critical appraisal of the environmental movement and the challenges it faces in the future.

The author argues that the conservation movement has reached its mature phase and is beginning to speak with authority so that now environmental management policies are becoming acceptable to society. He then examines the ways by which environmental ideas and concepts are disseminated, the organizations involved and the resources available to them, before considering how environmentalists have to coexist with other groups. Nicholson rightly argues that conservation management strategies cannot be pursued by environmentalists alone and if successful conclusions are to be achieved, co-operation and interaction with other groups in 'different but converging subject areas' are essential. Nicholson then includes a fascinating chapter outlining the contribution of some of the leading individuals who have been responsible for the present-day form of the movement.

In assessing the current state of the movement, Nicholson maintains that environmentalists should strive to identify and prevent possible causes of environmental damage, attempt to change the philosophy behind policies and practices harmful to the environment, and then replace them with conservation-friendly approaches and create more environmental assets ranging from school study areas to national parks. Possibly his most important recommendation is the suggestion to encourage the change in attitude and life style of the younger generation so that they are favourable to conservation policies. Perhaps if these points can be attained, the ultimate goal can be achieved, that at some time in the future the enhanced general awareness of environmental principles and practices by society and institutions would be such that the

existence of environmentalists as a separate group would not be necessary.

Overall a good read especially if one is prepared to re-examine one's own views on the environment.

Denis Hide, North-East London Polytechnic.

The Hunting of the Whale: a tragedy that must end

Jeremy Cherfas

The Bodley Head, 1988, 239 pp., HB £12.95

This is an account of the history of whaling over 1000 years until 1987. It is filled with amazing facts, intrigue, suspense and sadness. Most importantly it concentrates several chapters on a blow by blow account of the fight for and against whaling, which has been a feature associated with meetings of the International Whaling Commission over two decades. The story not only relates to the cost to whales as individuals and to their populations, but also to its costs in human terms, such as actual or threatened loss of jobs or demotion of officials, suicide and physical attacks on delegates to the IWC. It provides a riveting account of the main events of the battle; the skill used by the protagonists to gain the initiative over their opponents is worthy of Sim Tzū, who wrote the definitive *Art of War*, over 2000 years ago.

In a wider context, *The Hunting of the Whale* perhaps provides an insight into the roles of commerce, greed, politics, bribery, nationalism and a *laissez-faire* attitude to the long-term consequences of meeting short-term requirements prevailing in other decisions by governments. Usually these, unlike the whaling issue, exclude public participation in their formulation, except those subject to confidential caveats, so the public are largely unaware of the background to decision making.

The chapter on the biology of whales provides some noteworthy facts, such as that a child could easily crawl through a blue whale's main arteries. Slimmers among the human population may have their own views on a blue whale's diet, which needs to account for about three million calories a day.

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The author does not end on a note of optimism in spite of the book's subtitle, but concludes: 'I think it would be foolish to assume any whales will be given up while there is hope they can be taken'. The book should be viewed with more optimism because of the author's contribution to bringing together the facts on whaling, many of which are difficult to come by or to interpret from raw material, and for making them available to the public domain in a very readable form. Tropical forest destruction and the Antarctic minerals regime are among many other areas requiring a similar concise, factual and readable presentation—can he be persuaded to take these on?

John Rudge.

The Natural History of Domesticated Mammals Juliet Clutton-Brock

British Museum (Natural History) and Cambridge University Press, 1987, 208 pp., PB £9.95

This book is identical in content to the hardback volume published in 1981 by the British Museum (Natural History) under the title *Domesticated Animals from Early Times*. It provides a fascinating account of the animals with which we interact so closely today, the history of domestication and the identity and current status of the wild relatives of those domesticants. The publication in paperback is very welcome, but the new title is less appropriate than the old one.

There is a major contrast between those animals whose breeding humans have controlled to select for morphological, physiological or behavioural characters (domestic animals) and those which have just been tamed and controlled without intentional selection in breeding (domesticated animals). The former include dogs, sheep, goats, cattle, pigs and horses; the latter include elephants, camels, llamas, reindeer, Asiatic cattle and cats (who someone once suggested to be the one species that has domesticated humans!). There is a detailed description of each of these animals and the evolution of breeds, in relation to their wild ancestors, from the study of abundant archaeological remains. There is reference to small mammals such as rabbits and ferrets and to rodents and carnivores (guinea-pigs, rats, dormice, hamster, chinchilla,

muskrat, mink, fox) used at various times for food, fur or hides.

While the evidence for domestication stems from West Asia 9000 years ago, from when there are increasingly abundant and widespread relevant remains, it is clear that the human–animal relationship is of much greater antiquity. The hunting of red deer, gazelles and bison is well documented from the Palaeolithic onwards. As human populations increased so it became more economic to keep herds of animals to kill for meat when required, and to live a more settled existence, cultivating crops such as cereals; herbivores, such as sheep, goat and cattle, were attracted to these patches of luxuriance and subsequently controlled, often with the help of dogs, supposedly the first animal to be domesticated. At various times, especially nowadays, there have been experiments at domestication and game ranching, involving animals such as the manatee and dugong, deer, antelopes and the cheetah (the great Moghul emperor Akbar supposedly kept 9000 cheetah during his 60-year reign in the 16th century), but breeding success in captivity was often poor. Antelope such as the saiga (saved from extinction by the Russians early this century), the eland and musk ox figure prominently in such efforts today.

Only a small proportion of the vast array of animals have the right attributes for domestication: they need to be adaptable, breed easily and rapidly, be gregarious, have a hierarchical social structure rather than be territorial; only some of these have economic value. Humans can be blamed more for loss of plant and animal diversity, than for the outright extinction of large mammals. For example, the originally very fertile area of Western Asia has been transformed to desert more by over-grazing than by climatic change.

Thus, there is much for the conservationist to learn for the future by studying the past. Various species were perhaps extinguished naturally by the Pleistocene, while others became extinct in the last few hundred years as they became undesirable once their relatives were domesticated. Yet others are faced with extinction today, as their habitat becomes reduced and isolated. Apart from protecting habitat, efforts to save