

BOOKS

Living Treasures: An Odyssey through China's Extraordinary Nature Reserves, by Tang Xiyang. Illustrated with more than 300 color photographs. Foreword by S. Dillon Ripley. New York: Bantam Books, Inc.; Peking: New World Press. 208 pages. \$29.95 (\$34.95 in Canada).

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Tang Xiyang, a journalist who was banished, along with his family, to a "reform-through-labor" camp in the Chinese countryside during the Cultural Revolution, has written a delightful and informative book about his adventures in China's superb nature reserves. Tang's total concern, dedication, and unshakable resolve to protect all wildlife in spite of great physical hardship and danger are inspiring. In addition to recounting adventures of his own in more than three hundred of the reserves, he provides data on their environment, topography, and history, and on the present status of their floras and faunas. His writing, pleasantly fluid and absorbing, is complemented by gems of classic Chinese poetry and historical accounts.

China's nature reserve system is undergoing a vigorous period of growth. In a recent three-year period, one hundred seventy new reserves were established—nearly as many as were established in the previous thirty years. I found it particularly interesting to learn of the high protection that China now provides the plants and animals in the reserves. Severe penalties are imposed on those who trap or kill animals, for example.

The "human element" of animals is conveyed in touching vignettes. There is a particularly lovely story about Tang's discover-

ing an unspoiled expanse of "swan lakes" in Xinjiang's Yurdus Basin, where herdsmen live in peaceful coexistence with swans, which they consider to be the bearers of good luck from heaven. In other vignettes elephants display "community spirit," monkeys break open ropes with their teeth to rescue trapped friends. Tang describes the last surviving band of Guizhou golden monkeys, animals so rare that their scientific value is beyond calculation; the crested ibis; the rare reptile that may have prompted the myth of the dragon; the elusive panda.

This compelling and fascinating book is the first-ever joint publishing venture between the American publisher, Bantam Books, and the People's Republic of China. A few photographs, unfortunately, are not sharp; this may be due to the difficulty of holding a camera for long periods while waiting to take a shot. Also, many of the photographs were taken from a great distance. Unfortunately, too, there is no index. Despite its shortcomings, this excellent book is well worth reading.

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