

Book review

Lions and Leopards as Game Ranch Animals. Proceedings of a Symposium on Lions and Leopards as Game Ranch Animals, held 24 & 25 October 1997. J van Heerden (ed.). Wildlife Group of the South African Veterinary Association, Onderstepoort, South Africa. 265 pp. Price: R110-00 (South Africa); US\$45.00 (outside South Africa). ISBN 1-875088-09-1.

Ecotourism is a major and burgeoning industry in southern Africa, near the top of the list as an attractant of foreign revenue and crucial in the economies of several countries. A plethora of privately-owned Game Reserves and Game Farms vie with each other to host these dollar-dangling tourists. Most successful are those Reserves which offer sightings of the renowned "Big Five" Lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo and rhino. Given our poor understanding of the management of these species in small conservation areas, and the growing demand by game farmers for these animals, I was therefore delighted to receive a copy of the Proceedings of this workshop. This would hopefully be the long-awaited reference guide helping game ranchers to manage their large predators.

However, the book, because this is how the 265-page proceedings is now being marketed, falls somewhat short of this expectation. The only clear focus of the book is that it deals with lions and leopards. There is no introduction to provide any context for either the workshop or the book, no indication of which target audience the book is aimed at, nor what it aims to achieve. Instead it dives straight into the first of 26 scientific/semi-scientific contributions, each between three to 24 pages in length. These papers cover a wide range of themes ranging from *The liona biblical overview* (which provides zero insight or guidance into ranching these animals) to *Larger carnivores on game ranches* (one of the few papers which more or less directly addresses the theme of the book implied by its title). Rather than being a book explaining the benefits of including lions and leopards on game farms, and how to go about

managing them, this book is a scattershot collection of summarised but unfocussed information on much of what is known about their general biology, some insights into the interaction between the predators and humans, capture and care techniques, and a good number of detailed contributions on the diseases of these two animal species.

Apart from the general impression that the book lacks central focus and cohesion, the organisers did an excellent job of getting an impressive list of people to contribute in the writing of this volume. The various papers are written by the very best practitioners in their fields, and the book will receive instant credibility amongst the scientific community. Despite the uncoordinated presentation of the contents of the book, the individual contributions are generally of high standard with clear, no-frills presentation of facts. However, very few of the authors are context-sensitive or reader-friendly, and whoever buys this book to glean useful information on farming these animals will have to do a lot of reading-between-the-lines. Much useful information is provided, but you have to wade around to find the nuggets.

In short, this is not a book for the game rancher himself, but rather a reference text for a veterinarian or wildlife consultant whom the game rancher will consult. For these specialists the book will be a definite asset and a worthwhile addition to their libraries.

Leo Braack

Head: Scientific Services, Kruger National Park, P/Bag X402, Skukuza 1350.