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# **Bring 'em Back Alive: Two Popular Narratives of Wildlife Capture**

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## **Abstract**

In the mid-twentieth century, when the United States and Britain were building up their public zoos, they sent collectors to capture wild animals in the Global South. These collectors' narratives included both the thrill of the chase and the challenges facing animal caretakers, and became source material for popular books, television programs and films. American Frank Buck and Englishman Gerald Durrell achieved exceptional local and international success, first through their written memoirs of animal capture, later in visual media, and finally through the establishment of their own zoos. While both Buck and Durrell featured their personal relationships with animals, their individual narratives exemplified contrasts between British and American humor and wildlife programing styles, as well as reflecting shifting attitudes toward wild animal captivity before and after World War II. This essay

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analyzes what their capture narratives meant during their lifetimes, and how they continue to impact two different strains of popular representations of human-wildlife relations—the threat of violence and the desire for friendly kinship.

**Key Words:** zoos, wildlife films, nature broadcasting, Gerald Durrell, animal capture

*The Zookeeper's Secret* (2018) is the title Jeffery Thompson and J. Stuart Bunderson chose for their book about finding fulfillment in one's career because of all the employed people they interviewed, zookeepers were among the happiest. Passionate about their work despite being underpaid and often unappreciated, zookeepers, from German Carl Hagenbeck (1909) in *Beasts and Men* to Australian Terry Boylan (2011) in *The Keepers and the Kept*, have written popular memoirs about the animals under their care. Their observations range from humorous descriptions and emotional attachment, to collecting scientific data and coping with emergencies, as well practical, often maternal, routines of attending to animal welfare.<sup>1</sup>

Zookeepers' work encourages them to be contemplative about evolution, ecology, destruction of the environment, and what humans have to learn from animals. William Hornaday, the first director of the New York (Bronx) Zoo (1896-1926), alarmed at the precipitous disappearance of the American bison that once numbered in the millions, brought a few to his new zoo. There he not only established a breeding population, but returned the offspring to the wild in 1907, initiating the world's first captive breeding and reintroduction program.<sup>2</sup>

Equally popular at the turn of the twentieth century, and often with the same audience, were narratives about big game hunting—outdoor adventure stories of going into the wild, stalking and killing a variety of dangerous or rare animals for the thrill, and returning in the name of science with trophies to deposit in natural history museums. European and American big game hunters wrote, and were written about, as exciting adventure seekers in Africa and Asia, creating a new hero paradigm. H. Rider Haggard's Allan

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<sup>1</sup> Zookeeper's anecdotes about their intimate relations with animals are now replicated in online videos about rescued animals that watched by millions of people.

<sup>2</sup> Nigel Rothfels (2019: 57) points out that Hornaday, like many early American zookeepers, was also a hunter.

Quatermain in *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), a typical example of the genre, was based on explorer-hunter Frederick Selous, who paradoxically was one of the colonial hunters responsible for establishing wildlife reserves in Africa and Asia that now host safaris for ecotourists who “hunt” with their cameras and prize their photo trophies. Big game hunting remains a favorite sport among international elites and hunter narratives continue to be popular in contemporary magazines and websites devoted to the subject. Despite exposés of some notorious hunts, the allure remains, or even increases, as megafauna become rarer, and therefore more valued.<sup>3</sup>

Combining these two narratives about zookeeper care and trophy hunter adventure is a third genre of storytelling—that of the live animal collector. From 1870 to 1980, the rise of public zoos in America and Europe required the services of collectors who obtained live wild animals, primarily from Africa, Asia, and South America. Collecting living animals emerged from the eighteenth-century gathering of specimen fragments and taxidermies for natural history museums and scientific research institutes. Even David Attenborough, arguably the most famous media personality for conservation, began his career as a collector for zoos.<sup>4</sup> The practice was phased out in the 1980s when most zoos stopped taking animals directly from the wild and instead traded animals born and bred in other zoos within self-regulating associations.

The wild animal capture narrative belongs to a specific period—from the height of colonialism in the early twentieth century to the post-World War II aftermath—and reflects many American and European attitudes toward colonized peoples and territories. In addition, however, it records a transition in perspectives concerning

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the American dentist Walter Palmer, who went into hiding after receiving wide-spread condemnation and death threats for shooting the famed lion, Cecil in 2015, resumed both his dental practice and big game hunting, boasting of his latest shoots of an Altai argali (Mongolian wild goat) online in 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Attenborough featured as a young collector in the television show, *Zoo Quest* (1954-1963), which Jean-Baptiste Gouyon (2019: 87) suggests was a template for Durrell's shows.

human-animal relations, from killing for the triumphal display of the hunter, to capturing to save species from extinction. In written and cinematic forms, the capture narrative combines aspects of both the thrill of pursuit and demonstrations of intimate care. Two animal-collectors-turned-zookeepers stand out as literary and media celebrities of the “Bring 'em Back Alive” genre: Texan Frank Buck (1884-1950) and Englishman Gerald Durrell (1925-1995). Both stressed that capturing an animal alive and preserving its life was more brave, difficult, and ethical than killing it, and the skills needed to do so far superseded those of the hunter, or the explorer-scientist who killed specimens for study. Their memoirs and biographies reveal them to be enthusiastic animal collectors in childhood who later turned their hobbies into a profession. Finding the job fulfilling but financially unviable, both turned to writing about their collecting trips and their resulting books proved popular with both children and adults, and men and women of all social classes. After becoming bestselling writers, each became involved in other forms of media, first radio broadcasts, then television programs and wildlife films, and finally, opening and curating their own zoos—Buck’s Jungleland (1939-1944) on Long Island, and Durrell’s Wildlife Conservation Trust (1959-) on Jersey Island.

Frank Buck came from a poor family in Texas and his autobiography, *All in a Lifetime*, describes the hardships he endured as a young man struggling to survive in a frontier society that was rough, violent, and yet full of opportunities (Buck & Fraser, 1941). G. Durrell (1956a) describes his extended idyllic childhood on Corfu with an indulgent mother, sympathetic mentors and amusingly annoying siblings in his most famous book, *My Family and Other Animals*. Though both boys were fascinated with the biota around them and collected all the creatures they could find—their formative years, hardscrabble and modestly gentle, respectively, continued to permeate their relations with nature.

Although their early careers began with similar passions for animals, their later trajectories were pursued to very different

purposes, as is clearly evident from their book covers: Buck's feature tigers leaping to attack, indicating the thrill of the hunt, while Durrell's show him hugging wide-eyed lemurs, emphasizing his role as protector and caregiver.<sup>5</sup> Both Buck and Durrell understood the entertainment value of animals, and the power of storytelling to portray their relationships with them. Both created distinct and dominant personae to tell their capture narratives that blur fact and fiction. Their accounts not only combine tales of pursuit and care, but also reflect changes occurring in their societies' perceptions of animals in the wild and in captivity. Moreover, the narratives reveal differences in their American and British heritages, both in their types of humor as well as in their styles of presenting wildlife on film. Their dual hunter-zookeeper perspective continues to shape popular wildlife documentaries and television programs that "capture" animals on camera—featuring both the dangers savored by hunters and the sentimental affinity favored by caregivers.

Both writers depict how they relate to wildlife from a particularly privileged vantage point that exists primarily among people whose lives do not depend directly upon those animals; they are by, and for, people for whom wild animals are a cause and a pleasure—not the next meal, nor an immediate threat to their lives and livelihoods. In their expeditions to Asia, Africa and South America, Buck and Durrell each relate how they rely heavily on native people's knowledge of habitats and animals, and include native attitudes towards the species they capture. The ecological worlds Buck and Durrell present differ from those of the indigenous people who create folklore and mythologies that integrate themselves and their origins with the animal world. Instead, they focus on the intimacy of their individualized relationships, for

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<sup>5</sup> The conservationist Durrell would not like to find himself linked to the showman Buck—the epitome of the self-promoting adventurer Durrell frequently mocked—and yet he began his career following in Buck's footsteps. During his first expedition to Cameroon in 1947, he writes in his diary, "I engaged a hunter the next day, and two boys, and armed with a shotgun sallied into the jungle à la Frank Buck" (Botting, 2000:120).

example giving animals personal names, in order to assist their readers in sharing the experiences vicariously. Neither writer was an academically trained zoologist; instead they negotiated their own paths through the realms of entertainment, anthropology and natural science, afforded them by the rise of public zoos.

## I. Buck's Collection Journey from Texas to Singapore

After recalling childhood obsessions with beautiful birds and poisonous snakes, Buck portrays himself as learning from the “school of hard knocks,” like a picaresque hero evading gunmen and partaking in barroom brawls. Having worked as a boy as a pig farmer and cowpoke, he would later invoke the image of a cowboy in the Malayan jungle by displaying his lassoing skills, merging his Texan identity with that of the explorer in exotic faraway places. At seventeen, he married Amy Leslie, a drama critic who introduced him to the luminaries of the Chicago entertainment world. These connections stood him in good stead when he later began making movies and helped him understand the importance of creating a star persona.

Despite the glamor, however, his passion for animal collection lured him away to Brazil, where he bought Amazonian birds that he later sold for profit in New York and London. Observing large wild animals for the first time at the London Zoo, Buck had revelation that led to his lifelong commitment:

The animals fascinated me. I could see Texas music in the lithe way a striped Bengal tiger paced his cage, each step keeping time to the banjo-ring of mythical boys from Dallas strumming on strings. I could fancy the elusive wind I had never quite caught in the sleek way a coal-black leopard, darker and glossier than the trough of any ocean wave I had ever seen. (Buck & Fraser, 1941: 86)

Discovering that collecting would both bring him in constant proximity to wild animals and earn him a living, he amicably divorced and took off for Singapore—the center of the Asian wildlife trade (Barnard, 2019: 62-65).

In Singapore, his base for thirty years, Buck bought more animals from the shops of Chinese middlemen than he captured, but recreated his persona as an intrepid pursuer who caught his prey through cunning, persistence and brute strength. Buck portrays himself as a man of action, both capturing animals and keeping them alive in his camp in Katong village outside of Singapore. Also as an established member of the international set that congregated at the Raffles Hotel bar, he personified the romance of colonial life, common enough in British literature, but less familiar to Americans starring a fellow American. He rose to prominence between the two World Wars, rarely alluding to either social discontent in Asia or Europe, or the extinction of species, and instead embodied the vitality and growing prosperity of the United States. His narrative expresses naïve optimism and the assumption of an eternal plentitude of wildlife in faraway jungles, despite, or perhaps because of, the warning signs of extinction in North America.

Buck's emphasis on animal savagery plays to an ecophobic strain in American culture that came from experiencing its own wilderness as dangerous and needing to be civilized (or eradicated). It also appeals to the machismo of the rugged individual male proving himself against fierce nature as epitomized by hunter-naturalist President Theodore Roosevelt (terms of office 1901-1909). Buck not only describes the beauty and danger of the jungle, but emphasizes the allure of the mysterious Far East as a place of excitement and opportunity where even a poor boy could exploit racial privilege to hold sway.

His narrative exudes brash Texan confidence that he alone can provide the American public with the animals it wants, especially when World War I prevented the premiere animal trader, the German Carl Hagenbeck, from operating. When the 1929 financial

crisis brought Buck's own animal trading to a halt, however, he discovered that writing about his adventures was far more lucrative. Employing Edward Anthony, a well-known New York writer, to assist him, Buck turned out two bestsellers, *Bring 'em Back Alive* (1930) and *Wild Cargo* (1932). According to Buck scholar, Steven Lehrer,

Anthony wrote the stories in a modest, matter-of-fact, all-in-a-day's-work fashion; yet almost everyone has its own breath-catching spice of danger. With his knack for eliciting telling details, Anthony created a real sense of drama. (2000: xi)

We do not know the exact contributions of each, or the liberties taken to enhance the encounters described, but the formula was a winning one. During the Depression years, Buck's books and films provided tales of fantasy escapism. His stories brought the thrills of the trophy hunt, formerly only available to the elite, to the common man, who, because of Buck's collecting, was also able to see the same fantastic beasts for the first time in the public zoos.

## II. Gerald Durrell's Worldwide Family

Gerald Durrell, born in India, describes his passion for natural history beginning with his family's four-year stay on Corfu (1935-1939). However, Durrell did not write about this childhood idyll in *My Family and Other Animals* until after his first four books on collecting in Africa and South America became bestsellers. With amazing recall for the sensuous detail of the island's terrain, he recreates the enchanted time on Corfu as an Edenic world without evil; all living things were delightful and every difficulty could be told as a comic misadventure. This boyish enthusiasm and wonder for life in all of its forms remained the touchstone of not only his approach to the capture, and subsequent care, of animals, but also of his perception of what animals are vis-à-vis humanity—all kin. Growing up in Corfu contributed to Durrell's unique brand of

modern pantheism and his own private fantasy of being a beloved boy-king of all he surveyed. Exploring the same ground that the ancient Greeks had already populated with gods, which his elder brother Lawrence alludes to in his writings, Gerald, like a true “primitive” found god in every creature and each godlike in its own way.

With the onset of war in 1939, the Durrell family returned to England, where despite the vastly different environment, the outdoors was still his home and houses were merely dormitories for his collections. Durrell was an autodidact naturalist coming from a long tradition of British amateur naturalists, receiving an informal and eclectic education from various tutors, but unlike Buck, he showed early talents for concrete and vivid writing and sketching. His biographer Douglas Botting (2000: 94) mentions that while Durrell was apprenticing at the Whipsnade Zoo, he began composing his own list of endangered animals. He was alarmed by the fate of the dodo, but inspired by the recovery of the nearly extinct Pere David’s deer that were present at the zoo.

At what might have been a pivotal moment of commitment—like Buck’s epiphany at the London Zoo—Durrell describes his night time feedings of these baby deer:

Then came the exquisite moment when the teat was pushed into their mouths and they sucked frantically at the warm milk, their eyes staring . . . I was very conscious of the fact they were the last of their kind, animal refugees living a precarious existence on the edge of extermination, dependent on their existence on the charity of a handful of human beings. (Botting, 2000: 94)

Durrell creates a bizarre, but moving, Madonna-and-Child portrait, of himself as a young man feeding and protecting a species that would possibly not survive. He takes on the burden of becoming their savior, of capturing members of an endangered species in order to save them and preserve the natural world as he knew and loved it.

He made his first trip to Cameroon in 1947, taking orders from British zoos to bring back the animals they wanted. He would later return to Cameroon and West Africa several times and then branch out to South America, and later the islands of Madagascar and Mauritius; he never had a permanent foreign base like Buck in Singapore. Although his trips to Cameroon and Guyana gained him renown as an animal collector, they did not financially sustain him and his wife Jacquie, whom he married in 1951. Noting the popularity of Durrell's radio broadcasts about animals, she, along with his literary brother, Lawrence, pressed him to write about his adventures.<sup>6</sup> Beginning in 1953 with *The Overloaded Ark*, he downplays the dangers of the Cameroon jungle, and instead, extolls its botanical beauties and the quirky endearing qualities of the animals and people he meets. He produced three travelogue-capture books in quick succession and their combination of humor, zest, scientific detail, sensitivity, and poetry heralded a new kind of nature writing, a unique product of Durrell's empathy for animals and his ironic view of human behavior. The financial and critical success of his books encouraged him to propose his own new kind of zoo, one specifically for the captive breeding of endangered species. Like Buck, Durrell discovered that it was storytelling, not the actual collecting, that would be profitable enough to help him reach his goal. In the process of writing, Durrell learned to limit his faithfulness to the facts as they were recorded in his diaries and to borrow techniques from fiction—reorganization, selection, compression, inversion—to enhance the tale and present himself and his experiences to best effect—as Anthony did for Buck.

Durrell's narrative trajectory picks up on the tail end of Buck's, beginning after World War II when countries of the Global South were not accepting the yoke that colonial powers were trying to reimpose, including decisions about who should determine what

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<sup>6</sup> J. Durrell (1967) mentions her role in persuading him to write in *Beasts in my Bed*.

happened to local fauna. Dissatisfied with leaving the fate of animals in native hands or current British zoos, Durrell voiced his commitment to open his own zoo with increasing urgency because no one else seemed either interested in captive breeding or equipped to do so. He ventured forth during a period of postcolonial transition in which his gender, race, and nationality still aided him, but he was aware that that status was quickly changing. He was not the only one prescient about the natural world's impending disappearance, which lent a palpable angst to his otherwise joyful discoveries, but he was unusual in being spurred to action to stave it off. Claiming his previous bestsellers and the promise to produce more as his only collateral, he finally managed to get a bank loan and opened the Jersey Zoo in 1959. From then on, all of his capture narratives pertain to developing and sustaining it.

### III. Big Cat and Big Snake Experiences

While it was Buck's job to supply charismatic megafauna—tigers, bears, elephants, rhinos, orangutans—which zoos were eager to purchase because they were popular with the American public, Durrell, instead, introduces the British public to an extraordinary array of unusual and rare animals—the giant water shrew, angwantibo, armadillo, giant horned toad, rhea, and the then little-known pangolin. Nonetheless, the two men inevitably had some similar experiences; both describe their first encounters with large cats as highlights of their early careers, but their accounts exemplify their divergent styles as raconteurs. Buck relates that on his very first trip into the Malayan jungle he learns that a black leopard is killing village livestock—thereby justifying its capture. He employs a Malay carpenter to fashion a trap of wood and rattan: “When we visited it the next morning there was the village marauder, black as coal and angry as sin, spitting and snarling at us from behind the log bars” (1941: 107). Not satisfied with this easy triumph over a “villain,” Buck shifts emotional gears and exclaims,

I felt as I looked at that leopard that this was a wonderful life—fine and thrilling. I felt that the world was mine. I loved the jungle, I loved the people, I loved the wild creatures. Had I died then and there, beside that first leopard trap in Johore, I would have been content. I felt that I had seen life in its fullest. (107)

In this moment of capture, he feels the greatest euphoria as if he had conquered the world, a fulfilment of his intimation at the London Zoo.

Durrell recounts his first experience with a serval, a leopard-like, but smaller, cat in Cameroon in a tone that is characteristic of Durrellian storytelling—humorous understatement and surprisingly pertinent comparison:

nearly every book that has been written about the forest assures one that if you catch a glimpse of a great cat once in fifty years you are doing fine. So I was filled with a mixture of apprehension and pleasure on finding the Serval (sic) there when I awoke. It stood quite still, regarding me thoughtfully and the tip of its tail moved very gently among the grass stalks. I had seen domestic cats looking like this at sparrows . . . Also, I was stark naked, and I have found that in moments of crisis to have no clothes on gives one a terribly unprotected feeling. (2001: 154)

Buck's jubilation over capturing the live panther that he casts as the embodiment of nature "red in tooth and claw" could not provide a greater contrast to Durrell comparing himself to a diminutive sparrow, potentially prey, made pathetically comic by the vulnerability of human nakedness. He reverses the capture narrative to view his own endeavors through the eyes of the resident cat.

Another such disparity occurs when they encounter famously lethal serpents—pythons, cobras and anacondas. Well-practiced in capturing poisonous snakes as a boy, Buck proudly proclaims that his first captured animal in the Malayan jungle was a 28-foot python. As he approached it "the python reared around instantly, thrashing

in the grass, and with its head raised charged us like a bolt of shining lightning. I dodged the charge and dropped the noose of my Texas lasso over the head and a foot or two along the gleaming throat” (Buck & Fraser, 1941:104).

Buck invokes the image of a rodeo wrangler, and aside from difficulty of knowing where a python’s throat begins and ends, he later reveals that it is actually Ali, his Malay assistant, who shows him how to transport the snake using forest materials. While saying that over the years he brought many pythons to America, he does not include any factual information about the snake, other than to correct the common misconception that pythons are venomous. He knows his readers do not want scientific detail or poetic descriptions, but crave action-packed prose and demonstrations of Texan know-how tempered with confessions of human fallibility such as his failure to conquer the mosquito.

Durrell, describing his contact with an anaconda, again takes pleasure in debunking his Buck-like predecessors:

In nearly every book written about South America the author at some point or other . . . stumbles upon an anaconda. These eternally measure anything from forty to a hundred and fifty feet . . . in spite of the fact that largest anaconda ever officially measured was a mere thirty feet. Inevitably, the monster attacks and for three or four pages the author wrestles in its mighty coils until he either manages to shoot it with his trusty revolver, or it is speared by one of his trusty Indians. (1956b:141)

Durrell’s real anaconda half-heartedly attempts to evade his sack, and Durrell makes its anticlimactic capture a case in point. At every opportunity, he scoffs at the self-aggrandizing thrill-seekers, replacing their exaggeration with comic minimizing that ridicules human fear and violence. Both capture narrators engage the readers to see the world through their eyes, and to share their feeling of being only truly and fully alive when among animals. They often concur, however, the real danger lies in their own mistakes and give

many examples of having to recuperate from their moments of absentmindedness or acts of folly.

#### IV. Heroic and Anti-Heroic Humor

As the cat and snake examples indicate, both Durrell and Buck were conscious of not only of the manner in which they wished to narrate their experiences but also of how they themselves were to be perceived in their roles. The two narrators are always the larger-than-life protagonists, with other people and animals cast in antagonistic or supportively subordinate roles. Buck depicts himself in a heroic mode of being brave, persistent and resourceful, the one at the top of a social and natural hierarchy, while he casts both animals and humans in the familiar theatrical stereotypes of the time—devoted subalterns, loving mothers, drunks, bullies, clowns, and maidens-in-distress. Though Buck emphasizes his bravery and intelligence, he also admits to fear, confusion, and occasionally despair, to heighten the tension and risk, and magnify his perseverance against the odds.

Durrell, from a more privileged background, portrays himself as a socially-awkward eccentric anti-hero, driven by an insatiable curiosity for the natural world. He revels in his own personal clumsiness and is quite willing to describe his abject failures, as they make as interesting stories as his successes. He relates his humiliating experiences with aplomb so that he flattens differences between himself and others even though it is always through his perspective that everyone else is viewed. He avoids describing conflict among animals but highlights the quibbling among people—both those in his team and locals—inverting the traditional hierarchy of humanity on the top. His depictions of nonhumans stress their admirable behavior, individualized characters, and ecological importance, and that they are all esteemed members of the rich diversity that inspires and supports *homo sapiens*—a species that he increasingly argues does not deserve it.

Their heroic and anti-heroic stances as well as the comic sensibilities with which they are expressed have root in cross-Atlantic differences that British comedians have commented upon. Actor and social commentator Stephen Fry who has also featured in wildlife programs explains with an example from the American film, *Animal House*:

there's a fellow playing folk music on the guitar, and John Belushi picks up the guitar and destroys it. And the cinema loves it. [Belushi] just smashes it and then waggles his eyebrows at the camera. Everyone thinks, "God, is he great!" Well, the British comedian would want to play the folk singer. We want to play the failure. (2012)

Adopting a jocular tone, Buck epitomizes the humor of the Belushi character—it is big, physical, and is about winning. With brash self-confidence, he relates his exploits at getting the better of his human and nonhuman opponents. Buck enjoys catching out other people's boastful pretensions, such as bargaining with a *dato* (Malay headman) who assumes he is a stupid white man willing to pay an outrageous sum for an orangutan, or betting with his good friend, Sultan Ibrahim of Johor, that he will catch a man-eating tiger. He enjoys playing practical jokes on those who are "asking for it," such as spooking a drunken guest at his animal camp by placing a tiger under his bed, or facing off a macho sailor with an escaped orangutan. His humor is either a one-line reference to some aspect of American popular culture rendered amusing in the Malay context e.g., "my camp wasn't exactly the Astoria Hotel," or the clever comeuppance of another's (and occasionally his own) complacency or hubris.

Durrell exemplifies the folksinger and Fry's definition of the British ironic humorist whose mainstay is failure and self-deprecation. He takes the mickey out of himself first, which both deflects other people's criticism and gives him license to good-

naturedly satirize them as well.<sup>7</sup> He utilizes the Wildean formula of exaggerating the trivial and trivializing the important in regard to his own comforts, expectations and abilities. Durrell sets himself up as the fall guy and depicts incidents with the humor of hindsight, such as in his slapstick account of his surprise at opening a box to have the rattlesnake inside strike out at him:

I flung myself backwards in a leap that could only have been emulated but not bettered by a wallaby in the prime of life and in full control of its faculties. Unfortunately, I rather spoilt the athletic effect by tripping over my machete and sitting down heavily. (1956b: 170)

The sardonic tone permeates his dialogues and descriptions of people as well as exaggerating what is embarrassing to him. He presents his actions (but not his goals) as a series of comic mishaps. Recounting events in retrospect affords both writers comic distance from what was likely fraught, frightening, or irritating at the time.

## V. Dealing with Animal Death

Capture, unlike hunting, does not end with simply obtaining an animal body, but extends to include care for its wellbeing, and therefore its death is not a victory but a failure. While acknowledging the excitement of the chase, as well as the boredom of the routine cleaning and feeding many animals several times a day, both Buck and Durrell attest to great satisfaction in getting an animal safely to its new home. Confronted with inevitable animal sickness and death, Buck and Durrell do not mention the numbers of animals that die in the course of their expeditions, and instead

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<sup>7</sup> Writer-actor Ricky Gervais concurs with Fry's assessment, "They [Americans] applaud ambition and openly reward success. Brits are more comfortable with life's losers . . . . We use sarcasm as a shield and a weapon. We avoid sincerity until it's absolutely necessary. We mercilessly take the piss out of people we like or dislike basically. And ourselves. This is very important. Our brashness and swagger is laden with equal portions of self-deprecation" (2011).

express sorrow and empathy toward some individuals while taking in stride as unavoidable the loss of others. Buck waxes unreservedly sentimental when recounting the excellence of simian mothers and casts them in the role of heroic martyrs. On one occasion, he is transporting a proboscis monkey family across the ocean, when the male suddenly dies. Although the female is visibly affected, she concentrates on keeping the baby alive. When the baby dies, however, she, despite being physically healthy, follows suit inspiring Buck to comment, "This is the only instance I have ever encountered, in all my years as a collector, of an animal dying of a broken heart" (Buck & Anthony, 1930: 188). Responsible for transporting thousands of animals, Buck's caretaker persona emerges primarily onboard ship where he does not have the help of Malay assistants who did much of the work in the Katong camp and must do all the cleaning and feeding himself. He faces typhoons, hostile crews, a lack of water and food for the animals, animal escapes and many deaths.

Having a soft spot for fragile creatures, Buck expresses a particular fondness for the diminutive mousedeer. As prey to all carnivores including humans, it has been given a clever trickster character, Sang Kancil, in Indo-Malay folklore, and yet the Malays set traps for them which Buck often destroys to release the deer. When after lovingly caring for the first ten mousedeer ever to be brought to America, he tells of his heartbreak when forced to chloroform them because they were not allowed entry by US Customs. Buck's compassion, though affected by commercial and competitive interests, is nonetheless sincere.

G. Durrell (2001) loved a similar tiny antelope in his Cameroon camp, and relates his keen distress at not being able to sustain the lives of the baby Olgiby's Duikers brought to him by local people after they killed the mothers. He tries to feed them with every kind of milk, and takes them into the forest, hoping they will gravitate toward some plant they can eat, but watches hopelessly as they dwindle away from starvation. When one more is brought to him, he vows not to take it, "but when it nuzzled my hand with its wet

nose and turned its great dark eyes on me. I was lost . . . I shall never forget the long and depressing struggle I had with these little antelope” (91-92). The animals die not from his capture, but native hunting practices that he both understands and condemns.

Their experience with the delicate antelopes exemplifies the ongoing conflict they have with local people—on one hand, they need their expertise and labor to help catch and care for the animals, and on the other, they are at odds with the local superstitions and hunting customs that appear to have no restraints on what, when, or how many animals can be killed. All the animals they capture are local people’s food—as Durrell emphasizes in Cameroon where all types of wildlife are referred to as “beef”. He acknowledges the luxury of pursuing animals for either pleasure or scientific knowledge, but after becoming devoted fulltime to insuring species survival, he battles all humans who are not fighting on his side, harping on the pressures of human overpopulation in the Global South rather than the capitalist agenda of overconsumption in the Global North.

Buck, working under the presumption of animal abundance, is rarely troubled by thoughts of extinction, or his own contribution to the early twentieth century’s massive slaughter of wildlife, but he makes one exception when he describes the extraordinary pains he went to in order to obtain two rhino calves from Nepal. Buck did not personally capture the calves but transported them to New York for Hornaday, who, when he heard that *twenty-one* adults had been killed in the process, was aghast:

I’ll never forget Hornaday’s horror over the fact that these rare and almost extinct patricians of the animal kingdom, these survivors of the great race of Indian rhinos that had practically ceased to exist except in books telling of their mighty feats, should have suffered the ironic fate of being shot down as public nuisances. (Buck & Anthony, 1930: 60)

Buck justifies his collecting as a business venture and a service, removing dangerous pests that imperil both plantation laborers and

village farmers, and he punishes the “criminals” by sending them to zoos. Durrell does not intentionally capture an animal *because* it is considered “a pest” though some of his first captures are of animals that local people were happy to be rid of. He rarely expresses animus toward any animal, retrospectively expressing fascination even for horseflies and sweatbees that torment him in camp. Though he confesses finding some animals unattractive, they are never criminals, nor deserving of death. Buck anthropomorphizes animal behavior to bring it into the scope of his public’s limited understanding by reinforcing cultural stereotypes of human social roles. Durrell, on the other hand, imaginatively empathizes with an animal, and strives to expand his reader’s knowledge beyond stereotypes, while still remaining within the realm of human affection.

## VI. The Cinematic Narrative

While their written memoirs evocatively recreate large and varied worlds of human and nonhuman individuals, environments and situations, Buck and Durrell’s visual media representations are linguistically simplified because they depend on images directly perceived by viewers rather than through the imaginative descriptions of the two interlocutors.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the complexity of their experiences are further reduced by the public relations announcements and commercial campaigns used to promote them. After the successes of their books, both Buck and Durrell became media personalities, performing the identities they had created in the books. Both men aver that their chief motivation was again financial—Buck because trading animals was increasingly less lucrative, and Durrell to fund his zoo.

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<sup>8</sup> Both Buck and Durrell also made radio programs which relied on, and, in turn, increased the popularity of their books.

Even more than in their written accounts, their visual media programs follow and precipitate two distinct human-animal representations in wildlife film, one toward the hunter's preoccupation with conflict and danger, and the other toward conservationist stewardship and zookeeper welfare. In addition, their visual media presentations focus almost exclusively on the animals, whether capturing them physically or only on camera, and exclude most of their humorous interactions with people. While the visual versions provide immediacy, offering viewers the satisfaction of seeing with their own eyes the worlds and creatures previously so vividly described, the books continued to provide more personal insights and backstories of the capture adventure.

Just as Durrell jettisoned aspects of the truth in his diaries to write his popular books and Buck collaborated with writer Anthony to contextualize the highlights of his captures, both men knew the same had to be done with film. They blur distinctions between documentary truth and compelling visual stories, corroborating what Jean-Baptiste Gouyon (2019: 3) attests when he states that all wildlife documentary is "intrinsically artificial." Moreover, the relationships between their books and films vary significantly depending on whether the film/TV episode was made *before or after* the book. Buck capitalized on the popularity of his books by making films based on them, thereby illustrating what the audience had already read and imagined. Only in his later autobiography, *All in a Lifetime*, does he include descriptions of the film outtakes. Durrell was not filmed replaying what he had already written; instead he wrote books about the filming expeditions, revealing what could not be seen or told in the film itself. He and Buck both write about the travails of the filming process—its obstreperous crews and cumbersome equipment impeding their captures, as well as the events that happen off camera, both comic surprises or frightening attacks. The follow-up books counter the *ocular* version offered in the television episodes and films with a behind-the-scenes *experienced* version told in the heightened prose of the star

participants.<sup>9</sup>

Like Gouyon, Derek Bousé in his history of wildlife films argues that the two-dimensional recorded media of television and film, as well as their commercial obligation to entertain, militate against any truthful representation of *in situ* wildlife. Instead, they perfect the illusion of documentary realism with increasingly sophisticated filming and editing technology. Bousé also notes, however, that after the first decade of the twentieth century, as wildlife films were becoming more commonplace, they differed in the US and Britain:

Two somewhat distinct ‘tendencies’ were emerging. These might be called, for purposes of schematic simplicity, the American and British models—though they are by no means geographically bound, and elements of each can be found in wildlife films from around the world. (2000: 125-126)

The American wildlife film “has tended to place more emphasis on dramatic action . . . the American tradition has also tended in the direction of filming in controlled conditions (pens and other enclosures, including zoos), and the depiction of dramatic events often constructed in the editing, or even through a bit of provocation or staging” (126). “Dramatic action” refers to both violence, such as in prey-predator chase scenes or males in combat, but also to a dramatic structure imposed upon animal lives.<sup>10</sup> Buck develops what the earlier hunting films initiated, and accentuates what Simon Cottle suggests was to become a standard in American wildlife filming:

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<sup>9</sup> Twenty-first century wildlife films often include a MOD, making-of- documentary, a short clip tacked on at the end of the film to show their filming process. In this way they have adopted what Buck and Durrell described in their post-film books, but it is also a ploy to earn the viewer’s trust by revealing some aspects of the process while still inevitably keeping others concealed.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Fuchs (2018: 1) writes that while Peter Steinhart finds similarity between the moment in which a predator takes down its prey and the “money shot” in pornographic films, he sees contemporary wildlife documentaries centering on large predators remediating horror film aesthetics.

They [American viewers] wanted to see a lot of animals chasing other animals and killing them, but without any actual bloodshed . . . a program packed full of drama, comedy, suspenseful cliff-hangers, and happy endings . . . They wanted to see more babies barely escape the jaws of villainous predators while the mother risked her life to rescue her young. (2004: 80-81)<sup>11</sup>

Bousé contends that the slower-paced British television wildlife programming evolved differently from both its natural history roots and radio broadcasting:

The British tradition of natural history documentation, which tends to place more emphasis on research and scientific inquiry . . . than on entertaining narrative; more attention to the revealing close-up than to the action-packed long-shot-although, again, these are anything but absolute rules. (2000: 126)

Bousé maintains that the American style relies on sensationalized lowbrow entertainment based on suspense and physical conflict. The British wildlife film provides greater educational content in its exposition of animal-environment ecology. British viewers seem less inclined to enjoy the American penchant for extremes—ecophobia toward dangerous creatures and sentimentality toward cute ones—perhaps because their own indigenous wildlife is less dramatic and dangerous (and much diminished), and the country has a long amateur naturalist tradition rather than the hunter-trapper tales that prevailed in North America.

Buck and Durrell somewhat conform to these national

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<sup>11</sup> Cottle quotes an independent producer who points out the two strains within American television programing: “Discovery is much bloodier. Animal Planet is gentler. Animal Planet reckons to have a different audience profile from the Discovery Channel in that they have more women and kids. They don’t go for the sort of same blood and guts things . . . Discovery certainly likes more kills per acre. I mean, Animal Planet is quite likely to either tell you to take a shot out because it’s too gory, whereas Discovery will put it the other way” (2004: 93-94).

templates. Buck's first three movies depict an animal world in constant conflict of either prey-predator or predator-on-predator violence. Casting himself not only as an uber-hunter in the jungle, but also an omnipotent judge, he exhibits daring, conquest, and control in one scene after another that all show him either evading imminent danger or engaged in a clever capture. Durrell also demonstrated an instinct for showmanship, but with expressions of wonder and comic camaraderie. When he first began collaborating with BBC's Natural History Unit for a television series in 1958, he was filmed in studio relating his collecting stories, which were interspersed with film clips he took in West Africa. He also humorously extemporized on the set with Jacquie and their chimpanzee, Cholmondeley, displaying his special rapport with animals while talking about their traits. He presents his animals in family-friendly environment, extending his own cross-species family to include the viewers, who perhaps inferred a false sense of animal cuddliness.

## VII. Buck's Wildlife Thriller

Buck's penchant for the sensational was based on Hollywood's burgeoning commercial model of ever-increasing sensationalism. Filming *Bring 'em Back Alive* (1932) took him nine months in Malaya, Sumatra, India, and Ceylon and required shooting over 125,000 feet of film, of which Buck claimed: "Not one of those feet was faked in any way. They were exposed on the actual spot and in the actual jungles where they were supposed to have been taken" (Buck & Fraser, 1941: 206). Given the difficulties of filming in the tropics at that time, Buck and his director Clyde Elliot appreciated the fanfare the film's opening received in New York's Times Square.

The *New York Times* review praised its technical excellence and the variety of close-up shots of animals during which the cameramen remained out of sight so that nothing impeded the viewers' sense of witnessing it firsthand. While previous wildlife films had been about

hunting and killing, Buck's films were the first to feature live capture. However, they still featured predator-on-predator combat to testify to natural savagery, such as prolonged fights—some to the death—between black leopards, tigers, crocodiles, and pythons. The second film *Wild Cargo* (1934) stars many of the same animal characters but with different “actors” in the roles for rematches. *Fang and Claw* (1936) features more captures than fights as censors were beginning to reject scenes of gratuitous animal violence.<sup>12</sup>

Buck's claim of authenticity, however, created problems not only for himself, but for later wildlife films that were assumed by the public to be documentaries rather than artful fabrications. In reviews of the first film, critics already began expressing suspicion that certain scenes looked staged, not that the film was tampered with, but that the animals were, especially those with predators engaged in mortal combat. In natural circumstances, tigers, leopards, cobras and alligators would avoid rather than attack each other. Buck's highlighting their violent encounters for the thrill factor alone suggested that the animals had been coerced. There were already precedents of blurring the lines between truth and fiction regarding how film represented wildlife and how that representation was achieved. Buck's films pushed the limit between accepted staging and baiting practices used by many filmmakers to reduce the time and expense of filming, and outright fraud—actually contriving conflicts that would not happen in the wild.

His cinematic versions were two steps removed from fact—first from the original capture, and then from his description of the capture in his books. He felt compelled to make his films conform to the “script” already established by those previously recorded encounters. As a filmmaker, Buck notes that it was not easy:

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<sup>12</sup> Britain passed the Cinematograph Films (Animals) Act in 1937 banning intentional cruelty to animals in film; a similar ban went into effect in the United States in 1939.

The animals themselves are your actors—bad actors most of them, dangerous, and as temperamental as any Hollywood star. They make their own plot and story as they go along, and they are likely to change any scenario you have hoped for, suddenly and without warning. The ‘stage’ these work on is the jungle—this is your setting, and the jungle was not designed by Nature for the making of movies. (Buck & Fraser, 1941: 208)

Though he suggests that filming introduces new challenges and opportunities, he still tries to provide the implicit promise of the books, giving the viewer his/her own sense of being in the wild.

No longer the solo protagonist in his narrative, Buck finds himself having to act as a mediator between animals and film crew, who can be as frustrating as their subjects:

Transport a director and camera crew, accustomed to Hollywood actors . . . into the raw jungle of Malaya, and they are rather lost. They are likely to become impatient when they find that you cannot order jungle animals around as you can movie actors or trained studio animals with keepers in attendance. (Lehrer, 2000: 234)

And yet, Buck does his best to arrange situations so that the animals *do* conform to the demands of the director and crew.

Since Buck’s three most famous films are based on his books of the same titles, the films inevitably illustrate scenes previously described and he felt obliged to stage them so that they fulfilled readers’ expectations. However, instead of the complex mix of ethological observations of animals and ethnographical commentary on local communities, the vagaries of human individuals and their relationships in traditional and colonial cultures, and revelations of heartbreaking failures found in the books, the films offer a much more simple melodramatic formula of animal capture, conflict, and death, relieved only by short episodes of comic animal behavior.

Many of the ingenious forms of capture Buck demonstrates are revealed to be native techniques, and are actually enacted by his

Malay assistants rather than himself, such as catching a bird of paradise with a noose of twine in a tree, or enticing dusky leaf monkeys with coconut husks filled with rice so that the monkeys' hands get stuck when they grab it, making them easy to catch. Every shot introduces a new menace or desired animal object on which to exercise a unique type of capture technique; Buck is seen directing the action but rarely physically participating.

In *Jungle Animals* published after the three films, Buck and Fraser (1945: 41) relate that when releasing a mousedeer from a native trap, a python bit his arm and he had to shoot it to free himself. The filmed version of the scene, however, is obviously set up because the python is shown lurking in the bushes before attacking. Buck also left himself open to charges of fakery when discovered to have created some scenes in manmade enclosures near Singapore, not in the deep jungle, as his first director Clyde Elliott (as cited in Toh, 2012) revealed in his memoirs.

His second director, Armand Denis (1963: 56-57), went further in accusing Buck of faking his jungle exploits, especially the capture of a man-killing tiger. In the book *Bring 'em Back Alive*, Buck points out that only old or debilitated tigers are likely to kill humans, but when a rubber tapper is mauled to death, he sets about trapping the killer. He describes the whole process with personal and cultural contexts which are absent in the filmed version that shows only the making and concealing of the pit, and the tiger falling into it. After his assistants tether the tiger, Buck descends into the pit to force the animal into a lowered cage. The book describes the immense difficulty because the men holding ropes slip and fall on the muddy ground, and the nails that Buck needs to fasten the cage door cannot be found. The film shows none of this heightened tension nor Buck's panicked screams. When the cage is raised, the tiger can no longer be clearly seen inside. Denis reveals that because a storm had flooded the pit and drowned the "large placid old tiger specially hired from a local animal dealer" that Buck is actually shown wrestling a dead animal. Denis admitted, however, that the final scene looked very

convincing.

Precisely. Film is not reality. The discrepancy between Buck and Denis's written accounts is not from differing personal perspectives about what happened, but two separate events—Buck describes the original event while Denis remarks upon its replay for film, in which everyone is *acting*, even the dead tiger. Whether the tiger was alive or dead made no difference if it *appears* to be as alive and menacing on film as Buck originally wrote in his book. Denis thought he would be making a *documentary* of actual events as they happened; Buck was recreating the scenes that he had already experienced and told. Daniel Bender commenting on that particular scene in the film writes: “Too fantastical, too superhuman to be real, the capture was pure fraud” (2016: 105). Unfortunately, Bender and Bousé do not clarify that they refer only to the cinematic re-enactment, and therefore imply that even the original capture described in the book was not merely exaggerated but faked too. David Attenborough (1961: 98) offers an explanation for Buck's practice, attesting that early wildlife films, even so-called documentaries, were understood by the aesthetics of the day to be theatrical film, fictional creations, rather than the hyperrealism of today's technologically enhanced wildlife film.<sup>13</sup>

More disconcerting than the blurred demarcations between factual and fictional animal representation, however, is the image of Buck himself. Coming across as a savvy businessman, entertaining raconteur, brave capturer, and conscientious animal caretaker in the books, he appears as a rather clumsy pudgy white man clothed in his signature shorts and pith helmet—that even the *Variety* reviewer at the time found ridiculous and called his “boy scout getup” (Media History Digital Library, 1934). In the film *Wild Cargo*, he is seen flapping his hands foolishly at the Malays who are doing all the work. Viewing the films from the current views of colonial

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<sup>13</sup> Attenborough credits the need for literal honesty in documentary film to the rise of television because a large portion of programs were “live.”

exploitation and anthropogenic species annihilation, one is hard pressed to understand how Buck's cinematic image enhanced his reputation. Nonetheless, for two decades, he was a star of his own making, the popular face of animal capture in the United States.<sup>14</sup>

## VIII. Durrell's Behind-the-Scenes Circus

Durrell, recognizing the importance of film as documentation, first tried filming himself, but later, working with film crews, quickly cottoned on to its falsity. Instead of concealing it, he incorporated it into his literary narrative as another source of humor and extended his family ethos to include the film crew. Thus, his later books, like *Buck's*, harp on the inconveniences of traveling with a director and camera crew and dealing with their requirements. He avoids Buck's dilemma of replicating in film what had already been depicted in books, with the famous exception of the *Corfu Trilogy*, which was reprised with human, rather than nonhuman, actors.<sup>15</sup> Writing after each filmed expedition, Durrell recounts the absurd lengths he and film crews go to in order to capture a few seconds of viable animal action. They use many of the same "staging" techniques that Buck used, but rather than shooting scenes of animal violence, they usually depict animal amiability and playfulness.<sup>16</sup> Durrell indulges with great relish in full disclosure of the process (with signature hyperbole and striking metaphors), offering a more complex, informative, and entertaining account than the visual version.

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<sup>14</sup> Although Buck was largely forgotten after World War II, *Bring 'em Back Alive* was resurrected in 1982 in a 17-part television series starring a much more handsome Bruce Boxleitner. Animal capture, however, plays a smaller role because the Buck character was too busy fending off Japanese and German enemies in 1939 Singapore.

<sup>15</sup> The 2016-2019 television series *The Durrells*, loosely based on his books, was extremely popular.

<sup>16</sup> Some of the same fraudulent (and harmful) techniques that Buck was accused of using have been practiced by BBC, Disney and National Geographic, as revealed in the investigative documentary *Cruel Camera*, first in 1982 and again, still relevant, in 2007.

While the early books center on Durrell's exuberant participation in physically capturing or bargaining for animals from local people, actual animal capture becomes less prominent in his television and film work, which instead focuses on his captive-breeding activities and conservation message. G. Durrell (2016) was not filmed in the field with a director until 1962, on an expedition to Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia, recounted in his book, *Two in the Bush* for the BBC series of the same name. He recounts only the challenges of capturing *on film* because no animals were physically taken on this trip. When film dictates the action, animals continue to provide impromptu delights, but they are not merely observed; they are managed as Buck's were. The director Chris Parsons and cameraman Jim Saunders know the shots they want and determine the action, telling Durrell what to do to perform his role as animal friend. In New Zealand, upon seeing a large lake covered by nonnative black swans, they arrange for a boat to accost the swans so that hundreds rise up, making an impressive show of how vast the numbers of these invasive birds are, while Durrell comments on how they, imported by European settlers, have replaced the native ducks. No harm was done to the swans, but it was a staged shot to illustrate Durrell's conservationist message in a graphic way.

Durrell (2016) tells of the discomfort the team suffers going to see another rare bird, the tahake, in the wild. Only after several days hiking, do they manage to glimpse (and film) one before it flees, and only then does their guide tell them that he has raised two tahake chicks that are very tame, "almost domestic." The cameraman who has been lugging heavy equipment over water-logged ground asks why they didn't just go there in the first place. "It wouldn't have been authentic," explains his director. "We wanted to show the bird's real environment . . . get the feel of the place" (76).

This scenario raises some of the main issues of the filmed capture narrative. One is to show the animal interacting with its pristine (without sign of human influence) native habitat to prove its authenticity, even though signs of human presence are often edited

out or the episodes are filled in with shots taken in zoos. Another issue is the imposition of the dramatic structure that begins with a wild animal fleeing or struggling and ends with a placated animal being unafraid and friendly, “almost domestic.” This is key to the whole captivity question “what is wild and why is it so important to some people to preserve it when it seems to mean ‘anti-human?’” People seem to want both in the capture narrative—pursuing the resistant creature, and befriending the subdued one; one without the other is either the diminution of nature’s mystery or the unbearable alienation of humanity.

While Durrell increasingly stresses the protection of habitats, the New Zealand terrains he visits are neither pristine nor inhabited by indigenous Maori, but show signs of modernity’s impact. Seeking keas, another NZ bird, in its mountain abode, they are thwarted by the surprising arrival of a noisy bulldozer. Disappointed, they later discover the maid at their hotel feeds a flock of keas bread and butter in her yard. Thus baited, the birds delightedly converge for the camera. This staging differs from Buck’s not in its technique of using food to attract animals, but in its amiableness, showing the world to be a challenging, but friendly place. They film the flock, but in his book, Durrell also paints a vivid portrait of the birds’ famously clownish behavior:

They were irresponsible, noisy, devilish and altogether charming birds, and as I watched two of them, their beaks covered with bread and butter, fight over the privilege of sliding down a roof, screaming abuse at each other, crests up and wings flapping so that the orange feathering glowed in the sun, making them look more like an animated bonfire than anything. (2016: 84)

“Fascinating” and “charming” are the two words Durrell uses most frequently for animals, but his reference to the birds as “animated bonfires” casts them beyond the range of filmmakers and viewers, and reinvents them in his own artistic imagination. While being filmed, Durrell and his narrative are curtailed by the director’s

needs, expectations, and goals, shifting the focus away from his personal perspective to the visual images. In his books, he remains completely in control, portraying occasions, people and animals as he wishes them to be perceived, augmenting the experiences with his poetic vision.

Durrell does not leave it to his directors to expose what goes on behind the scenes but tells it himself with such ludic exaggeration that there is little left for others to uncover. Without the written backstories, no one would know how many shots were staged or what antics were involved in making them visually arresting, such as describing himself wobbling precariously atop a ladder as he tosses up flying lizards to get a few filmed seconds of their flight. His comic commentary provides not only an antidote to the illusion of realism in nature films, but also shows the extraordinary effort that goes into making them.

His last book, *The Aye-Aye and I*, includes both filming and catching animals for the Jersey Zoo, but the animals are no longer caught by Durrell himself. His poor physical condition prevents him from going into the forests, and he instead becomes a full-time caregiver remaining in camp wherever they are stationed. No longer able to provide the personal hunting thrill of a young man's discovery, he instead fusses over the animals brought in by others. When they catch a mother aye-aye (a rare lemur) but not her baby, he is so worried he cannot sleep, and his second wife Lee tells him to stop, "carrying on like a mother." When the team manages to find the baby, G. Durrell (1992: 143) gushes, "the baby was so aristocratic and so incredibly beautiful that I stupidly burst into tears of relief." Thus, at the end of his life, his capture narrative is exclusively that of the mothering zookeeper.

Writing about that last trip abroad, Durrell (1992: 163) allows himself a moment of satisfaction when alone in camp on Mauritius, he sees a rare pink pigeon wearing a ring identifying it as having been raised at the Jersey Zoo: "it was heart-warming to see a Jersey-bred bird perching on a tree in its island home: this is what zoos—

good zoos—are all about.” Unlike Noah’s dove that returns only because it cannot find a place to land, Durrell’s pink pigeon affirms that it is not only once again surviving in its native forest, but includes him in the picture, its ring acknowledging the success of his intervention in effecting the species’ revival, a potent image of humans as caretakers in the midst of Anthropocene devastation. In the end, his role in capture becomes solely *ocular*, just seeing, capturing his impression of the animal in words, conveyed privately to the reader, without the mediation of other people or technology.

## IX. Not a Zoo: Jungle Theme Park and Captive Breeding Center

The careers of both men culminated in the establishment of their own institutions of captive animals, which they claimed were *not* zoos because they differed from other zoos at the time in character and intent. The summit of Buck’s enterprises was successfully outbidding the nation’s famous zoos to be the animal entertainment concessionaire at the New York World’s Fair in 1939. Instead of displaying animals in the customary taxonomically-grouped cages, he created a simulacrum of his Malay jungle with an unprecedented number of exotic people (or costumed to be exotic) and animals on American soil for a public eager to participate in the illusion. Riding through the fair on the back of an elephant along with Johnny Weismuller, star of *Tarzan*, like a rajah surveying his self-made kingdom, he marvels that a poor Texan boy could rise to such heights. After the fair, he transferred the animals to Long Island for his Jungleland theme park that closed in 1944 when wartime shortages of food and workers threatened the closure of many zoos.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast, Durrell writes about the difficulties of finding a

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<sup>17</sup> The zoo in Gainsville, Texas where he was born, was renamed the Frank Buck Zoo in 1954.

place and funding to launch his now world-famous Jersey Zoo—the first institution devoted to captive breeding. Unlike the extrovert Buck, reveling in his glory, Durrell, professed to be a shy man, going public only on behalf of animals. He had to turn on the charm with famous sponsors, such as the zoo’s Royal Patron, Princess Anne, who in 1984 inaugurated his other unique institution—the International Training Centre—that educates naturalist-zookeepers from extinction hotspots in poor countries.

The zoo was Durrell’s animal kingdom, as he virtually lived in it, but the zoo staff expressed surprise that he was not more often with the animals. His biographer Botting suggests that he was too anxious about finding the money needed to keep it going, and was overworked from writing more books, taking more televised expeditions and making more lecture appearances. In *The Stationary Ark*, his least funny book, G. Durrell describes all that goes into the running the Jersey Zoo according to his ideals, and explains why he depends upon humor:

If anyone objects to what may seem, on the surface, a frivolous attitude, I can only point out that if I did not find the antics of myself and my fellow animals—from politicians to peacocks—irresistibly comic, I would not have the heart to do what I am doing. The present world looks so dark, that one needs the fireflies of humour to light one’s way. (1976: 9)

His humorous depictions of this vast and varied world mask not only his immediate worry about maintaining the zoo, but also the burden of his prescient despair over extinction, always haunted by the echo “too little . . . too late.”

## X. Their Legacies Today

Humor, however, might be Durrell’s unique legacy—for his books are still read around the world for the joy they transmit, thanks to his ability to express his rapport with animals with

insightful and comic aplomb. Few books about environmental destruction and animal extinction are humorous, but Durrell's "fireflies" keep people engaged rather than turned off or paralyzed by the immensity of the problems. In contrast, Buck's books are rarely read for pleasure anymore and mostly attract the ire of scholars who wish to critique him and his life work; even his humor seems dated and can sometimes be construed as offensive. Buck's popularity was defined by his era, and his views on animal collecting and captivity are no longer viable. His naïve optimism and hubris do not obviate his affection and fascination for animals, but his attitude is dictated by the pervasive views of the time that assumed humanity's religious, economic and scientific dominion over nonhumans.

Buck casts himself as a hero dealing with a world fraught with danger, performing roles of judge and jailor of villains, and protector of the weak and innocent. Yet his narrative is ebullient, full of the early twentieth-century American confidence and can-do spirit, a beacon to those boyish-at-heart as well as bold enough to seize the opportunity—a fulfilment of American masculinity and its concept of progressive civilization. In applying the dictum that ontogeny repeats phylogeny to the development of both individuals and societies, however, Aldo Leopold (1949: 175-176) suggests that the men subscribing to the trophy hunter narrative are "cavemen reborn . . . who never grow up . . . who must possess, invade, appropriate" because they can never really value the wilderness. Buck, as well as his place and time, were caught up in what Leopold calls the "prerogative of youth" and never graduated to "husbandry" of the mature naturalist who works with the land and its nonhuman inhabitants.

In contrast, Durrell's paradoxical nature operates in reverse. He suffered from being ahead of his time in practicing wildlife husbandry and land stewardship. His buoyant humor conceals a deep pessimism that contributed to worsening alcoholism. In his later years, he portrays himself as still the entranced boy of twelve

in spirit but trapped in an increasingly incapacitated body. Every human and nonhuman he writes about is treated as extended family, binding them together in a circle of his personal affection. He does not pontificate on how Gaia, the Earth, is one ecosystem or how similar humans are to animals—he writes as if these truths were self-evident. A collector with maternal instincts to provide care, he expresses effervescent ecstasy over the beauty of the world, yet his narrative cannot hide his sorrow—tinged with postcolonial angst—over its depletion.

Although Buck and Durrell would have agreed that they were extraordinarily lucky men to have spent their lives among animals, their projects have had problematic consequences. Buck's activities, viewed from the current age of extinction, are utterly unacceptable because he made use of the animal trappers that are today's illegal poachers. His methods of capture were sometimes brutal and some of his caretaking techniques—questionable even at the time—have been consigned to history by responsible zoos all over the world. Animal capture has become a villainous narrative with wildlife trafficking being the fourth most profitable illicit trade after that of humans, weapons and drugs. Buck's persona, representative of pre-World War II America, has been replaced by the new heroism of *preventing* capture and rescuing animals, such as shown in the film *The Cove* (2009), the videos of Greenpeace members protecting whales (1975), the Born Free documentaries (2007) about resettling former entertainment animals in sanctuaries, and in the media coverage of the all-female anti-poacher unit, the Kenyan Black Mambas (2021). That said, as mentioned at the beginning of this essay, the hunting stories upon which Buck built his narrative also endure, as does the emphasis on animal violence in many wildlife television programs. However, that narrative is now compounded with stories about hunting down the hunters, such as in Bryan Christy's (2021) novel, *In the Company of Killers*.

Durrell remains a posthumous spokesman for species survival and habitat preservation; his caretaking and captive-breeding

models have been emulated around the world. But he too, came under scrutiny for his portrayals of Africans, and even some of his most benevolent practices have been abused. For example, the International Union for Conservation of Nature's red list to protect endangered species pertains only to animals in the wild, not those in various forms of captivity, giving rise to an underground economy of wild animal farms to harvest body parts. Buck and Durrell's animal capture narratives remain important landmarks in the evolving British and American perspectives on human-wildlife relations, providing a historical context for how those relations were once perceived, and consequently impact the directions in which they now go.

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## 讓牠們活過來： 野生動物捕捉的兩種流行敘事

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### 摘 要

二十世紀中葉，美國和英國分別派了狩獵者到南半球去捕捉野生動物，以便建造動物園。這些狩獵者的回憶錄裡既有追捕者的快感，又有如動物管理員照顧動物的挑戰，在書本、電視和電影中廣受歡迎。其中又以美國弗蘭克·巴克和英國杰拉爾德·杜瑞爾的作品為代表，在當地及國際上都非常成功，從文字與視覺媒體開始，繼而都各自建立了自己的動物園。雖然兩人都因為講述他們與動物的關係而聲名大噪，但他們的風格迥異，不僅體現了英美幽默的差異和媒體對野生動物描述之間的對比，也反映了人們對二戰前後捕捉野生動物態度的轉變。本文將著眼於比較他們的捕獲敘事在他們一生中的意義，以及他們的作品如何繼續影響人與野生動物關係在大眾媒體中兩種不同的表現——暴力威脅和友好的親屬關係。

**關鍵詞：**動物園、野生動物電影、自然廣播、杰拉爾德·杜瑞爾、動物捕捉