

## BOOK REVIEWS

**THE ANNOTATED MALAY ARCHIPELAGO** by Alfred Russel Wallace, edited by John van Wyhe. NUS Press, Singapore, 2015. XVIII + 801 pp, 118 ill. ISBN 978-9971-69-820-1 (paperback). S\$32.00 (c. £16, €22 or US\$24).

**ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE: LETTERS FROM THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO**, edited by John van Wyhe and Kees Rookmaaker. XXXI + 319 pp, 26 ill. Oxford University Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-19-968399-4 (hardback). £16.99 or US\$29.95.

**AM ENDE DES ARCHIPELS – ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE** by Matthias Glaubrecht. Galiani, Berlin, 2013. 442 pp, 12 ill. ISBN 978-3-86971-070-9 (hardback). €24.99.

On my first trip to Southeast Asia as a young rucksack tourist, more years ago than I like to think, I carried two books in my backpack: Lonely Planet's *Southeast Asia on a Shoestring* and the two volumes of the first German edition of *The Malay Archipelago* by Alfred Russel Wallace (1823 – 1913). *Der Malayische Archipel* had been published in the same year as the first British and American editions, 1869. Lest I shock bibliophiles, mine was only a worn copy with heavy foxing of this classic description of the natural history and peoples of what is now Indonesia, Singapore and island Malaysia that I had picked up a couple of years previously in an Edinburgh bookshop for 75p. A copy of the first English-language edition of *The Malay Archipelago* presumably would not have gone that cheap, even in poor condition, but unlike the German, Dutch, Russian and (abridged) French translations, the only ones published during Wallace's lifetime and apparently only in one edition each, the British version went through four editions (ten printings) by 1900, with altogether over 13,000 copies sold. The Japanese translation was only published in 1942, following Japan's occupation of the British and Dutch East Indies during World War II. The most reliable edition until recently may well have been the Dutch one, entitled *Insulinde* (1870 – 1871). The translator and editor, Pieter Johannes Veth (1814 – 1895), a scholar of the geography and ethnography of the Dutch East Indies, corrected many errors that were never remedied in the English revisions. (Wallace learnt Malay during his eight years in the Malay archipelago, but never, apparently, any Dutch.) The edition also featured a better map, drawn to purpose by

Veth's son; the two in the original English edition were apparently recycled from an atlas published in 1865, cluttered with irrelevant information. Ten translations of *The Malay Archipelago* have been published to date, most recently into Italian in 2013, the centenary of Wallace's death.

John von Wyhe, an American historian of science at the National University of Singapore and founder and director of both the Darwin Online and the Wallace Online projects, was approached, as he writes in the Acknowledgements of *The Annotated Malay Archipelago*, by NUS Press with a suggestion to edit an illustrated edition to commemorate too the Wallace centenary. Fortunately, a much more valuable annotated edition has now been published instead. Oxford University Press re-issued a facsimile reprint with a very good, comprehensive introduction by John Bastin, a British historian of modern Southeast Asia, in 1987, but with no corrections to the text. Instead of issuing yet another facsimile, NUS Press re-set the text of the first edition, the most readable I've come across with its larger font and wider spaces. In addition to his own excellent, well-researched introduction, van Wyhe has added over 800 footnotes with corrections, additional information, references and modern readings of obsolete wording, making *The Annotated Malay Archipelago* the most accessible edition to date as well. Wallace was a very good writer, and even today his book is a joy to read – if somewhat depressing when one has seen what's become of Indonesia's fauna and flora in the century since the author's death.

The subtitle of Wallace's classic is *The Land of the Orang-Utan, and the Bird of Paradise*. His main interest, however, appears to have been insects. In his eight years in Southeast Asia, from Spring 1854 into Spring 1862, travelling over 20,000 kilometres, he collected for his own private collection over 20,000 insects representing 7,000 species and over 3,000 birds of some thousand species. His "duplicate" collection, the one he would sell and that would secure him a good income for many years after his return to Britain, encompassed over 125,000 individual specimens, 110,00 of which were insects, including 80,000 beetles. The Victorian age was the heyday of amateur natural history, and the market for zoological specimens, especially small and beautiful collectibles such as beetles and butterflies, was large and wealthy – and not limited to Britain. He was fortunate in having a very well-connected and apparently honest agent in London, to whom he regularly sent parcels by what was already a reliable Dutch and British postal system. If originally a commercial natural history collector, he gradually became a naturalist. Wallace was, as the science writer David Quammen noted in a review in retrospect in *Nature* [Vol. 496 (2013): 165 – 166], "arguably the greatest field biologist of the nineteenth century."

Wallace was the first Western naturalist to observe the Orang-Utan extensively in the wild, and his chapter on the species is presumably the most interesting for the mammalogist. In fact, it is the first field report on the behaviour of the Orang-Utan ever published. He showed great respect and empathy for the great apes – and shot 17. Of these, seven were sent to London as skeletons, in addition to two others

he was able to purchase from other hunters. With that, the number of Orang-Utan skeletons in European collections more than doubled. Of the ten other specimens he hunted – that is what field zoologists of his time would do – he saved only skins and skulls. On his return voyage to London in 1862, he brought with him the first living birds of paradise ever seen in Britain, two male specimens of the Lesser Bird of Paradise (*Paradisaea minor*). They were acquired by London Zoo, which paid Wallace, in addition to a price for the birds, his first-class return passage from Singapore to London. Together that cost the zoo £307 9s, the equivalent in today's money, according to the website Measuring Worth, of approximately £25,000.

An excellent companion to *The Annotated Malay Archipelago* is another book edited by van Wyhe, together with his collaborator on the Darwin and Wallace Online projects in Singapore, the Dutch historian of zoology Kees Rookmaaker. *Alfred Russel Wallace: Letters from the Malay Archipelago* reprints – and annotates – every letter Wallace either wrote or received in Southeast Asia during his travels, as far, of course, as they have survived. Although Wallace was known to correspond regularly with his mother and sister, for example, instead of at least a hundred letters that could be expected only 22 are known to still exist, and not one from his mother. Many letters, especially to his agent and to scholarly friends and acquaintances, were meant to be passed on for publication, and include fascinating descriptions as well as titbits of his travels and travails. In one letter to Charles Darwin (1809 – 1882), dated 30 November 1861, for example, he describes meeting the Prussian geologist Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833 - 1905), the founder of modern geology in China, on a Dutch steamer, and asking him if he was a convert to the new theory of evolution as espoused recently by Darwin in his book *On the Origin of Species*. "It is very easy for a geologist", Richthofen replied with a smile.

The most important, historically, of Wallace's letters is one sent to Charles Darwin in February 1858 from Ternate, a Jersey-size island in the northern Moluccas. Alas the original manuscript is now lost. Know to historians of evolutionary theory as the Ternate essay, it was edited and published in 1858 in the *Journal of the Proceedings of the Linnean Society of London – Zoology*; Darwin had certainly received it. In it, Wallace explained to Darwin his own theory of evolution by means of natural selection, one that, unbeknown to him, Darwin had been filing on independently for years – many more years than Wallace. The two had first met in the natural history galleries of the British Museum in late 1853 or early 1854. As Wallace would later write, Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* (1839) had helped to inspire him to travel first to Brazil in 1848 for four years, and subsequently to Southeast Asia. Once Wallace was in the East Indies, Darwin approached him, apparently after a recommendation, with a letter sent care of his London agent late in 1855. The domestication of animals was pertinent to Darwin's studies of the evolution of species, and Wallace was in a position to contribute observations from the source of the domestic chicken and Bali cattle. The two maintained a lively and friendly correspondence until Darwin's death.

The receipt of Wallace's letter from Ternate set in motion Darwin's first publishing efforts to promote his own theory of evolution. Darwin was known to keep his correspondence; alone the letters published by Cambridge University Press run to 20 fat volumes, with another ten in preparation. The loss of the manuscript from Ternate, of all letters, has led to a cottage industry of conspiracy theories suggesting that Darwin was never quite forthright in acknowledging Wallace's own discovery of what came to be known as Darwinism. In the last 20 years, at least a dozen Wallace biographies in English have reached the market, and all dwell on the controversy. I cannot claim to have read them all (to be honest, I've read only two), but the first book-length biography of Wallace in German, *Am Ende des Archipels*, is certainly an excellent alternative (if one can read German, obviously). Matthias Glaubrecht, author of an earlier biography of Darwin, is uniquely qualified; he is a malacologist and an evolutionary biologist himself, the first director of the new Hamburg Natural History Museum in the making, and a very good writer. He covers Wallace's life and travels in lucid prose, offers a comprehensive review of the Wallace literature to date, and his analysis of the Darwin-Wallace controversy has been compared by German reviewers to a fascinating detective story. The British reviewer of *Am Ende des Archipels* (a title that presumably needs no translation) in the *Archives of Natural History*, the journal of the Society for the History of Natural History, argued for an English translation. Wallace emerges from Glaubrecht's book, as he does from *The Malay Archipelago*, not only as a conscientious naturalist, but as an extremely decent and modest human being with an upright social conscience (left-wing Labour by today's terms, I would guess) and genuine empathy for the indigenous peoples he came across in Southeast Asia and South America. Glaubrecht does permit himself to point out that what's now known as the Wallace Line, the faunal divide between Oriental and Australasian wildlife, was apparently first recognised not by Wallace but by the German naturalist Salomon Müller (1804 – 1863) in a publication dated 1842. German was another language Wallace never learnt.

Having travelled through Southeast Asia himself as a zoologist, Glaubrecht concludes his book with a thoughtful analysis of what has become of Wallace's Malay archipelago. The near-extinction of one animal species after another, the illegal and semi-legal, corruption-fed forestry industries, and clearance of vast tracts of virgin territory to produce just palm oil, are presumably known well enough to educated people outside Indonesia and Malaysia. Glaubrecht's splendid essay describes the tragedy in the context of *The Malay Archipelago*. As to the Darwin-Wallace controversy, Glaubrecht and van Wyhe both remind one that Wallace himself never saw one. *The Malay Archipelago* was dedicated to Charles Darwin.

*Herman Reichenbach*