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Lane Simonian. *Defending the Land of the Jaguar: A History of Conservation in Mexico.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. xiv + 326 pp. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-292-77691-3; $40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-292-77690-6.

Reviewed by Wim Pelt (freelance science writer)

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Many Villains, A Few Heroes, and a Saint

"Think globally, act locally" has been a popular rallying cry in the environmentalist movement for some years, and a broader perspective on local and national policies can be gained from an international comparison. To provide that comparison is one of the aims of this book. In Mexico, as in many developing countries, nature is more often looked upon as a resource for development than as a treasure to be preserved. Many, however, have taken great pains to try to preserve the biosphere with varying success, and Simonian's other aim is to tell their story.

Does this book tell that story? I do not think so. It paints in bold strokes a picture and provides several insights, but the objective-sounding subtitle is a misnomer: Simonian is passionately involved in his subject and that shows on nearly every page. He acknowledges so in his foreword, but even evaluated against the aim "to recount why Mexicans devoted themselves to the protection of the environment" (p. xi), the book fails: the real aim seems to be to correct common historical judgments, to rehabilitate, and to blame. Moreover, the yardstick is not how effective people were in conserving the environment, but their intention: if they use economic arguments, if only to get things done, they fall short; the only acceptable attitude to Nature is one of awe. I must point out here, however, that Simonian is so conscientious a scholar that he provides and orders his material in such a way that a reader might come to different judgments. This makes me wonder what the intended readership is. The lofty tone might appeal to activists, but I wonder whether they will appreciate the 80 pages of notes and bibliography. My impression is that the book is based on a series of lectures and was written in some haste. A few impressions:

The Maya are one of those Simonian set out to rehabilitate, and he is probably right here, though conservation in that age is obviously an anachronism. He does not discuss their possible belief in reincarnation as tree or animal in their attitude toward nature.

In explaining that the Mexican forestry act predates the U.S. one, a discussion of the Catholic ethos with its emphasis on sin and decay vs. the Protestant optimistic frontier mentality should be mentioned, not just individualism vs. collectivism. The hagiography of Alvarez stands out in such a way as to irritate the reader, at least this reviewer. Only in this case, we are treated to "heart-warming" anecdotes from his youth; we are supposed to feel angry that when he, at the age of 22 without previous qualifications, gets to work in the National Museum as a favour and suggests improvements, these are not implemented at once; and the excuses for his going on collecting trips with hunters–lack of transportation, "though he abhorred the wasteful exploitation of wildlife" (p. 146) and collecting himself, "although he detested commerce in wild animals, because he felt compelled to take the job to help to support his family"–having just before resigned from a job in which he had nothing abhorrent to do–sound lame and overdone to me.

And the sneer that "even if an area is set aside for conservation, some future president could still give it to one of his relatives" sounds hollow from someone who employs his daughters in his own zoo on state funds. That zoo is, as I see it, his only claim to fame.

Whereas for Mexico, enough material is presented to come to a conclusion different from the author's, the references to the U.S. conservation movement are somewhat cryptic to me as a European, for whom Gifford Pin-

chot and John Muir are not exactly household names. Understanding is made more difficult because the index gives Muir only on page 77, whereas he also features on pages 135 and 143.

In sum: much has been done, but much needs to be done, because the history of conservation in Mexico is a subject that deserves a book. Let's get to work.

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