

BOOK REVIEWS

A disappearing breed

Brian Bertram

WITH the publication of Vols IIIC and IIID of *East African Mammals*, Jonathan Kingdon has completed his *tour de force*. These final volumes deal with most of the artiodactyls — the bovines and antelopes whose numbers and diversity contribute so much to the array of East Africa's mammals.

The format is the same as in the earlier volumes. For each tribe the author presents an introductory profile covering topics such as structure, coat colouring, the form of the horns, body size, evolutionary history, signalling and ecological niches. For each species he then describes its past and present distribution, its distinguishing features, its feeding and predators, its behaviour and breeding. Again, the author's superb illustrations abound, and contribute greatly to the information presented; Kingdon can convey so much more with a few pencil lines than anyone could say in many pages of text. There are always beautiful and meticulously accurate drawings of the whole animal, and there are often equally accurate drawings of the skinned animal, revealing the underlying musculature, and of the skeleton. In addition, there are countless thumbnail sketches which capture the essence of an animal's appearance or behaviour.

Unlike earlier volumes in the series, neither of these final volumes can stand on its own. Volume IIIC includes the bovines and the smaller antelopes, while Vol. IIID has the larger antelopes, four appendices, the bibliography and indexes for these last two volumes, and a species checklist for all seven volumes. The first appendix outlines the fundamental problems of conservation, and the ethic, the threats, and the meagreness of the response. The second, by David M. Jones, summarizes current knowledge of the feeding and handling of mammals in captivity. Appendix III lists the various parasites and diseases known to infect

East African Mammals: An Atlas of Evolution in Africa, Vols IIIC and IIID. By Jonathan Kingdon. Vol. IIIC, pp.393, ISBN 0-12-408344-7; Vol. IIID, pp.353, ISBN 0-12-408345-5. (Academic: 1982.) Each volume £49.95, \$99.50.

East African mammals, and Appendix IV considers briefly the potential for commercial exploitation of wildlife.

We can now look back on the whole series, and we must do so with considerable awe. The 2,900 pages contain a vast wealth of information and discussion. They also contain hundreds of fascinating and often most beautiful illustrations. Particularly in the earlier volumes, more guidance could have been given to help the reader to make use of the illustrations, noting important features or explaining what an animal was doing. But it remains indisputable that these seven books constitute a remarkable work.

The series has expanded in the writing. "This is the first of a three volume work" announced the flysheet to Vol. I, in 1971. By geometrical progression, this was followed by IIA and IIB, and by IIIA, IIIB, IIIC and IIID. It has been a somewhat unplanned growth, resulting in some awkward anomalies of arrangement: thus the page numbers in Vols IIB and IIID, but only these, continue from where the previous volumes' numbers left off; the bibliographies are sometimes split up according to subject and sometimes not; and what is essentially the same gazetteer appears in Vols I, IIB, IIIA and IIID.

Expansion plus inflation have had an alarming effect. On publication eleven years ago, the 446 pages of Vol. I cost £12 (about £38 at today's prices), and a reprint can still be bought for £34.40. The 353 pages of Vol. IIID will cost you £49.95, and the whole series £255 (\$534.50), which

means that what started as a set of three, which keen private naturalists could just hope to afford, has ended as a series mainly for libraries. It is well worth making sure you have access to it somehow, because it contains so much of value as well as of beauty.

Valuable beautiful things are rare, and so may well prove to be good investments. On their current form these books will be. But I fear that the series, like its author and like several of the species it describes, is a disappearing breed. The very high standard of production, the generous use of space, the large typeface and the ample illustrations all allow what have become increasingly reference works for the specialist and the professional to retain the attractiveness of coffee table books. What a pity it is that other continents and other faunas have yet to be so well served by anyone as East Africa has by Jonathan Kingdon and Academic Press. □



The art of Jonathan Kingdon — a Greater Kudu from Vol. IIIC of *East African Mammals*. A limited edition of full-size illustrations from the series has also been published. Details can be obtained by writing to Pangolin Prints, PO Box, Oxon, UK, enclosing a stamped, addressed envelope.

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