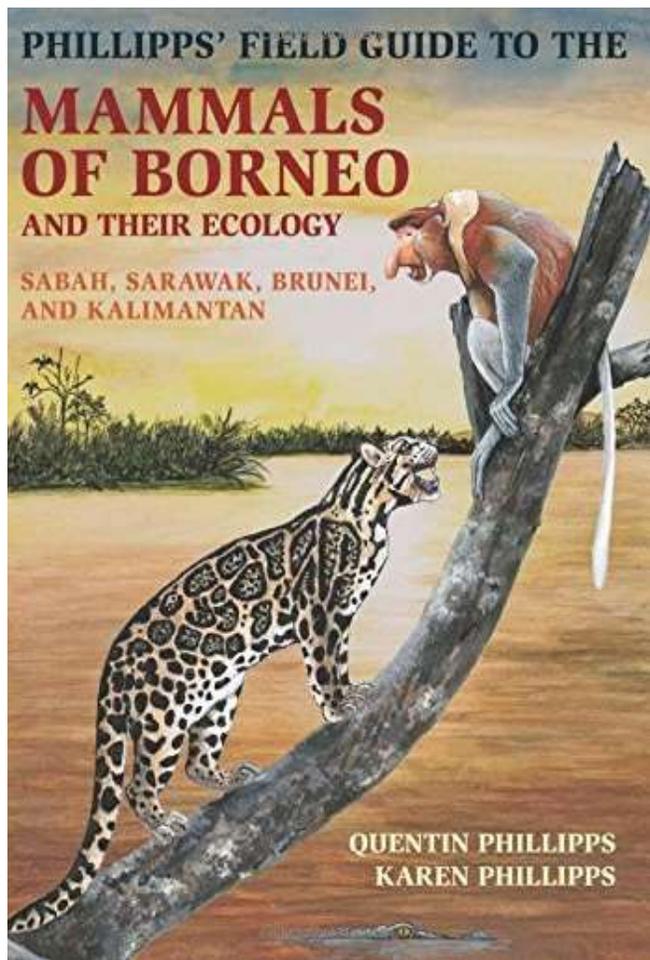


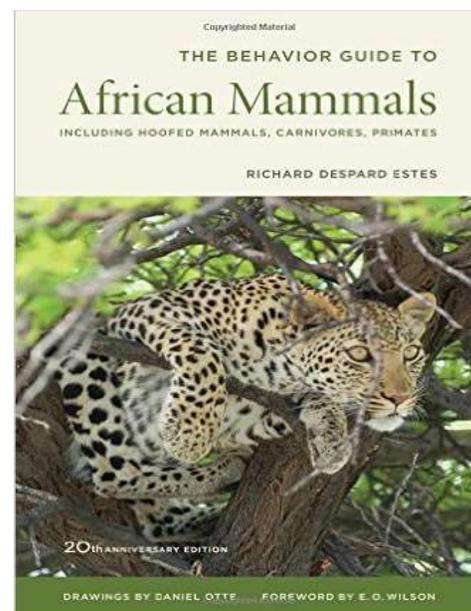
BOOK REVIEW



It is tempting to exclaim “**FINALLY**”. The long wait for a book that combines the “field guide” format with wider behavioural ecology of a species is over. Quentin Phillipps and Karen Phillipps, both known for co-authoring other natural history books about Bornean wildlife, have endeavoured to write a book about Borneo’s mammals that includes information about their ecology. It is said to be “*the most comprehensive, up-to-date, and easily accessible field guide to the mammals of Borneo -- the ideal travel companion for anyone visiting this region of the world*”. It covers Sabah, Sarawak, Brunei, and Kalimantan, providing essential information on 277 species of land and marine mammals and features 141 detailed colour plates on 400 pages. Detailed facing-page species accounts describe taxonomy, size, range, distribution, habits, and status. This unique at-a-glance guide also includes distribution maps, habitat plates, regional maps, fast-find graphic indexes, top mammal sites, and a complete overview of the vegetation, climate, and ecology of Borneo.

The task of providing information about mammals’ ecology is huge, and the authors fall short of matching the monumental standard of the classic “*The Behavior Guide to African Mammals*” by Richard D. Estes. To be fair, however, it must be noted that the available information about the behavioural ecology of Bornean mammals is dwarfed by the piles of publications available for most African mammals. Consequently, many “popular” mammals such as orangutan, proboscis monkey, gibbons, Sumatran rhino and Bornean elephants are described comprehensively, including conservation status and actions, whereas less known species are afforded information similar to a standard guidebook. However, the authors could improve a future edition of the book significantly by providing comprehensive information about *every* mammal species, where this is possible. There exists a number of species, where comprehensive studies have taken place and extensive knowledge readily available, for example, long-time macaque, pig-tailed macaque, porcupines, various civets and leopard cat, just to mention a few.

The book begins with a few useful chapters. Particularly important are the chapters on Borneo’s general ecology i.e. the interactions between plants and mammals. Even if these chapters only touches the surface of very complicated topics, such as seed-dispersal and migration, they add a very important holistic context to the information about each species.



Richard D. Estes set a benchmark for books about the “behaviour guide” subject. His book on African mammals has become a classic.

The authors have also included a range of extinct species in the book. This may seem rather peculiar and somewhat irrelevant to the general reader. However, the opening chapters include a short history of the Pleistocene era and how the great Sundaland emerged and disappeared again. The past, undoubtedly, provides contemporary conservation biologists with important information that ought to be considered in modern mammal conservation initiatives, and this justifies the relevance of these chapters. The only problem with including extinct species is that it opens “Pandora’s box” --- why are some species included, e.g. extinct rhinos and elephants, and not others?

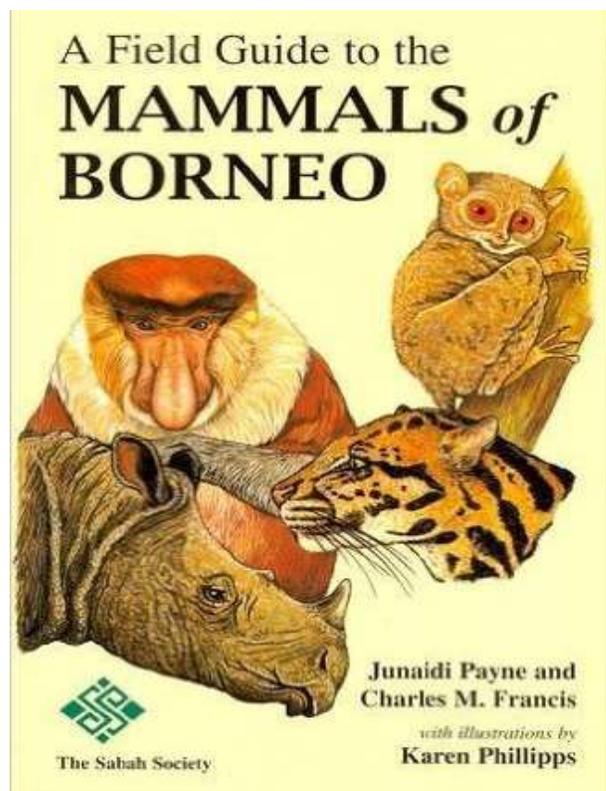
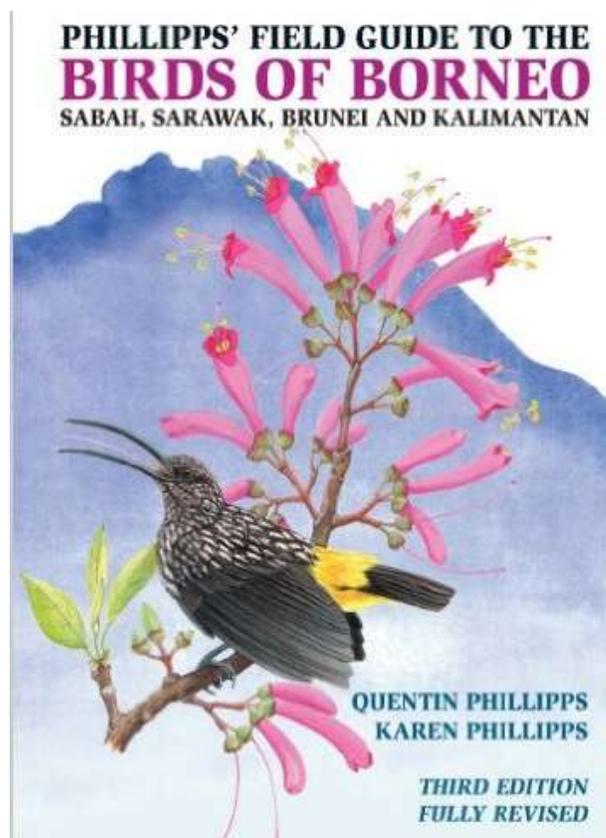
Understandably, every book has its limitation and cannot include every detail of each past and present mammal species. In this case, however, the book will benefit if the authors account for their choices, or divide it according to certain criteria along with providing justification for highlighting these, for example, large herbivores or “primates”.

One of the book’s biggest attraction is Karen Phillipps marvellous colour sketches. All species, maps, plants, drawings and illustrations are in colour. Another big plus is the conservation information provided, even if only for a few select species.

Despite a few short-comings this book is an awesome and welcome addition to all with an interest in Southeast Asian mammals.

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Other books by the same authors.