



*BOOK REVIEW*

**Jane Carruthers, *National Park Science: A Century of Research in South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 554 pp., illus., bibl., \$67.72 Hardback, ISBN 9781107191440**

This fine book tells South Africa's tumultuous history through the lens of scientific research in its national parks. Since the unification of the country in 1910, these parks have played an important nation-building role, while at the same time, they have primarily served the interests of privileged game hunters. They have helped to empower white chauvinism and the apartheid regime while also leading to path-breaking research, especially in the field of conservation biology. This terrain of contentious history requires some careful maneuvering, and Jane Carruthers has done an excellent job of laying out its complex histories.

As a contribution to the Ecology, Biodiversity and Conservation series at Cambridge University Press, the book caters especially to scientists, though historians of biology will surely also find it interesting. Carruthers has written a detailed account of the life and work of numerous scientists in South Africa's many parks, and she has supplemented her arguments with rich footnotes in which she refers mostly to published scientific material. The book is divided into three historical sections: 1900 to 1960, 1960s to 1990s, and 1990 to 2010, which corresponds roughly to the period before, during and after apartheid. These political contexts are important but do not dominate in her explanation of how research came about in the national parks.

The period before apartheid, Carruthers argues, was marked by the parks being established chiefly to keep the public away from areas reserved for white hunters. Over time, the agenda of the parks gradually shifted towards protection and biological conservation, along with propagation of desired animals. Perhaps the highlight of her analysis is the description of tensions that evolved between biologists, specifically zoologists, and veterinarians, with the zoologists arguing in favor of wildlife conservation and the veterinarians in favor of defense of livestock.

The apartheid regime resulted in white people getting an even firmer grip on and access to the national parks than they had previously. Carruthers argues that the racist policies also led to an overarching

bureaucratic mindset among park managers and scientists. The racist policies of the state divided people into groups, counted them, and placed them in discrete localities based on racial profiles implemented by local committees. This approach, she points out, “chimed well with the kinds of measuring, monitoring, describing and also controlling of plants and wild animals that were encouraged in South Africa’s national parks” by scientists and park managers alike during apartheid (p. 148). It is an interesting and convincing argument on how a political regime came to nurture a certain scientific culture.

The end of apartheid initially led to a questioning of the role of national parks. To the critics, they seemed to have served “the pet interests of wealthier whites” (p. 319). Yet their famed wildlife, drew both scientists and tourists, especially those from the global North, to the parks, and the needs and interests of the visitors became crucial for energizing local resort economies. The lifting of academic and economic sanctions in the 1990s also led to better integration of South African scientific communities with the rest of the world. The result was both increased innovation, and the internationalization of their research.

Carruthers places the Kruger National Park at the core of her story because of its significance to the many scientists working there. The most important tension among scientists trying to find out how to best serve the park was related to culling of species, especially elephants. While the world opinions about animal rights and managerial practices could be dismissed during the apartheid regime, with the end of the regime, park authorities became much more sensitive to what potential eco-tourists would think. Carruthers shows that the question of whether to pursue elephant culling brought South African scientists together with researchers in the rest of the southern Africa and indeed the international world of elephant science.

Chapter 5 stands out for those looking for a suitable chapter to assign students in a course about the history of conservation science and environmentalism. It provides a nice overview of South African politics during the apartheid regime and what it entailed for the country’s national parks. It may offer a class discussion about the ways in which a political regime may shape scientific research.

Carruthers has done a fine job in bringing together new and exciting material about the history of scientific research in national parks. Her analysis is non-provocative, and, as a result, she provides some truth and reconciliation to the contested issue of race and the somber history of white researchers’ entitlements. Her book is a valuable and timely

contribution to the history of biology in South Africa that is worth both time and attention.

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