

## Tekst 8

### Nature bites back

*Stephen Moss reviews David Quammen's study of predators with a taste for human flesh*

#### **Monster of God: The Man-eating Predator in the Jungles of History and the Mind**

by David Quammen

516pp, Hutchinson, £25

- 1 TV executives in the US are fond of saying that there are only three certainties in life: death, taxes and Shark Week on the Discovery Channel. The extraordinary popularity of wildlife programmes – especially those featuring sharks, big cats and crocodiles – confirms our obsession with what David Quammen calls “the alpha predators”: animals that not only kill humans, but eat them too. The relationship between human beings and this diverse group of creatures (linked by dietary preference rather than zoology) is the subject of this book.
- 2 *Monster of God* traces the development of our responses to the danger of “man-eaters”. First, we were simply in awe of their power, and then we fought back, ultimately taking our revenge on them through wholesale massacre. Only in the 20th century, when most large predators had become globally endangered, did we finally consider protecting them.
- 3 But to use a cliché of which wildlife film-makers are rather too fond, it may now be too late. Quammen looks ahead to the year 2150, when the world’s population is predicted to peak at 11 billion. By then, he believes, most of the alpha predators will have been eliminated. So while he still can, he has gone to see some of them for himself. He travels to India for Asiatic lions, to northern Australia for saltwater crocodiles, Romania for brown bears, and finally to Siberia for the elusive Siberian tiger. At each location he finds the usual conflict between predators and people.
- 4 For this book is as much about people as it is about natural history. As an example of our power over the animals, Quammen describes an extraordinary episode in the life of the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. The despised leader was brought by helicopter to a forest clearing, into which bears were driven so he could massacre them in cold blood – not hunting but butchery, as one observer noted bitterly.
- 5 Such examples, although fascinating in themselves, do not quite deliver the promise of the book’s rather awkward subtitle. Following Quammen’s brilliant debut, *The Song of the Dodo*, this book feels a bit like that “difficult second album” – a collection of very readable but disconnected essays in search of a unifying theme.
- 6 And while he is excellent on examples from the Bible and from classical literature, he chooses to ignore some more popular references. In a work dealing with the relationship between humans and alpha predators, the impact of the film *Jaws* on our attitude towards sharks surely rates a mention.
- 7 For me, the most interesting theme to emerge from the book is how an individual’s relationship with these creatures can be defined by his or her socio-economic status. The poorer you are, the more likely it is that a meeting with an alpha predator will end in your death.
- 8 Here we encounter a paradox. Those of us in western society may rarely encounter these animals in the flesh, yet we are probably more familiar with their lives than at any time in human history. Look at the recent success of BBC1’s Big Cat Week, in which seven million people regularly tuned in to watch a television programme deliberately conceived, produced and marketed as a wildlife soap opera. Despite – or possibly because of – the danger they pose, we just cannot get enough of these magnificent beasts. To put it bluntly: rich people are entertained by predators; poor people are eaten by them.

*<http://books.guardian.co.uk>*

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- 1p **29** ■ How does Stephen Moss introduce his review in paragraph 1?
- A By blaming television for people's feelings of horror towards alpha predators.
  - B By correcting the mistaken view that most people have of alpha predators.
  - C By focusing on the special fascination that people have for alpha predators.
  - D By questioning the commercial exploitation of people's fear of alpha predators.
- 1p **30** ■ Which aspect of the book *Monster of God* does paragraph 2 deal with?
- A The history of human attitudes and behaviour towards alpha predators.
  - B The human inability to understand the behaviour of alpha predators.
  - C The reasons why humans are so deeply impressed by alpha predators.
  - D The view that humans have proved to be superior to alpha predators.
- “it may now be too late” (paragraph 3)
- 1p **31** ■ Too late to do what?
- A To prevent overpopulation of the earth.
  - B To save the alpha predators from extinction.
  - C To stop mankind from destroying the planet.
- 1p **32** ■ Why does Quammen bring up the story about Ceausescu, according to paragraph 4?
- A To demonstrate the senseless cruelty of the Romanian dictator.
  - B To point out how people can abuse their power over animals.
  - C To show his disgust at the brutal killing of alpha predators.
  - D To stress the urgent need for wildlife protection.
- 2p **33** □ Geef voor elk van de onderstaande uitspraken aan of deze op grond van alinea 5 of 6 wel of niet overeenkomt met de mening van Stephen Moss over *Monster of God*.
- 1 De inhoud van het boek heeft niets te maken met de ondertitel.
  - 2 Er is te weinig samenhang in het boek.
  - 3 Het boek besteedt te weinig aandacht aan haaien.
  - 4 Het boek is minder geslaagd dan Quammens eerste boek.
- Noteer het nummer van elke uitspraak, gevolgd door “wel” of “niet”.
- 1p **34** ■ How could paragraph 8 be summarised?
- A The more educational wildlife programmes are, the more people enjoy them.
  - B The more wildlife programmes we watch, the less we seem to learn from them.
  - C Those who have little to fear from alpha predators know a lot about them.
  - D Those who show most interest in alpha predators also kill most of them.