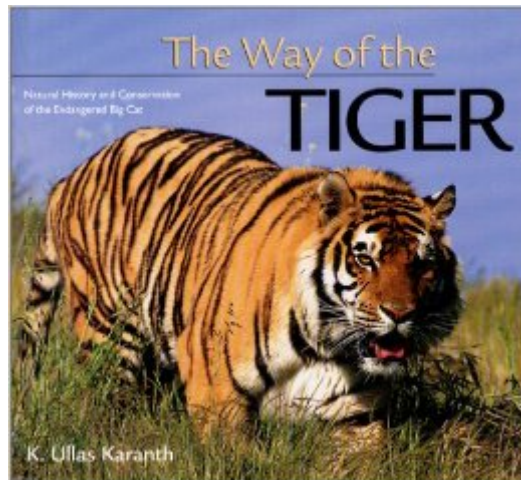


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The Way Of The Tiger: Natural History And Conservation Of The Endangered Big Cat



Synopsis

The seemingly solitary life of the tiger, and the ferocious intensity of its attacks, are legendary. But sadly, the existence of this massive cat is threatened by human encroachment. "The Way of the Tiger," written by India's foremost tiger specialist, presents scientific insights and information on the world's tiger species in a readable text that will appeal to a popular audience.

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Customer Reviews

Review of "The Way of the Tiger" by Ullas Karanth This is a highly informative book that makes the science of tiger biology accessible to a wider audience. The book communicates complex ideas with exceptional clarity and simplicity. An added bonus is the profusion of wonderful photographs. The author addresses the biological, economic and political problems that haunt tigers. The methods and results of decades of scientific work are distilled and summarized in a manner that makes complex scientific issues seem remarkably obvious and simple. For instance, scientific research tells us that tigers can survive only if there is sufficient prey available in the habitat. So what happens if there is a shortage of prey? Will tigers consume all the available prey? Karanth's work suggests not. Tigers have evolved in a way that ensures that they only consume the surplus prey. Hence they will never deplete their prey base through overconsumption. Karanth compares this to a person living off the interest on their investment, rather than the capital. The observant reader might note the irony - humans often do live off their capital in unsustainable and ultimately destructive ways (e.g.

depletion of soils, forests, fish stocks). Having summarized the biological issues Karanth then turns to the key socio-economic threats to the tiger. Tiger populations are in decline, but because insufficient resources are allocated to accommodate their biological needs in the wild. The two main threats to the tiger are: habitat destruction and poaching of tigers and their prey. Tigers when killed provide income to poachers and their habitats when converted to agriculture, timber or mines generate money and jobs for some. As Asia's human population expands, the conflict between the insatiable desire to generate wealth and the ecological needs of the tiger intensifies. To some commentators the answer lies in the notion of sustainable development - a concept which has been elevated to the status of a self-evident doctrine. The book convincingly argues that in practice, sustainable development in India has failed to deliver on its conservation promises. To others the key to the tiger's survival lies in "...making live tigers worth more than dead ones.." Karanth supports this notion as far as it goes, but notes its limitations. Karanth provides the most compelling and commonsense case for conservation, that I have encountered. Less than 5 per cent of the land mass in the tiger range countries is reserved for conservation. Sacrificing these areas to the altar of economic development will not deliver solutions that have eluded mankind on the remaining 95% of the land. The author of this book is measured in his criticisms of the prevailing situation. As a final observation, this reviewer would like to note yet another reason why the tiger remains high on the list of endangered species. Conservation is an expensive business - both in terms of funds to pay for protection and in terms of foregone opportunities (e.g. timber and minerals left unexploited in the tiger habitats). These costs fall disproportionately on the poor in often the poorest of countries. On the other hand, tigers are a global public good. People in the developed world want tigers to exist (economists call this the "preservation value"). Yet, the developed world contributes only a fraction of the costs of sustaining and protecting tigers. The developed world thus "free-rides" on the conservation efforts in the tiger range countries. Since tigers and their habitats confer global benefits, economic reasoning calls for a more substantial contribution from the global community. In short concerned people from all over the world have a moral and economic responsibility to contribute to efforts to protect tigers.

Some of my photographs of wild tigers were used to illustrate this book and while there are a few other fantastic pictures of wild tigers most of them (including the cover shot) are images of captive tigers photographed in natural enclosures in the USA. This form of wildlife photography undermines the work of people who spend days and even weeks searching for tigers in their natural habitat and also presents to the reader a rather distorted view of tigers as a species. This, I think, is a

tremendous shame as the book is exceptionally well written by the great tiger biologist Ullas Karanth and includes everything you will ever need to know about wild tigers, presented in a readable, informative way. Aside from the "false" pictures, I would still encourage anyone with even the slightest interest in *panthera tigris* to buy this book. It will enhance your appreciation of this splendid cat, the most magnificent of all life on earth.

Dr. Ullas Karanth is one of the most respected conservation biologists working to save the tiger from extinction in the wild. In this book, Dr. Karanth presents interesting information regarding the tiger's place in ancient culture, its biology, evolution and behavior. The book ends with the best discussion I have ever seen on the past and future of tiger conservation throughout the world, particularly in India and Nepal which contain most of the world's tigers in the wild. The book is written with a view towards educating the INTELLIGENT layman about the main threats to tigers and the methods of tiger conservation. The text is not watered down for the benefit of those who merely wish to have a book that looks pretty; however, it is a pleasure to read, since Dr. Karanth's clarity of thought and writing are apparent throughout. The author summarizes the research of other biologists (Drs. George Schaller, John Seidensticker, Mel Sunquist) and presents his own work on the monitoring of tigers and their prey. One learns how the densities of the tiger's ungulate prey species in a given area can be estimated. Since tiger numbers are positively correlated with the numbers of the cat's ungulate prey, this provides biologists with methods of estimating the number of tigers in a given area. For accurate counts, the author proposes the use of remote cameras to photograph tigers, which can be uniquely identified by their stripe markings. This "camera trapping" approach, as it is called, can be combined with powerful statistical methods to estimate the proportion of tigers in the population that were actually captured by the cameras, thus giving a total count of tigers in the sampled area. Fascinating glimpses of tiger behavior are presented through the results of fieldwork in the Kanha and Nagarhole National Parks (India) and Chitwan National Park (Nepal) by the eminent scientists mentioned above. Much of what is known to science regarding tiger behavior and ecology is the result of these systematic studies. The methods and goals of modern field biology are carefully distinguished from the subjective impressions recorded by hunter-naturalists in the first half of the last century. In an age when the media is choked with enormous amounts of misleading information, it is refreshing to find a book that gives sound scientific information in a clear and precise fashion. Dr. Karanth points out, for example, that while the much-publicized poaching of tigers for body parts is undoubtedly harmful, the poaching of the tiger's ungulate prey is likely to be equally, or more, disastrous. An especially attractive feature of the book is the pains the author

takes to refute age-old and popular myths about tigers. For example, many people believe that white tigers are a separate race that need to be conserved (they are merely genetic mutants), or that keeping tigers in captivity by private citizens somehow contributes to tiger conservation (this is a colossal delusion). As another reviewer notes, Dr. Karanth's criticism of the concept of 'sustainable use' of tiger habitats by humans is interesting. This fashionable concept, so dear to social activists who know little and care less about tiger conservation, cannot be applied to tiger range countries like India. This is because the number of potential consumers of products from tiger habitats is out of all proportion to the available resource base. Sacrificing, on the altar of 'sustainable use', the few protected areas where breeding tigresses still thrive can only spell doom for the species. Dr. Karanth ends the book on an optimistic note: given the tiger's history of survival under extremely adverse conditions, there is a hope for this magnificent King of Cats if rational action, based on sound science, is applied to tiger conservation. The deep sense of hopelessness about the fate of wild tigers that one often comes across in the media is useless at best and counter-productive at worst. The first thing that concerned people should do if their efforts are not to be downright harmful to the survival prospects of tigers is to get informed before intervening. This book is a splendid attempt to provide such information.

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