

# REVIEWS

- BOOKS
- TV
- RADIO
- DIGITAL
- MOVIES



Two rival males engage in a skirmish over territory. Such conflicts can be intense and violent.

BOOK OF THE MONTH

## NATURE'S DECEPTORS

The story of the famous nest trespasser.

**The Cuckoo: The Uninvited Guest**

Oldrich Mikulica et al Wild Nature Press £24.99



It isn't often, even in these days of increasingly breathtaking photography, that a bird book comes along and leaves you speechless with admiration. For its outstanding images, text and overall design, this 'uninvited guest' is more than welcome. The photos, all taken by Oldrich Mikulica over several years, are of superb artistry and quality, and provide us with an intimate series of glimpses into the endlessly fascinating world of the common cuckoo. Researchers have discovered a great deal about the species' biology, but photographers, thanks to their unrivalled patience, often see and capture things overlooked or rarely seen by others. The images here – of the birds themselves, and their eggs, chicks and food – are presented in a wonderfully effective and comprehensive way. This isn't simply a picture book, however – the text has an accessible, engaging style, and is up to date, scholarly and eminently readable. My bird book of the year.

**Tim Birkhead** Ornithologist

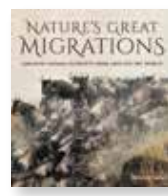


**Driftfish**

Edited by Susan Richardson and James Roberts Zoomorphic £12.99

A beautifully crafted anthology of essays, stories and poetry from online magazine *Zoomorphic*, this is a celebration of sealife in all its infinite forms by a long list of contemporary – but mostly unfamiliar – contributors. Unsurprisingly, whales are particularly well represented, with British writer Sarah Thomas skilfully capturing the guilty thrill of witnessing a whale hunt while hitchhiking in the Faroe Islands, and American explorer James Michael Dorsey relating an exhilarating encounter kayaking alongside a pod of hunting orcas.

**Pete Dommert** Nature writer



**Nature's Great Migrations**

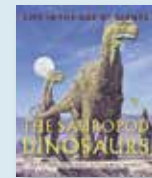
By Marianne Taylor New Holland £16.99

The epic journeys of migratory animals pose some of nature's most tantalising conundrums: where, why and how do some species travel many thousands of kilometres across or between hemispheres or oceans? Taylor tackles these head-scratchers for 25 wandering creatures – great and small – in a lively style that covers reproduction, feeding, conservation concerns and the mysteries of navigation. Some lacklustre maps and photos are minor weaknesses in an accessible introduction to a diverse crew of globetrotters.

**Paul Bloomfield** Travel writer



A herd of North American diplodocids *Barosaurus lentus* in search of fresh browse.



**The Sauropod Dinosaurs: Life in the Age of Giants**

Mark Hallett, Mathew J Wedel Johns Hopkins University Press £26

Size isn't everything – except when it comes to dinosaurs. The largest were the long-necked sauropods, of which *Diplodocus* is arguably the best-known example. Despite their bulk, these herbivorous giants have received less coverage than their scarier,

carnivorous cousins, such as *Tyrannosaurus*, but this remarkable book helps to redress this imbalance. Blending hard evidence with informed speculation, it offers a complete guide to the science of the sauropods, from the history of their discovery and evolution to their biological basics. From this flows a plausible and readable reconstruction of lifestyle and behaviour, including how they might have moved, fed, socialised and interacted with the Mesozoic world around them. A must-have for any dinosaur enthusiast.

**Paul Chambers** Palaeontologist

Xxxxxx



**Orchid: A Cultural History**

By Jim Endersby Kew Publishing £22

Few orchid books are as fascinating as this. Jim Endersby explores the grip of these exotic flowers on the human imagination, reflected in literature from antiquity. Their beauty has appealed to a gamut of emotions – romance, lust, avarice, jealousy – and no other plant family has become so deeply embedded in fiction and poetry. Melding art and science, this original title reminds us that the destruction of biodiversity also inflicts damage on our shared culture, a fundamental attribute of human existence.

**Phil Gates** Botanist



**The Rhinoceros and the Megatherium**

By Juan Pimentel Harvard University Press £22.95

Scientific progress needs more than cold facts and rationality: it also requires a dose of imagination, according to Juan Pimentel. He argues that what we know about the giant ground sloth *Megatherium* (which now exists only as bones) and the Indian rhinoceros (which until 1515 was known only in the west from a few fantastical drawings) owes much to our delectation for a good story. No imagination would mean no theories of natural selection or relativity – indeed no interesting questions at all.

**Stuart Blackman** Science writer

### MEET THE AUTHOR

## Nigel Hicks

After a career photographing the far-flung, Nigel is now focussing his lens on the local.



### What's special about the south-west?

For a remarkably small area, it has a hugely varied environment. Unlike most of England, population and industrial pressures in the south-west are relatively light, so there is still a significant amount of open space. And the region did not suffer the same level of environmental damage as the rest of the country during the 1960s–80s, so it's something of a wildlife reservoir.

### Which part are you most fond of?

The 'toe' of land between Penzance and Land's End. I grew up here and the rugged remoteness still appeals.

### Can you suggest three unmissable locations?

First, the Isles of Scilly. The quality of the light, the colours of the water and the curves of the sandy bays and rocky islets are stunning. Second, the Avalon Marshes of the Somerset Levels. The flooded remains of former peat-extraction sites, these are a mix of open water, reed-lined marshes, boggy woodland and seasonally flooded grasslands, and give a sense of what much of the Levels must have been like before they were drained hundreds of years ago. Third, Cornwall's Atlantic coast, for the sheer raw power of the ocean.

### What wildlife rarities are found in the south-west?

There's the Eurasian bittern, European spoonbill and great white egret, all of which have started to recolonise parts of the UK after long absences. In the sea, the westernmost coasts see basking sharks

“THE REGION IS SOMETHING OF A WILDLIFE RESERVOIR.”

regularly, along with the occasional leatherback turtle and sunfish.

### Any memorable wildlife encounters?

I once came across a newborn seal pup making its way down to the sea. Its beautifully cute face did not match the very threatening snarl it gave as I approached.

### Did any species elude you while writing the book?

Kingfisher and roe deer! Both will get priority treatment in my next project.

### Where are the best places to escape the crowds?

Just about anywhere if you venture more than 200 yards from any rural or coastal car park. Just start walking and you'll soon leave almost everyone behind.



● **WILD SOUTHWEST** offers an overview of the landscapes and wildlife of Devon, Cornwall, Somerset and Dorset (*Aquaterra Publishing*, £14.99) [www.aquaterrapublishing.co.uk](http://www.aquaterrapublishing.co.uk)