

Bookshelf

OUR BOOK SELECTIONS THIS TIME ARE BOTH MAMMAL REFERENCES BUT THEY REPRESENT OPPOSITE ENDS OF A SPECTRUM IN TERMS OF SIZE, AMBITION AND COVERAGE. ONE IS A MAGNIFICENT MAMMOTH OF A BOOK, THE OTHER A LITTLE GEM OF LOCAL EXPERTISE.

This behemoth of a book comes from the team behind the definitive bird reference *Handbook of the Birds of the World* (HBW), which holds pride of place in the libraries of ornithologists around the globe.

For some time, the closest thing to a comprehensive mammalogy reference has been *Walker's Mammals of the World* – at two volumes and 1 900 pages of small, densely packed text, it's a goldmine of high quality information. But the competition just got a lot bigger and heavier, and an awful lot more expensive. Volume One of the *Handbook of the Mammals of the World* (or HMW as it will inevitably be known) covers one order, the carnivores (not including the seals, sea lions or walrus which will come later with the other marine mammals). This volume alone is over 700 pages, and retails at a heart-stopping £149.99. There are seven more volumes to come.

This is clearly not a book for the casual naturalist. It's aimed at academics, professional naturalists and library collections. This said, the production is far superior to that of the average academic text, a feast for the eyes as well as grist to the mills of the mind. The pages are large and glossy, featuring

stunning colour photography and exquisite plates illustrating the members of each group. Packed around the images is the text. Dense, authoritative, highly structured and amply referenced, this takes the form of family introductions (those for the larger groups are in themselves the equal of many existing monographs on the same taxa), followed by species accounts. Here, HMW can claim something unique and wonderful. Every species has its own entry. In Britain we're used to this level of coverage – our 80 or so resident species are all fairly well known and we expect to see them covered in any book claiming to be comprehensive. But for other more biodiverse parts of the world, this has never been the case. There are too many mammals, many of them only scantily known. Traditionally these are lumped together, robbed of their identity for the sake of convenience. Even Walker covered many of these inconvenient rabbles in generic batches, a treatment that allowed for the inclusion of much useful information but which sometimes left the researcher in a quandry over specifics such as, say, the body length of an Angolan slender mongoose (*Galerella flavescens*). Members of genera such as *Galerella* are often described with generic statistics such as a size

range of 25.4–42cm. In the HMW, however, the figures and notes accompanying each species are as detailed as current knowledge allows. (Head-body length of our Angolan friend is 33.5–35.5cm, if you were wondering.)

The taxonomy used in HMW is that of Wilson and Reeder, the long-accepted standard for mammals, last updated in 2005. HMW also offers numerous 'improvements', based mostly on molecular studies. Within the Carnivora, this means familiar families including the Felidae (cats), Ursidae (bears), Hyaenidae (hyaenas), and Mustelidae (weasels and relatives) are joined by groups previously awarded subfamilial recognition, such as the skunks (Mephitidae) and the linsangs (Prionodontidae). There is also recognition of the monophyletic origins of the Madagascan carnivores, including the fosa and falanoucs, which go under the umbrella Eupleridae. Of the 'new' families, two contain just one species, the Naniniidae (African palm civet) and the Ailuridae (red panda).

All in all this outstanding project will be 10 years in the making, which is probably just about time to save the small fortune required to own a copy for yourself.

AMY-JANE BEER

READ ON



Handbook of the Mammals of the World

is edited by Don E Wilson and Russell A Mittermier and will be published in at least eight volumes between now and 2016 by Lynx Edicions. Volume 1, Carnivores is available now, RRP £149.99.

READ ON



The Mammals of Suffolk by Simone Bullion

Bullion is published by Harper Perennial, and available from SWT priced £20 plus £3.50 p&p. To order call 01473 890089 or send a cheque made out to SWT Trading Ltd to SWT, Brooke House, The Green, Ashbocking, Ipswich, IP6 9JY.



IAN WHITE

One of the disadvantages of producing a hardback mammal fauna is that it is out of date as soon as it is published. However, Simone Bullion, in *The Mammals of Suffolk*, has managed to produce a book that is a lot more than a collection of distribution maps for a single county. She has been greatly helped by her southerly location; Suffolk, at one time or another, has been home to most of our mammal fauna with the exception of wildcat, pine marten and

mountain hare – but then Suffolk is not known for its mountains or pine wood habitats. The book is an informative introduction to most of our current mammal fauna, beautifully illustrated with stunning photographs. In addition there are notes on species protection, status and field signs which I found useful, after all – how *do* you tell the difference between a water vole hole and a brown rat burrow? The present mammal distribution in the county is compared with that recorded by George Rope in

1885 and there are a number of references to current mammal research which means the book is well up to date. If I have a regret, it is the name of the book; a more ambiguous title such as "*Southern Britain's Mammals (and their distribution in Suffolk)*" might make it more accessible to a general audience and get it the wider audience it richly deserves.