

**Wild Thailand**, photographs by Gerald Cubitt, text by Belinda Stewart-Cox. Asia Books, 208 pp.

*Wild Thailand* is a very beautiful book. Unashamedly of the coffee table genre, its more than 400 superb colour photos portray the spectacular scenery and diverse wildlife of Thailand's wild places with affection. Nearly all the photographs are high quality, crystal clear and reproduced to a high standard. Most of the text is in a lengthy introduction which explains Thailand's regional geography and geological history, and provides a concise account of principal wildlife habitats and flora and fauna. The section on origins and evolution is a little difficult to follow. It jumps around so much in time and place that it fails to convey a potted geological history of the country. Simple diagrams showing the various tectonic upheavals and sinkages would have helped. The section could quite logically have been combined with that on landforms which follows it. On the other hand, the section on the history of nature conservation in Thailand was clear and to the point.

The individual chapters focus on each region, with an introductory section followed by descriptions of 33 of the most important national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and sometimes broader areas like the Mekong River. The description of each area tends to be rather skimpy but the essential information is there and anyway it is difficult to concentrate on reading text when it is surrounded by such superb photographs. A lot more information can be gleaned from the lengthy captions to the photographs.

The pictures and text tend to tell two contrasting stories. The photographs inspire wonder at the sheer beauty and diversity of Thailand's natural treasures and they remind the reader that there is still much that is worth saving. A quick flick through the volume gives the false impression that Thailand is an unspoiled naturalist's paradise. Only a handful of photographs portray the dangers facing Thailand's wildlife. The text, on the other hand, constantly reminds readers of species which are extinct or nearly so and the threats to individual sites, such as the proposed Kaeng Seu Ten Dam in Mae Yom National Park and the extensive encroachment in Doi Suthep-Pui National Park. Logging and encroachment are often mentioned, but hunting hardly at all.

The book is designed to impress. Readers will undoubtedly be motivated to go out and see for themselves some of the areas portrayed in the book and perhaps some will become active conservationists. When I was younger, books like this played a major role in inspiring me to become a conservationist and I would have no doubt that *Wild Thailand* will have a similar effect on some of Thailand's younger generation. A Thai language edition in a cheaper format and a section on how to become actively involved in conservation would help in this respect.

*Stephen Elliott*  
Department of Biology  
Chiang Mai University