BOOK REVIEW


Overview.—The pervasive theme in this book is simple yet profound: Wildlife conservation is a social problem. This may seem odd coming from the mouths (and hands) of two scientists, but it is obvious that these men have had time to think extensively about the issue. The goal of the book is to articulate the impact of human cultures on the welfare of wildlife populations, beginning with the Stone Age and ending in the 21st Century, an ambitious goal, indeed. The authors, Richard Taber and Neil Payne, hold impressive credentials. Among other writings, Taber authored chapters in the first four editions of the Wildlife Society's wildlife techniques manual and has worked with numerous conservation organizations around the world. Payne has written three books on techniques of wildlife habitat improvement for wetlands and uplands in North America.

Structure and comments.—The book is divided into 14 chapters, each of which painstakingly and, on a few occasions, repetitiously, leads the reader through multiple layers of anthropogenic impacts on wildlife. When I first read the title and introduction, my reaction was something akin to, "How much more can be heaped on me?". The first two chapters did little to expel a similar feeling although I soon began to see the rationale of the book’s structure and the necessity for including the diverse impacts from multiple anthropogenic stressors.

The first chapter, "Stone Age Settlers into North America", describes the movement of big game hunters—fully equipped and experienced for the hunt—from Asia into North America with power to continue killing "beyond the power of the beasts to maintain their populations." In chapter two, "Human Wildlife Development in Eurasia: Farming and Animal Domestication," the competing interests in land—that of the hunter and the farmer—are presented. The third chapter, "Ancient Warrior-Rules," introduces a third theme, jurisdiction over wildlife. The authors describe how hunting was used as a vehicle for training for military combat and how wildlife favored by nobility was limited to the nobility, a concept that continues in varying degrees today. The fourth chapter, "Medieval Europe," discusses the role of the "waste," that uncultivated region of forest and marsh that enclosed the village fields and was under communal ownership by the village. With increases in cultivation and population, wildlife habitat diminished. Nobility came to the rescue with forest reserves serving as royal hunting grounds; and with these reserves came the poachers.

Chapters five, "European Trade and Exploration," and six, "European Trade and Settlement," focus on, among other issues, how wildlife on islands within shipping routes was decimated by predation of animals introduced to the island either deliberately as future food sources or accidentally during stopovers and anchorages. Further, travelogues such as those of Captain Cook provided readers with the exact location and approximate abundance of heretofore unknown populations. Little wonder that I smiled when the authors finally opined: "Cook annoyed the Hawaiians and so they killed him the next year." Chapters seven, "Wildlife Conservation in the Colonial Mother Country" and eight, "Wildlife Conservation in North America," look at the beginning of a political and social agenda aimed at conserving wildlife. Wildlife laws are described within a social context that recounts for the reader the push and pull of politics and the representative opposing camps at that time, e.g., Pinchot and Muir. The second half of the book is devoted to describing formal conservation efforts on federal (United States and Canadian) and international levels, ending with the authors' call to develop a holistic approach to wildlife conservation. In chapter nine, "Wildlife Conservation in North America: Land Use to 1945," the authors explain the impact of the change from subsistence farming to commercial farming on wildlife and wildlife habitat. Chapter ten, "Wildlife Conservation in North America: 1945–1970," continues the chronological saga and includes an interesting description of academic and agency incestuousness that led to species-specific or resource-specific management with little thought being given to non-game species, environmental degradation or ecosystem management. Then Aldo Leopold's A Sand County Almanac awakened the public interest. Unfortunately, this interest was sparked primarily in the urban populations; the rural population remained a neglected stakeholder.