

**Chasing the Dragon's Tail: The Struggle to Save Thailand's Wild Cats**, by Alan Rabinowitz. Doubleday, New York, 1991. 241 pp. US\$ 22.50.

It is difficult to place this book either as the random thoughts of an eminent field biologist or the mildly eccentric views of a visiting foreigner to Thailand. Clearly written for the US market who must believe that all their field scientists experience adventures akin to Hollywood stars, it offers few insights for those of us living in Thailand.

Nobody with any knowledge of field research in tropical forests can doubt the difficulties which are more often than not encountered. Most animals are nocturnal and their sightings are few and far between. The terrain is exhausting to traverse and the climate debilitating; all of which require great endurance and patience. This part of Dr. Rabinowitz's work is vividly described but all too often his misunderstanding of local customs seems to have undermined some of his strenuous efforts to come to terms with both the alien environment and the people provided to assist him.

The area which Dr. Rabinowitz researched over a period of two years represents a tiny part of Huai Kha Khaeng's magnificent wildlife sanctuary. It is rich in large mammal species and thanks to his pioneering work, the mapping and telemetry of mammals has advanced greatly over the past few years, leading to knowledge which may contribute to their conservation in Thailand. As Dr. Rabinowitz has published a prolific number of scientific papers it would have been useful if more of this information had been made available for this book

"Chasing the Dragon's Tail" we must assume refers to what seems to have been an endlessly frustrating time for Dr. Rabinowitz whether dealing with the vagaries of the Thai bureaucratic system, the complexities of the Thai language or the very real difficulties of capturing live wild animals for research. His sad but amusing story of returning to the sanctuary after a brief interlude only to find that his dog had been eaten by the research station's staff because it was considered dangerous, is instructive — quite understandable to a Thai but repugnant to westerner.

Some readers may also take exception to the subsidiary title of this book which implies that one man could indeed save Thailand's wild cats. He has outlined some of the myriad problems confronting all conservation efforts in Thailand but tended to ignore some of the real progress that has been made over the past few years. This book is a good racy read but provides few solutions to the ongoing battle to save Thailand's wildlife.

*Mark Graham*

Communication Resources Thailand, Ltd.  
56 Suriwongse Road  
Bangkok 10500