

Bookshelf

JIM JONES AND AMY-JANE BEER HAVE BEEN TAKING A LOOK AT THREE RECENTLY PUBLISHED BOOKS THAT WOULD MAKE A WORTHWHILE ADDITION TO YOUR BOOKSHELVES.

I challenge anyone to abide by the rule to never judge a book by its cover when faced with the sleek lines and inquisitive nose and whiskers of the animal on the front of *Otters*. A sighting of this beautiful, much celebrated creature is one of those rare encounters that imprints forever upon the mind.

Author Hans Kruuk, whose field experiments helped bring the field of behavioural ecology to prominence, makes 'no excuse for being somewhat infatuated [with otters]'. His research has focused on carnivores and he has written seminal monographs of the Eurasian badger and otter.

This book extends Kruuk's

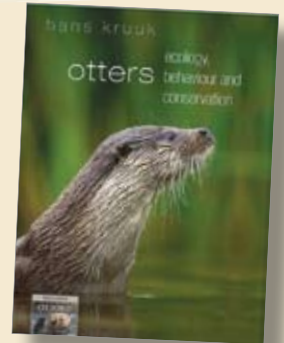
earlier monograph on the Eurasian Otter (*Wild Otters*, OUP 1995) to cover all 16 otter species. The book commences with a series of pen portraits setting out the differences between them before adopting a synthesised approach in chapters dealing with habitat, social organisation, social behaviour, hunting and diet. Kruuk emphasises the similarity between species, useful in sharing research hypotheses. For instance the need for fresh water for Eurasian otters inhabiting sea coasts is reflected in the similar ecology and behaviour of the North American river otter and the Cape clawless otter.

Kruuk's background as a field scientist comes across in his

vivid and almost lyrical direct observations of his subject animals. The personal style and illustrations do not compromise the rigorously researched facts making it accessible to amateurs and professionals alike.

Kruuk emphasises recent research and conservation initiatives and places otter studies in the wider context of general ecology and conservation biology. Pollution remains a threat to many otter species and the further impacts of over-fishing and whaling mean that the plight of otters remains a conservation concern worldwide.

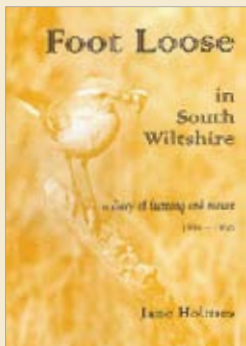
JIM JONES



READ ON



Otters: ecology, behaviour and conservation, is published by Oxford University Press in hardback, RRP £32.50.



Foot Loose in South Wiltshire is a diary, written by Jane Holmes between 1936 and

1950. Three generations later, it seems impossible that there were opportunities at such a time to wander the countryside, enjoying and recording wildlife, to get on with life, and not spend ones waking hours wholly obsessed with the fears of war. And yet, within the first few pages of this book, I found myself ensconced in a life where hours of backbreaking labour left no time for doom and gloom, and where days off involved excursions on foot, push bike or pony, or occasionally by bus or hitched rides. In place of DVDs, shopping malls and multiplexes there were the subtler sensory pleasures of a countryside yet to be subject to intensive farming and in place of pseudo-celebrity claptrap there was fascination to be had in the routines, traditions and gossip of rural life. Jane, now in her 80s, recorded it all with fond brevity and evocative but refreshingly unmaawkish turns of phrase. Her descriptions make the world of 60 years ago feel immediately

familiar. It's diary writing at its best – unselfconscious, enlightening and totally engaging. I loved it.

The feeling of helplessness experienced watching a wild animal suffer is probably familiar to most people. Usually the best option is to call the RSPCA or a local wildlife hospital and hope that they can help. Some might be tempted to intervene more directly, either by delivering the animal concerned to a vet or rescue centre, or attempting to care for it themselves. But what exactly is the right thing to do with a catted blackbird, a mangle-blighted fox, a broken badger or a starving hedgehog? Who do you call and what should you do in the time before help arrives? Who will pay for veterinary care and what are the chances that any of this will actually do any good? For answers to all these questions and hundreds more, Angela Wilkes has written *Wildlife Rescue* – an easy-to-read but authoritative manual of wildlife care. The book offers a wealth of background knowledge, practical advice on preventing accidents and injuries to wildlife as well as dealing

with the aftermath, up-to-date contact information and numerous case studies. There are whole chapters dedicated to hedgehogs, foxes, badgers and rodents and their relatives, as well as chapters dealing with birds and other wildlife. A useful and timely book, which will undoubtedly save some lives.

AMY-JANE BEER



READ ON



Wildlife Rescue by Angela Wilkes is published by Broadcast Books, www.broadcastbooks.co.uk RRP £15.95

READ ON



Foot Loose in South Wiltshire by Jane Holmes is published by Hobnob Press, RRP £7.95. It is available direct from www.hobnobpress.co.uk