



Tibet Wild: A Naturalist's Journeys on the Roof of the World

Author: Leslie, David M.

Source: BioScience, 63(8) : 684-685

Published By: American Institute of Biological Sciences

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1525/bio.2013.63.8.12>

BioOne Complete (complete.BioOne.org) is a full-text database of 200 subscribed and open-access titles in the biological, ecological, and environmental sciences published by nonprofit societies, associations, museums, institutions, and presses.

Your use of this PDF, the BioOne Complete website, and all posted and associated content indicates your acceptance of BioOne's Terms of Use, available at www.bioone.org/terms-of-use.

Usage of BioOne Complete content is strictly limited to personal, educational, and non - commercial use. Commercial inquiries or rights and permissions requests should be directed to the individual publisher as copyright holder.

BioOne sees sustainable scholarly publishing as an inherently collaborative enterprise connecting authors, nonprofit publishers, academic institutions, research libraries, and research funders in the common goal of maximizing access to critical research.

small-bat-eating black-and-white owl, the frog- and lizard-loving roadside hawk, and the double-toothed and plumbeous kites that feed on small animals flushed by troops of monkeys. Another way is with varied hunting times and techniques—the crane hawk, with its specialized double-jointed legs and small head, delves into cavities after nocturnal animals; the black hawk-eagle hunts nocturnal, arboreal mammals, including bats. As the book suggests, far more niches are available to raptors in the wet tropics than in temperate areas.

Adding to the book's interest are the two-dozen color plates illustrating the raptors, their habitat, and some of their prey. Images of the rarely photographed ornate hawk-eagle (on the cover), barred forest falcon, and Mexican wood owl are particularly striking. Many maps, tables, and graphs also illustrate the research.

The book's strength lies in its thorough collation of basic biological data from the project and the general literature. The tables and appendices are packed with data that include the mass, morphometrics, diet, habitat, and hunting methods of many of Tikal's reptiles, amphibians, and mammals, as well as those of the raptors. (An extensive bibliography includes more recent research.) I would have liked to have seen a table summarizing the reproductive parameters for all of the bird species in the study, however. Arguably, the most important outcomes of the project are the results of the project's telemetric work, which will be a boon to conservationists. With tropical forests being felled, often illegally, at an alarming rate (more than 3 percent per annum in Guatemala), this sound knowledge of the spatial needs of Neotropical raptors will prove indispensable to preservation efforts.

Neotropical Birds of Prey is a handsome tribute to an ambitious project. Not least, the book captures the dedication required to squeeze a decent set of data out of *any* suite of raptors—a notoriously difficult group to study—much less those of the remote, dense,

and humid Tikal forest, with its heavily armed plants, aggressive insects, and venomous snakes.

PENNY OLSEN

Penny Olsen (penny.olsen@anu.edu.au) is an associate professor in the Division of Evolution, Ecology, and Genetics in the Research School of Biological Sciences, at The Australian National University, in Canberra.

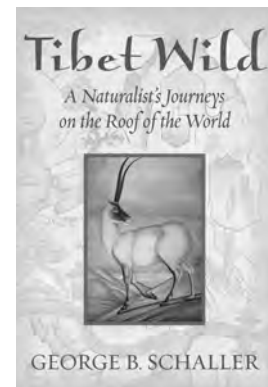
ADVENTURES ON THE ROOF OF THE WORLD

Tibet Wild: A Naturalist's Journeys on the Roof of the World. George B. Schaller. Island Press, 2012. 384 pp., illus. \$29.95 (ISBN 9781610911726 cloth).

To conduct field biology requires tenacity, grit, and flexibility; to endeavor to achieve conservation success requires patience, persistence, and passion. The essence of field biology and the hope for conservation success are both reflected admirably in George B. Schaller's most recent book, *Tibet Wild: A Naturalist's Journeys on the Roof of the World*. I can think of no living biologist who embodies these characteristics more than Schaller does. Nearly 80 years old, he still regularly treks in faraway lands, observing and recording the natural history of species that the vast majority of us will never see in the wild. Schaller is a vanguard, and *Tibet Wild*, like his other books, is a sentinel of urgent conservation need.

In Schaller's words, "this book is part observation and part evocation" (p. 14). It contains 14 chapters, 8 of which are focused on the Chang Tang in "the great northern plain" of the Tibetan Plateau (p. 2) and on his decades-long quest to discover the calving grounds of his beloved chiru (*Pantholops hodgsoni*)—a small, enigmatic antelope unique to the plateau

that once numbered in the millions but was severely overharvested for its exceptionally fine coat. After 26 journeys on the Chang Tang, beginning in 1984 and totaling 41 months, Schaller no doubt has more insight into the area's biology and character than does any other naturalist. Other chapters summarize Schaller's notable travels and observations in the Pamir Mountains (he calls them the plateau's "veranda" to the west) and the "Hidden Land of Pemako," characterized by the "Yarlung Tsangpo Great Canyon" (p. 227), which falls quickly off the eastern side of the plateau "from mountain coolness... into a humid heat of wild bananas and leeches, along a narrow cliff trail through a gorge with a river rumbling below" (p. 230).



Schaller's pattern is to publish books in pairs: the scientific results of his research on a species followed by a more popular overview of the species and the landscape it inhabits. He did this for his pioneering work on mountain gorillas (*Gorilla beringei beringei*; Schaller 1963, 1966), Indian tigers (*Panthera tigris*; Schaller 1967, Schaller and Selsam 1969), Serengeti lions (*Panthera leo*; Schaller 1972, 1973), and Himalayan sheep and goats (Schaller 1978, 1982). Tibetan wildlife is his latest subject, beginning with *Wildlife of the Tibetan Steppe* (1998) and now paired with *Tibet Wild*. I value the specificity of Schaller's scientific observations and the clarity of his presentation. As a far less adventurous nature lover, I admire and am thankful

for his clear passion for his subjects, their homes, and their ways.

Tibet Wild differs from Schaller's other books, most notably in two ways: His focus is directed more on his journeys—some treks lasted more than 50 days—which results in the absence of his typically rich descriptions of biology and behavioral nuances of the large mammals that he observed. A more pleasant diversion away from his previous titles is Schaller's choice to pepper this book with glimpses of his personal life—from childhood through raising two sons with his wife and early field companion, Kay, to his ambitions, fears, and hopes for a positive future at the Roof of the World. An insightful subsection in a chapter entitled "A gift to the spirit" articulates the author's perception of his own accomplishments and perceived inadequacies: "My inner voice points to failure. I have not built anything, no conservation organization, no university department" (p. 99). "Feral naturalist" is a chapter focused on his early life as young boy in Europe before and during World War II and his move to the United States as a 14-year-old.

Many personal reflections and philosophies are scattered throughout *Tibet Wild*, often at the end of a paragraph, almost as if they are afterthoughts and less important than his detailed chronicles, which they are not. He ends a rather clinical description of the birth of a chiru from his field notes with "the scene transcends science and reaches the emotions, touching the heart" (p. 103). Schaller sees his legacy mostly in the young nationals he has trained in Tibet "who will continue to fight to protect nature's beauty" permitting "my legacy... [to] flow onward long after I have ceased to be even a memory" (p. 100). I know that many memories will live on.

Of Schaller's many writings—he has written 16 previous books and numerous scientific and popular papers—*Tibet Wild* is not the place for the uninitiated to start. It is tedious in

parts, perhaps reflecting the author's eagerness to simply document the details of the places he has traveled and the people with whom he has worked. The text also jumps around chronologically, and even geographically, chapter by chapter, which is a bit distracting. As the primer on Schaller's works, I recommend *A Naturalist and Other Beasts* (Schaller 2007, Leslie 2008).

A life lived as Schaller's is rare. Adventures of spirit and mind abound in all of us, but those who have left so many footsteps in truly wild, often foreboding landscapes are exceptional indeed. Schaller's work in the wilds of the Tibetan Plateau will enlighten future generations, just as the chronicles of early adventurers—Moorcroft, Rockhill, Przewalski, and Hedin, among others—have done for over a century. Schaller defines his perspective of a lifelong pursuit in few words: "Conservation is a long journey, not a destination" (p. 6) and "conservation is my life, and I must believe in success or I have nothing" (p. 309).

After finishing this book, I was left with the uneasy feeling that few such volumes by Schaller are left to come, and a sense that he is starting to close a chapter on his journeys to the deepest and coldest parts of Tibet. I hope I am wrong, but his readers can be thankful that throughout his rich career, Schaller has taken the time to share in words the status of these wild places and their beasts as a permanent benchmark to what they may become. *Tibet Wild* sings with Schaller's tenacity, patience, and passion, which I can only hope will contribute to his own call for "a century of environmental enlightenment, one that expresses its loyalty to the earth and all its wonder and variety, the only home we shall ever have" (p. 356).

References cited

- Leslie DM Jr. 2008. A naturalist and other beasts: Tales from a life in the field, by G. B. Schaller. *Journal of Mammalogy* 89: 255.
- Schaller GB. 1963. *The Mountain Gorilla: Ecology and Behavior*. University of Chicago Press.

- . 1966. *The Year of the Gorilla*. University of Chicago Press.
- . 1967. *The Deer and the Tiger*. University of Chicago Press.
- . 1972. *The Serengeti Lion: A Study of Predator-Prey Relations*. University of Chicago Press.
- . 1973. *Golden Shadows, Flying Hooves*. Knopf.
- . 1978. *Mountain Monarchs: Wild Sheep and Goats of the Himalaya*. University of Chicago Press.
- . 1982. *Stones of Silence: Journeys in the Himalaya*. Bantam.
- . 1998. *Wildlife of the Tibetan Steppe*. University of Chicago Press.
- . 2007. *A Naturalist and Other Beasts: Tales from a Life in the Field*. Sierra Club.
- Schaller GB, Selsam ME. 1969. *The Tiger: Its Life in the Wild*. Harper and Row.

DAVID M. LESLIE JR.

David M. Leslie Jr. (cleslie@usgs.gov) is the unit leader of the US Geological Survey's Oklahoma Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit and adjunct professor in the Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management at Oklahoma State University. Leslie is the vice president of the American Society of Mammalogists and a member of both the AIBS Publication Committee and the Editorial Board of BioScience.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

The Moon in the Nautilus Shell: Discordant Harmonies Reconsidered.

Daniel B. Botkin. Oxford University Press, 2012. 448 pp., illus. \$29.95 (ISBN 9780199913916 cloth).

Daniel B. Botkin, a professor emeritus of environmental studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and a well-known global ecologist, has written a personal account of the current environmental issues of climate change, population dynamics, species extinction, and natural resource management. *The Moon in the Nautilus Shell: Discordant Harmonies Reconsidered* is a follow-up to his pivotal publication *Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the Twenty-First*

doi:10.1525/bio.2013.63.8.12