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David Quammen. *Monster of God: The Man-Eating Predator in the Jungles of History and the Mind.* New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003. 485 pp. $26.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-393-05140-7; $15.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-393-32609-3.

Reviewed by Kelly Enright (Department of History, Rutgers University)
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On the Value of Being Meat

"It's one thing to be dead. It's another thing to be meat," or so David Quammen tells us in his latest investigation into human-animal relationships in *Monster of God* (p. 307). An adept mixture of history, science, and journalism, Quammen's book explores the fates of wildlife that has been known to prey on human beings. The emotional connection to such "man-eaters" has informed representations and management of the world's predators. Addressing the specific histories of lions, tigers, crocodiles, and bears, Quammen elegantly mixes historical research with on-site interviews and personal observations. Each chapter is self-contained, making this an excellent text from which to extract readings for undergraduate or graduate courses in environmental or animal history, environmental studies, and historical geography.

Throughout the book, Quammen attempts to disrobe the mystique of "man-eaters" to better understand the dire fate of these animals. Rather than show how myth, mystique, and fear are harmful to the natural world, *Monster of God* leaves us wondering how wildlife can survive human contact without such irrationalities. Perhaps unwittingly, respect, awe, and even fear have been important to wildlife conservation.

The strength of Quammen's book lies in its intimate detail of specific situations. He examines various dynamics present in local lore and treatment of regional man-eaters, where the values of many groups clashed and the meaning of man-eaters continues to find no consensus. He shows how populations of lions in India's Gir forest, crocodiles in the Australian outback, tigers in the Russian Far East, and brown bears in Romania have been influenced by politics and practices of their local and national human populations. The history of these relationships offers lessons in conservation, including unexpected successes in Communist China and trophy hunting in the Russian Far East. Quammen's work contributes a narrative of human-animal interactions to scholarship of colonialism and postcolonialism. He shows how shifting ideologies have changed management and mismanagement of wildlife and landscapes.

Through examining differing models of human-predator interaction, Quammen argues for the larger meanings and implications of man-eaters. About half way through his narrative, he asserts that in order to save wildlife and the natural places in which they live, animals must have "value." Arguments over saving or not saving wildlife are really arguments about cultural values. Is the market for crocodile skins more important than their presence in the ecosystem? Is it worth living in fear of tigers for the sake of their beauty as living creatures? The oddest moment of our abstract notions of wildlife value is a mathematical equation. I quickly skimmed its meaning at first, but the figure haunted me as a sublime example of just how distanced our relationship with wildlife has become. The point Quammen makes is that the equations of science do not give a better appreciation of wildlife than myth or lore. Emotion–whether fear, admiration, or sympathy–have been driving forces behind the history of humans and wildlife.

Quammen concedes that the word "man-eater" is sexist and sensationalistic. I wonder how experiences of women might have reframed some of Quammen's arguments. Some female-predator myths, in which women are kidnapped, seduced, or raped by predators, contrast with his story. Why are women less likely to be eaten in myth and lore? Would attacking a female detract from the animal's nobility? This is not a critique of Quammen so much as a call for more studies that weave his elements of psychology and history, myth and reality, and Western and local cultures.

I agree with Quammen that the word "man-eater" has no replacement. It implies not a biological category, but a primal fear rooted in human desires to consider

themselves apart from the natural food chain–that is, not meat. The term engages Quammen's text with historical work on the "wild" and "wilderness"–terms we continue to use even as we know they are constructed and artificial. At times, there are no better words. To discuss the environment is to engage both the ecological world and the mythological one.

Quammen's book ends on a pragmatic, though grim, note. By 2150, he proposes, man-eaters will be gone from the wild. Remaining perhaps inside zoo enclosures where the designation "man-eater" will no longer fit. What he foresees is not just species extinction but the extinction of an idea. This is why he insists at the start that the word "man-eater" "deserves preservation because it labels and commemorates an elemental experience" (p. 5). Like the word "wilderness," man-eater implies a primal relationship with nature that many feel is lost to modern experience.

Quammen values wildlife as a psychological necessity of human existence. In ending, he proposes our fears of wildlife are as abstract as our fears of aliens. This suggests a modern disenchantment with the world and a retreat into imagination as the only remaining unknown. While fear of wildness has always been in part a product of imagination, the wilding of the imagination seems a wholly different enterprise. At the very least, it has astounding implications for the natural world.

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