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Book review — Boekresensie

Proceedings of a symposium on lions and leopards as game ranch animals

Edited by J van Heerden

1997. South African Veterinary Association Wildlife Group, Onderstepoort, South Africa, 265pp. Price R100 (excl. postage). ISBN 1 875088 09 1.

The proceedings were made available to delegates at the annual Wildlife Group symposium held on the 24 and 25 October 1997. People from a number of disciplines and all experts in their field have made contributions to the proceedings. The topics covered included sociality and ecology of lions and leopards in the wild, lion genetics, census and capture techniques, handraising and veterinary management, a disease overview, parasites and trophy hunting.

The proceedings open with a biblical overview of lions by Pastor R Schmid. An international contribution by Dr Linda Munson (world-renowned veterinary pathologist with a special interest in wild carnivores) discusses the canine distemper virus outbreak in lions in the Serengeti and what the implications are for wild felid populations in South Africa and elsewhere. Prof. J du P Bothma gives us a glimpse into the life and times of the leopard, elusive creature that it is. He reiterated the importance of the leopard, and other large carnivores, in attracting tourists to Africa. Karen Trendler shares information on handrearing large carnivores and emphasises that they pose a unique set of problems especially once they have grown a 'little' and their hunting instincts become stronger. Dr Dewald Keet's paper discusses the role of the lion and cheetah in the epidemiology of tuberculosis in the Kruger National Park. This disease is becoming a serious threat to one of the largest natural lion populations in the world and has implications for the private landowner.

The proceedings provide a good source of up-to-date information on lions and leopards. It is a worthwhile acquisition for researchers, veterinarians, game ranchers or lay persons with an interest in large carnivores. After reading these proceedings one realises that the stability of Africa's natural lion and leopard populations is under threat, not only from 'man the predator' and loss of habitat but also from exotic and emerging new diseases like tuberculosis and canine distemper virus. While other species are effectively protected on smaller, private lands, large carnivores are not really suited to the game ranching scenario, emphasising the importance of large protected areas for the conservation of these species.

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