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Tiger Tales: Tracking the Big Cat Across Asia

Ullas K. Karanth

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The tiger s enduring appeal has generated a vast body of literature. This anthology, compiled from non-fiction sources by tiger scientist and conservationist K. Ullas Karanth, opens up a captivating world of rich descriptions, deeply felt personal experiences and serious reflections by hunters, amateur naturalists and wildlife scientists who encountered this most charismatic of all animal species. The first section of the book explores tiger hunting and old-style natural history, and revives some of the earliest essays on the tiger. Historian Mahesh Rangarajan s overview of the pre-colonial and colonial periods, when ruthless hunting of tigers was the dominant social ethos, sets the stage for English forester C.E.M. Russell s narration of tiger hunting in Mysore, published in 1900. Then follow tales by hunter-naturalists Dunbar Brander, Fred Champion, Kenneth Anderson, William Bazé and Arthur Locke. The descriptions by more recent and less justifiably bloodthirsty hunters, such as Kesri Singh, a game manager in princely India, and Jack Denton Scott, an American safari hunter, provide grim examples of the slaughter of tigers. The second section covers the post-colonial period. This was the era when a new natural history , driven by the sheer joy of watching tigers, emerged leading to the first steps to save this magnificent cat from the brink of extinction. Essays by forest managers such as A. Hoogerwerf, Kailash Sankhala and Vladimir Troinin, who were fascinated by the tiger, are complemented by the writings of perceptive amateur naturalists such as E.P. Gee, Arjan Singh and Valmik Thapar. In the last section the reader steps into the world of modern tiger science and conservation. An account of the first-ever scientific study of tigers by George Schaller is followed by the observations of other biologists, such as John Seidensticker, Melvin Sunquist, Dale Miquelle and John Goodrich, who followed in Schaller s footsteps and generated new insights into tiger ecology and behaviour. The concluding essay, by naturalist-historian Geoffrey Ward, offers a lucid overview of current tiger conservation issues. With its judicious blend of adventure, natural history and tiger science, this anthology will appeal to wildlife enthusiasts as well as serious conservationists.

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