

## Book reviews and announcements

**Jayewardene, J. 1994. The elephant in Sri Lanka. Wildlife Heritage Trust of Sri Lanka. ISBN 955-95677-0-5. 4to boards. 128 pp, 8 pl. US\$ 35 + postage.**

Despite the elephant being the "flagship" of Sri Lanka's wildlife conservation efforts, it is remarkable how little is actually known about its population, ecology, ethology and biology. The Sri Lankan elephant is considered by some to be doomed. The island's elephant population at the turn of the century was estimated to be around 12,000; that is what remained after decades of slaughter by British sportsmen (5,194 elephants are recorded as having been shot between 1845 and 1859, about another 2,000 having being captured for export). The present population is estimated to be around 2,000.

The future for the elephant in Sri Lanka looks bleak. Its habitats continue to be modified and fragmented. Animals are still killed by farmers in defence of their crops. Most importantly, there is no effective conservation strategy in place to stem this depressing tide. It is in this background that Jayantha Jayewardene's book assumes a significance beyond its title. An "outsider" to the conservation establishment, he has a passion for elephants. In his *Elephant in Sri Lanka* he reviews the history, utility, ecology, population and (dispassionately) the conservation of Sri Lanka's elephants. He also describes the place of the elephant in Sri Lankan history, culture and pageantry. The book cites and summarizes much of the relevant literature and ends with a set of proposals for elephant conservation and management. Jayewardene's treatment of the subject of conservation is remarkably objective. His chapter "Is the Sri Lankan elephant at risk?" concludes that given the existing habitats, Sri Lanka will be able to support a population of around 1,500 elephants. One can only hope he is right.

**Kotagama, S.W. & P. Fernando. 1995. A field guide to the birds of Sri Lanka. Wildlife Heritage Trust of Sri Lanka. ISBN 955-9114-07-7. 8vo paperback. 224 pp., incl. 32 pl. US\$ 15 + postage.**

Sri Lanka's avifauna, one of the richest in any comparable area of South Asia, includes 227 resident species of which 23 are endemic. In addition to this, a further 95 migrant, 24 pelagic and 75 incidental species have been recorded from the island.

There have been many developments in ornithology during the past decade. Scientific names of many birds have changed through taxonomic revision; several new records have been added to the avifauna; and in general, there is a new awareness of the dangers faced by Sri Lanka's birds as a result of the loss and modification of important habitats.

*A field guide to the birds of Sri Lanka* provides a rapid, reliable and simple means of identifying all the birds likely to be encountered in Sri Lanka. Each bird is described briefly with comments on identification, diagnosis against similar species, distribution and status. The nomenclature follows Sibley and Monroe's (1990) *Taxonomy and distribution of the birds of the world* (Yale Univ. Press,

New Haven, 1111 pp), but a cross-reference guide is given to Phillips's (1978) checklist.

The colour plates are meant to be diagnostic rather than aesthetic, and illustrate 238 species, many showing both sexes, some in both breeding and non-breeding plumage. The text is also illustrated by more than 100 line drawings.

This field guide cannot (and obviously is not intended to) replace G.M. Henry's (1955; 1971, 2nd ed.) *A guide to the birds of Ceylon* (Oxford Univ. Press), now sadly out of print. But it is what it claims to be, an easy-to-use, comprehensive and useful field guide to Sri Lanka's avifauna.

**Bennett, J.W. 1828-30 (1995 facsimile reproduction). A selection from the most remarkable and interesting fishes found on the coast of Ceylon from drawings made in the southern part of that island from living specimens... Wildlife Heritage Trust of Sri Lanka. ISBN 955-9114-01-8. 4to boards, 3/4 leather. viii+30 pp, 30 pl. US\$ 50 + postage.**

Five of the thirty marine fishes described in John Whitchurch Bennett's book, better known as *Fishes of Ceylon*, become available from this publication. Formerly an officer of the Royal Navy, Bennett arrived in Ceylon in 1816. After more than ten years' service in relatively menial positions in the colony's administrative establishment, he was appointed Sitting Magistrate in Galle, then an important port in the southern part of the island. It was probably while he was there that he executed the drawings published in his *Fishes of Ceylon*.

Bennett was a gifted artist and his fish drawings reproduced in this book (which ran into four editions between 1830 and 1851) represent a degree of perfection difficult to surpass. The Wildlife Heritage Trust facsimile edition carefully reproduces the colours of the rare first edition of the book, which was originally issued in six parts in wrappers. It is 3/4 leather bound and decorated in pseudo-period style and published in a limited edition of 200 copies.

**Spix, J.B. & L. Agassiz. 1829-31. Selecta genera et species piscium quos in itinere per Brasiliam annis MDCCCXVI-MDCCCXX jussu et auspicii Maximiliani Josephi I. Bavariae regis augustissimi peracto collegit et pingendos curavit Dr J.B. Spix ... C. Wolf, Monaco [Munich]. Wildlife Heritage Trust of Sri Lanka facsimile reproduction. ISBN 955-9114-02-4. 4to boards, 3/4 leather. i+2+xvi+ii+6+138 pp., 98 pls. US\$ 125 + postage.**

This very rare, pioneering work, of which just over 100 copies were originally printed is of immense importance in the study of Brazilian fishes, particularly those of the Amazon. It includes several first descriptions and illustrations. Although a microfiche version is available, the work has until now never been reprinted.

The facsimile edition is a same-size reproduction of the original in the Zoologische Staatssammlung München. It is bound in period style (the original was issued in parts in wrappers).