

Book reviews

Save the Birds

Anthony W. Diamond, Rudolf L. Schreiber, David Attenborough, Ian Prestt
Cambridge University Press, 1987, 384 pp., HB £17.50

This is a coffee-table book that has all the characteristics of the genre—sumptuous paper, beautiful photographs, lovely artwork and splendid design. It is also, like so many of its kind, the product of a ‘packaging’ operation, in this case of Pro Natur GmbH of Frankfurt. In general, books of this type are over-weight, over-priced, over-edited, over-designed and offer a watered-down, easily assimilable version of the truth.

Save the Birds is different—thank heaven. Firstly it has been produced by an organization, Pro Natur, dedicated to conservation in association with the International Council for the Protection of Birds. It has been ably written by Tony Diamond, an ornithologist with world-wide experience of bird conservation, with sections by no lesser luminaries than Sir David Attenborough and Ian Prestt. Above all, however, it has a message that shines through, section after section, chapter after chapter, page after page—save the birds. This message is ably summarized in the sections written by Rudolf Schreiber, founder of Pro Natur and publisher of *Save the Birds*.

The heart of the book is an account of each of the world’s major ecosystems together with the variety of life forms (not just birds) that it supports. Each account is followed by case reports of particular endangered species, plus a summary of the state of conservation. Such a survey must, of necessity, be selective but, in this case, the selection is excellent.

A further section deals with conservation in general and offers a variety of reasons why we should save the birds, the threats that are faced and action being taken. Finally, there is a British section (presumably a German section in Germany, Spanish in Spain and so on) that succinctly summarizes these islands’ own problems and solutions. There is also a somewhat irrelevant introduction to bird biology. All in all these are well-written, well-researched and up-to-date accounts of the state of play. They have detail where relevant, but also the range to offer a global

view of what is happening to our planet at the end of the twentieth century. If you are not worried when you start to read it, you will be when you finish. What to do?

In their foreword, David Attenborough and Ian Prestt quote ICBP’s campaign slogan ‘Think globally—act locally’. I cannot help but think that with highly mobile creatures like birds ‘Think globally—act globally’ might be a much better approach. It is the responsibility of the rich nations of the world to ensure that bird conservation is attempted wherever it is needed. That is also the message of this splendid book, which should be compulsory reading for all presidents, prime ministers, general secretaries—indeed anyone who takes power on our behalf.

John Gooders, Battle, East Sussex, UK.

Plants in Danger: What do we know?

Stephen D. Davis *et al.*

International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, Gland and Cambridge, 1986, 461 pp., SB £15.00 (US \$21.00)

This latest publication from IUCN’s Threatened Plant Unit (by an alphabetically ordered team of eight authors) is arguably the most useful they have published—at least for the general biologist. The book’s stated purpose is to ‘provide conservation organizations with a concise guide to information on threatened plants’. While the achievement of conciseness has unfortunately not been a problem in compiling the entries for many tropical countries (as little information is available), many data are provided for the ‘North’ countries, and this is an extremely worthwhile and useful summary.

Perhaps even more valuable is the book’s core (although you would not expect this from the title), which is a mind-bogglingly useful compilation of all kinds of basic information on the world’s flora. Arranged, in the main, by country, each entry starts with area and population statistics, followed by a floristic summary (estimated numbers of species, levels and distribution of endemism), then a brief account of the vegetation, and a list of the flora accounts, checklists and field guides that exist for the country in question.