

## Carnivores of the World

By Luke Hunter. 2011. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey, 08540-5237 USA. 240 pages. 29.95 USD. Paper.

When this book arrived I flicked through and noted it contained the Giant Panda, a vegetarian. A second flick and I realised the seals were missing. On page 1 the author explains the book covers 245 species of *terrestrial* mammals that trace back to a single Paleocene ancestor [hence no seals]. Instead there is a plethora of cats, dogs, weasels, mongooses and bears.

In early 2012 an unknown beast was caught on camera trap regularly feeding on a cow carcass. It was a Giant Panda, so they are not totally vegetarian. However the authors of this book quote “Recorded occasionally scavenging for carrion ...” and so are current with their knowledge.

The book begins with the 120 species of cats. These range from the widespread Wildcat [*Felis sylvestris*]

to the most endangered large cat; the Tiger [*Panthera tigris*]. There are currently 161 species in the dog family. This includes the 36 species of pinnipeds, not covered in this book. Each species has a description, including all the major forms, and notes the distribution and habitat. There follows an account of the animal's feeding and social behaviours. Finally there are sections on reproduction and its current status.

There are 84 plates of drawings of skulls. This is useful in the field because an active naturalist often finds skeletal remains. Perhaps what is more remarkable is how similar these skulls are. You might expect the snubby-nosed cats to be comparable, but you can see the close relationship with the longer-nosed dogs. Clearly nature has evolved a great design for carni-

vore structure and is sticking with it. The last section is 86 plates of footprints, another useful field guide.

The art work is very good. The form depicted is realistic from the little Black-footed Cat to the massive Polar Bear, showing that the artist, Priscilla Barrett, has a field as well as an anatomical knowledge of each species. Where useful the different forms are included. So there are four forms of the Grey Wolf, three for Brown Bear and three sub-species of Tiger. In addition to the coloured depictions there are small black-and-white vignettes of cubs, feeding activities or social behaviour.

I believe the text is accurate and up-to-date. Everything I checked [see my comments on the Giant Panda] was correct. I was disappointed by the limited, but not incorrect, information on the Eastern Wolf (*Canis lycaon*). This may be a subspecies of Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus lycaon*) or a distinct species closely related to

the Red Wolf. This is mentioned in the introductory section on the Canid group, but not in the texts on the individual species.

Because of its size this is a useful field guide and it would be handy to carry anywhere in the world. You will not see a Sea Otter in Africa, but there is still much of the book that would be useful, and this is true for any continent. The problem is not the book, but seeing the beasts. After years of wandering the wild I rarely see a Mink; a very common mammal, and I have not seen a Striped Skunk for three years; another common mammal. Smaller animals are even more difficult to find. If you are lucky enough to see a carnivore this book will help you identify it and learn something of its life.

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