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Ziswiler, Extinct And Vanishing Animals

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EXTINCT AND VANISHING ANIMALS: A biology of extinction and survival. Vol. 2 of The Heidelberg Science Library.

By

VINCENZ ZISWILER

Revised English Edition by

FRED AND PILLE BUNNELL

New York: Springer-Verlag New York Inc. 1967

Pp. 133, illus. paperback. \$3.40

At the present point in time when the affluent societies that have been brought into existence through the applications of modern technology, when the basic human needs for food, water and shelter tend to be taken for granted, additional needs such as those associated with the concept of environmental quality in terms of rare and endangered species command our attention. For this reason, Ziswiler's excellent book, ably translated by the Bunnells, has made a timely appearance.

Ziswiler, using a variety of examples from all parts of the world, and avoiding specialized terminology and jargon, presents a brief review of the progressive destruction of animal species, at the same time suggesting ways and means by which man can prevent an increase in the number of exterminated species. His thesis is that "when man continues to destroy nature, he saws off the very branch on which he sits since the rational protection of nature is at the same time the protection of mankind." Ziswiler's hypothesis for the extermination of species groups the causes under the three general headings of profit (including food), fear of animal competition, and man's latent urge to kill. Raymond Dasmann's more recent analysis of the great current need for this kind of environmental diversity finds similar expression when he points out that for our own protection there is a need to preserve the widest biotic variety of wild animal species and domestic crop plants. Dasmann says, "Disturbance of any natural environment should not exceed the minimum needed to accomplish its rational use for worthy human goals," and further on reiterates his belief in a basic rule that cannot be ignored: "Do not destroy what you cannot create." It is certainly quite obvious that we have not as yet been able to recreate even the most simple animal species in the scale of evolution.

Coverage of the subject may be inferred from Ziswiler's chapter headings: Direct Extermination, Indirect Extermination, Local Extermination, The Biology of Extinction, and Protecting Nature. Appendix I contains an annotated summary of the bird and mammal forms already extinct listed by scientific and common names. Appendix II is an annotated list of the most gravely threatened animal forms, the so-called endangered species. The index seems to be inclusive; there is no bibliography or selected list of supplementary readings, and there is no glossary (none is necessary). Scattered throughout the book are several easily understood graphs, charts and maps as well as a variety of well-reproduced photographs and drawings. In such a brief review, it seems almost unfair to enumerate the very few inaccuracies or deficiencies in the text.

This book appears at a particularly apropos time to provide both the lay public and the Congress with the necessary information to lend informed support for federal legislation for a so-called "rare and endangered species" bill.

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