Review: Noninvasive Survey Methods for Carnivores

Robert A. Long, Paula MacKay, William J. Zielinski and Justina C. Ray (Eds.)

Reviewed by Elery Hamilton-Smith

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This is a truly comprehensive overview of the theoretical base, evolution, innovation, current state of practice and future prospects for continuing development. It commences with a discussion of the importance of noninvasive research in carnivore research and conservation. This is followed by a valuable review of the issues in designing field surveys and it then identifies and provides an evaluative description of nine different methodological strategies and concludes with a synthesis and forecast.

The structure and clarity of the text is of exemplary quality with very adequate photographic illustrations and diagrams. The overall result is an excellent textbook and field manual. The fact that the bibliography covers 45 pages both points to the need for this overview of research and at the same time is a good indication of the thoroughness of the text itself.

I find myself reflecting on the extent to which it is more than just a working manual for the field. Much of its inquiry could be valuable to those engaged in ecological studies of any specific habitats. I recall the one of my own students who undertook an analysis of a small island of tropical rainforest and, in her own words, commenced by identifying who ate who. This was largely based upon invertebrate predation and, of course, had to be invasive in order to examine stomach contents. If only the current book had then been available it would have been of great value in leading her to a much better analysis of her results.

Key methodologies that have both made a great contribution and which also hold out the best prospects for continuing development include genetic analysis, remote sensing technology coupled with innovative design, and in particular, the use of detection dogs – probably the most competent of all field staff!

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