

the transliteration of Chinese names in citations.

Ever since Vol. 4, the Forewords have formed a valuable part of the *Handbook*. The present one, on Fossil Birds, could scarcely have been written as recently as ten years ago. New discoveries, especially in China, have shed much light on dinosaur–bird relationships. (One undoubted dinosaur actually had flight feathers on all four limbs!) The fossil record contains many delightfully odd birds with no close surviving relatives; but it is also increasingly adding to our knowledge of the origins, relationships and past distribution of many present-day bird families. Hummingbirds in Europe, ducks who were contemporaries of the later dinosaurs, a metre-tall, possibly flightless owl from Pleistocene Cuba, flamingos with a preference for swimming rather than wading, and a miniature turkey from Florida are just a few of the species Dr Kevin Caley describes in this survey.

At the time Volume 12 went to press, all the earlier *Handbook* volumes were still in print, though stocks of 1, 4, 6 and 9 in particular were running low. Anyone still planning to start collecting the set needs to move fast. Some volumes may by now already be unavailable: when they are, it is safe to predict that second-hand prices will start to rise exponentially. No comparable work will ever be published in the future, however long people, and birds, continue to inhabit this planet.

Nicholas Gould

## References

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- Wilkinson, R., He, F.-q., Gardner, L., and Wirth, R. (2004): A highly threatened bird – Chinese yellow-throated laughing thrushes in China and in zoos. *International Zoo News* 51 (8), 456–469.

**NATURAL HISTORY** by Neil Cross. Simon & Schuster, London, 2007. 279 pp., hardback. ISBN 978-0-7432-6375-7. £11.99

*Natural History* is by no means about zoos – it is, if anything, a sort of psychological thriller which is interested in the ‘animal’ brutality of the human beast – but it is most certainly a novel in which the zoo-minded may be interested, given its setting (a down-at-heel chimpanzee sanctuary in the west of England) and the back-story of the two central protagonists (they met, we are told, at the white tiger cage at Bristol Zoo in the 1970s, before going to work at a West Country safari park). The reader is also whisked to the Congo, where we are introduced to orphaned bonobos and taken to president Mobutu’s menagerie in Kinshasa. So, not a novel about zoos, but one which has a very strong zoo flavour to it.

As a novel, *Natural History* is successful up to a point. Neil Cross is a writer who stands on the cusp of critical success, and at times his writing is both pacy and poetic, whilst his characters are – mostly – compelling; too often, though, he is let down by a propensity to melodrama and a reliance upon narrative twists which have been telegraphed well in advance. But it is the zoo content which fascinates here. There are slips – mention is made of fur seals living off the Devon coast, and we are told, improbably, that the proprietor of the chimp sanctuary is in the habit of entering a cage with a troop of adult males – but these may well be deliberate pointers to the unreliability of the character who narrates the tale. Certainly, the descriptions of the sanctuary ring very true. It appears to have been modelled, very loosely, on Monkey World in Dorset – although the fictional place (‘Monkeyland’) shares few of the qualities or successes of its inspiration. There are some nice observations on the internal politics of such a place, of the clash between commercialism and ideology, and the

scene in which a keeper punches a visitor who has been taunting an ape is one which may raise the spirits of any zoo person who has ever been confronted by a misbehaving public.

Simon & Schuster seem uncertain how to market *Natural History*. It is not helped by a truly dreadful cover, complete with

the most banal of strap lines (‘There’s a beast in every man’ barks out at potential buyers); this is a novel in which the cocktail of decent writing, a fair story and some interesting zoo content probably deserves rather better.

John Tason

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## CONSERVATION

### Some good news from Zimbabwe

For most people outside Zimbabwe, the very mention of the word conjures up images of chaos and repression. Yet it is not all doom and gloom, for there still remain areas of calm where dedicated people continue to operate effectively. One such example exists at Dambari, near Bulawayo, where the Marwell Zimbabwe Trust, registered in Zimbabwe as a not-for-profit NGO, is dedicated to conserving the country’s wildlife and habitats. This small but very effective organisation has been in existence for ten years, and we are now seeking additional partners to enable us to further our important conservation work.

The headquarters of the Trust (Dambari) is situated 25 km south of Bulawayo and has accommodation for students and visitors. The Trust is managed by Verity Bowman, a Zimbabwe resident, and supported by a staff of 20, with two full-time researchers working on small antelope and cheetah. In addition the Trust’s education programme provides placements for Zimbabwean students’ work experience in research and methodology.

A collection of small antelope is held on site, representing eight species: blue, red, grey, yellow-backed and Maxwell’s duikers, suni, grysbok and steenbok. This collection is used for *ex situ* study of behaviour, life history and nutrition by

visiting researchers, as well as a resident researcher who is also carrying out a Ph.D. study on the ecology of three species of antelope in the nearby Matopos National Park.

The second research project, on cheetah, has two objectives: to determine the population size and distribution of the species and to reduce human/cheetah conflict through education and giving advice to farmers on non-lethal predator control.

The rhino project is a component of the Zimbabwe national rhino conservation plan for both black and white rhino. Together with the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (PWMA) and like-minded NGOs, the Trust contributes toward the execution of a national rhino management plan. The Trust also provides logistical support for rhino operations such as individual marking, translocations and emergency snare removal, and training PWMA staff.

Needless to say, this all costs money and the Trust is funded entirely by external funders. The two existing partners, Marwell and Paignton Zoos, have provided the core costs, with additional funding from grants received from the U.K. and U.S.A. for research projects and some of the rhino work.

I hope that, from this brief resumé of the Trust’s activities, you will appreciate that it is fulfilling an extremely valuable role in helping to conserve important

populations of endangered species in their natural habitat. Throughout Africa, the increasing demand for land by an expanding human population (in spite of war, famine and disease) is resulting in decreasing space for wildlife. In order for these wild populations to survive, there is an increasingly urgent need for their planned management, and zoos have a moral responsibility as well as a legal requirement to contribute toward that management. Marwell Zimbabwe Trust offers you a way to meet those obligations, not only in the form of support for this valuable conservation work but also through the opportunity to make a contribution directly as a partner in the organization and planning of this work. Rather than being a passive supporter, here is the chance to become truly involved in sustaining *in situ* conservation of some of the world's most important megafauna.

If you are interested in becoming such a partner you can find more information about the Trust through links on both Paignton and Marwell Zoos' websites, or please contact me at [pmcstevens@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:pmcstevens@yahoo.co.uk).

Abridged from Peter Stevens, Chairman, Marwell Zimbabwe Trust, in *LifeLines* (British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums) No. 98 (October 2007)

### Rare rhino sighting in Malaysia

A Sumatran rhinoceros has been photographed in peninsular Malaysia in the first sighting for more than a decade. The image, captured by a camera trap, snapped just a small part of the rhino but experts declared the wrinkly and folded thigh was unmistakable. Rhino footprints were last found in Johor state in 2001, but the last sighting in the wild was in 1994, when a rhino wandered out of a forest in the northern state of Perak.

The report in the *New Straits Times* did not reveal where the rhino was snapped,

but said the photo was taken in a wildlife corridor targeted by the Wildlife and National Parks Department, which also spotted elephants, sun bears and gaur.

'We're going back to areas where the rhinos were once recorded, looking for more signs and taking samples,' said Siti Hawa Yatim, head of the department's biodiversity conservation division. 'We're also looking for doomed animals – individuals alone in a vast area who cannot survive without companions.'

World Wildlife Fund Malaysia announced earlier this year that it had captured video footage of the extremely rare Borneo subspecies of the critically-endangered Sumatran rhino. The footage, taken in a forest in Malaysia's Sabah state, showed a rhino eating, peering through jungle foliage and sniffing the automatic video camera equipment used to photograph it. WWF says scientists estimate there are only between 25 and 50 of the Bornean subspecies left.

*Animal Keepers' Forum* (American Association of Zookeepers) Vol. 35, No. 1 (January 2008)

### Conservationists urge clampdown on internet wildlife trade

An eight-month survey of Chinese-language internet auction sites by the wildlife trade monitoring network TRAFFIC (a joint programme of WWF and IUCN) found 4,300 advertisements for wildlife products, including elephants, tigers, rhinoceroses and marine turtles. The survey included Yahoo, eBay and several independent websites. 'Internet service providers and websites need to take greater responsibility for keeping wildlife trade legal,' says Joyce Wu, Programme Officer for TRAFFIC East Asia. 'Government authorities must also ensure that wildlife trade on the internet conforms to the same regulations as trade in physical markets.'

In the course of the survey, TRAFFIC informed authorities in China, Hong

Kong and Taiwan about suspected illegal trade. As a result, several advertisements were removed, deliveries intercepted and those involved convicted.

Once the report *World Without Borders* was published, TRAFFIC met China's CITES Management Authority and the China Internet Information Security Monitoring Bureau to address different standards in physical and virtual trade. Meetings were also held with major website companies and other relevant organizations such as the State Forestry Administration and the Customs Bureau to find solutions to control illegal wildlife trade on the internet.

The report recommends the development of strategies to police virtual markets, to bring web-based markets under the same regulatory structure as physical markets, and to alert shoppers to the growing use of the internet for illegal trade.

*HerpDigest* ([www.herpdigest.org](http://www.herpdigest.org)) Vol. 8, No. 12 (4 March 2008)

### Bee buzzing can scare away elephants

According to a recent study (L.E. King, I. Douglas-Hamilton and F. Vollrath, *Current Biology*, 9 October 2007), strategically placed beehives might offer a natural elephant deterrent in areas where

humans are encroaching on elephant ranges. Experiments carried out by Oxford University's Lucy King and colleagues in Samburu National Reserve, Kenya, demonstrated that a significant majority of elephants fled as soon as they heard the sound of aggressive bees played from a disguised loudspeaker. The study supports the idea that bees, and indeed perhaps even just their buzz, might be used to keep elephants at bay.

'We expected the elephants to respond to the threatening sound of disturbed bees, but we were really surprised by the speed of their reaction,' says Lucy King. Eight of the 17 family groups tested left their resting places under trees within ten seconds of hearing the bee sound coming from a speaker ten metres away; and all but one fled within 80 seconds.

These valuable experiments are beginning to outline a new tool in the growing armoury of non-lethal elephant deterrents available to farmers. 'More research is needed to understand to what extent beehives could be used to keep away elephants,' says King, 'but we are hopeful that this approach might work. Using bees in this way would enable local farmers to reduce elephant crop-raiding and tree destruction, while at the same time providing some income through the sale of honey. This would be a valuable and significant step towards sustainable human–elephant coexistence.'

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## MISCELLANY

### Should zoo food be chopped?

In many zoos the food, particularly fruit and vegetables, provided for a range of animals is chopped into small pieces, even though the animals are capable of processing much larger food items. Chopping food takes up keeper time and the

chopped edges increase the risk of bacterial contamination and food spoilage. Leaving it whole may increase food processing time and allow the animals to express more natural foraging and feeding behaviour.

Among the reasons given for chopping food are that it enables all individuals in