

**National Parks of Thailand** by Denis Gray, Colin Piprell and Mark Graham. Industrial Finance Corporation of Thailand, Bangkok. 250 pages, Bt 498.

The built-in obsolescence of the guide book genre virtually guarantees a continuing market, and the pace at which national parks are being created (17 since 1991) in Thailand is ample proof. Thus we have an updated edition of the *National Parks of Thailand*, first published in 1991, which adds 14 parks to the original 63.

Seventy-seven of the present 81 national parks, which cover about 13 per cent of the country, are described and accompanied by satellite images, route maps and pictures to complement its packable, bedside table format. Each description contains essential information for a rewarding visit: habitat, wildlife, nature/hiking trails, weather, and getting there.

More parks are in the pipeline, adding up to a goal of 115, a figure that will probably earn Thailand the gold for the highest proportion of protected area in the world.

But locking up the land is not the same as protecting it, and the guide serves as a combined paean and litany: a paean to these priceless assets and a litany of the ravages of greed and need which have slashed the country's forest cover from 70 per cent to under 20 per cent in less than half a century.

The book opens with a broad sweep of the history of the protected area system and the richness of Thailand's endangered flora, fauna and habitat to put the reader on a sound footing for the jog through the park descriptions that follow. It points to the "surprising dearth of research" into the biota of the parks, necessary knowledge for sensible management of protected areas; sadly but truly, we just don't know enough of what's out there.

This preamble is required reading, for this guide is intended to enlighten rather than just inform, to enable the reader and park visitor to appreciate what is in danger of being lost.

Unfortunately, there is at present no Thai language edition, an omission that needs to be rectified. Otherwise, the book is preaching largely to the converted, the small minority of foreigners (5 per cent of an estimated 12 million in 1994) who visit Thailand's national parks because they already know the value of their contents.

The replacement of the 1:250,000 changwat maps by satellite images of the land occupied by the parks may not go down well with all readers. Experts may be able to read satellite images, but most visitors are likely to prefer the detailed information contained in conventional topographical maps.

The production of the book is up to coffee table book standards, including the photos, except for the frontispiece picture, which rightly takes pride of place.

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