



Mammals of South Asia, Volume 1.
A. J. T. Johnsingh and Nima Manjrekar.
Universities Press (India) Pvt Ltd, 3-6-747/1/A and 3-6-754/1, Himayatnagar, Hyderabad 500 029. 2013. Ixviii + 614 pp. Price: Rs 1720. ISBN 978 81 7371 590 7.

Although compared to Amazonia, East Africa and Southeast Asia, the mammalian species richness is lower in South Asia, this region assumes a great conservation significance because of the high human population density and the resulting pressures on wild habitats, and the highly restricted ranges of many of the mammalian species. During the past three decades, considerable research has been carried out on the wild mammals in South Asia, especially by the home-grown scientists. There was need for a comprehensive volume summarizing major findings on the wild mammals. The editors of this book, A. J. T. Johnsingh (arguably one of the most renowned wildlife biologists of South Asia) and Nima Manjrekar (a highly trained and experienced wildlife scientist) have done just that.

With a highly readable Foreword by world renowned wildlife biologist George B. Schaller, the Introduction by Johnsingh and P. O. Nameer introducing various mammalian orders, endemism and zoogeography sets the stage for detailed descriptions of South Asian mammals. This volume includes five mammalian orders – Insectivora (hedgehogs, gymnures, shrews and moles), Scandentia (tree shrews), Chiroptera (bats), Primates (lorises, macaques, langurs and lesser apes) and Carnivora (large and small cats, canids, hyenas, small carnivores, bears and pandas). Some of these taxa have been highly re-

searched, whereas only little information is available about others. Accordingly, the length of each section/chapter varies. In general, each chapter provides information on description, taxonomy, distribution in South Asia, ecology, behaviour and conservation status of the concerned taxa/species. Despite the fact that relatively little is known about insectivores, tree shrews and bats, Xuelong Jiang and Robert Hoffman, Meera Anna Oomen, and P. J. Bates respectively, have put together comprehensive chapters on these taxa. Primates and carnivores have always been charismatic and ‘sexy’ species attracting not only the general public but also wildlife scientists. Understandably, the rest of the 500-odd pages covers various species of primates and carnivores. Although the information on lorises, largely solitary and nocturnal primates, has been only scantily and recently made available, both slender loris and slow loris have been covered in separate chapters. There is also a separate chapter for each of the macaque species, though I do not know why several species of macaques, including stump-tailed macaque, pig-tailed macaque and long-tailed macaque have been left out despite the available material on these species. Each species of langurs has been covered separately in individual chapters, though one would have appreciated a still larger chapter on the Hanuman langur, as information is available from several localities with different subspecies/species. The chapter on gibbons appropriately considers two species and presents recent information on their biology.

Almost 50% of this volume is devoted to carnivores. Except three chapters – small carnivores by Divya Mudappa, otters by Syed Ainul Hussain and small cats by Shomita Mukherjee, each chapter on carnivores covers a single species. Despite Mudappa’s and Mukherjee’s love for small carnivores and small cats respectively, I find these chapters to be too ‘small’. Of the canids, more research



Small-clawed otters

has been carried out on dhole and wolf than on fox and jackal, but information provided on each species is fairly comprehensive. Bears and panda are classified as carnivores, but the chapters aptly provide detailed information on their omnivorous diets. Nothing excites most people more than leopards, lions and tigers. Highly authoritative chapters have been included on these species.

Although a more or less uniform format has been followed by all authors, their different backgrounds such as in anatomy, ecology, taxonomy, behaviour, cognition, conservation, etc. has understandably made each author a bit biased, with a greater emphasis on the area of one’s own specialization. Several authors, however, have strongly brought out the threats faced by most of the species. The major threats include habitat degradation, fragmentation and total loss. Invasion by alien species is threatening the native vegetation turning the habitats useless for the native fauna. Hunting of several species for consumption and medicinal use is resulting in depleted wild populations, including local extinction of species in several places.

Although there have been several field guides and books on mammals of South Asia during the past two decades or so (leaving S. H. Prater’s classical book *The Book of Indian Animals*), I find this book to be as classical and exciting as the 1981 publication by John Eisenberg, *Mammalian Radiations: An Analysis of Trends in Evolution, Adaptation and Behavior*. Excellent photographs by expert photographers and skillful illustrations of mammalian species by Maya Ramaswamy make this volume a field guide for amateur naturalists. The classical as well as up-to-date references provide a source of valuable information to students and professionals in wildlife research. Information on distribution, natural history and conservation status of various mammalian species makes the book an invaluable source of consultation for wildlife enthusiasts and nature conservationists. Since many species of mammals in South Asia are threatened with extinction, I am sure this book would stimulate more research and conservation activities.

MEWA SINGH

*Biopsychology Laboratory,
University of Mysore,
Mysore 570 006, India
e-mail: mewasinghltm@gmail.com*