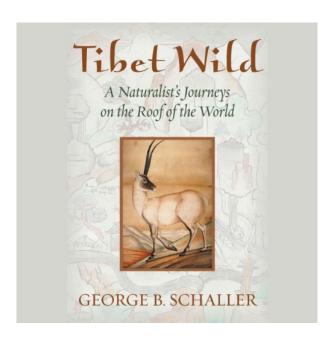
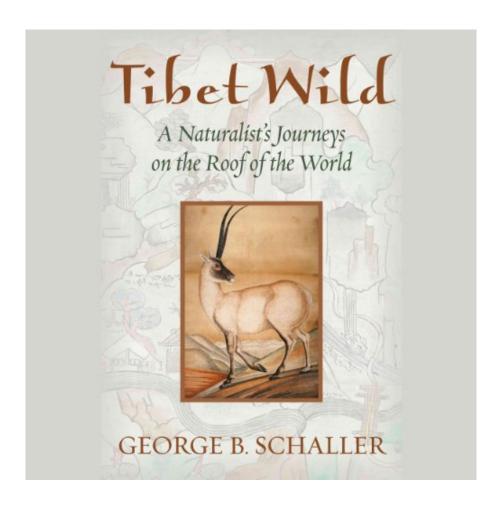
## TIBET WILD: A NATURALIST'S JOURNEYS ON THE ROOF OF THE WORLD BY GEORGE B. SCHALLER



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### TIBET WILD: A NATURALIST'S JOURNEYS ON THE ROOF OF THE WORLD BY GEORGE B. SCHALLER PDF

As one of the world's leading field biologists, George Schaller has spent much of his life traversing wild and isolated places in his quest to understand and conserve threatened species - from mountain gorillas in the Virunga to pandas in the Wolong and snow leopards in the Himalaya.

Throughout his celebrated career, Schaller has spent more time in Tibet than in any other part of the world, devoting more than thirty years to the wildlife, culture, and landscapes that captured his heart and continue to compel him to protect them.

Tibet Wild is Schaller's account of three decades of exploration in the most remote stretches of Tibet: the wide, sweeping rangelands of the Chang Tang and the hidden canyons and plunging ravines of the southeastern forests.

As engaging as he is enlightening, Schaller illustrates the daily struggles of a field biologist trying to traverse the impenetrable Chang Tang, discover the calving grounds of the chiru or Tibetan antelope, and understand the movements of the enigmatic snow leopard. As changes in the region accelerated over the years, with more roads, homes, and grazing livestock, Schaller watched the clash between wildlife and people become more common - and more destructive.

Thus what began as a purely scientific endeavor became a mission: to work with local communities, regional leaders, and national governments to protect the unique ecological richness and culture of the Tibetan Plateau. Whether tracking brown bears, penning fables about the tiny pika, or promoting a conservation preserve that spans the borders of four nations, Schaller has pursued his goal with a persistence and good humor that will inform and charm readers. Tibet Wild is an intimate journey through the changing wilderness of Tibet, guided by the careful gaze and unwavering passion of a life-long naturalist.

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10 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

A Last Gasp?

By Charles S. Fisher

In the late 1960s restless in my academic job, I wanted to volunteer to help George Schaller in his forthcoming study of pandas in China. Tim Asch, the anthropological film maker, warned me against the

project. He was right, as can be seen in Peter Mathiessen's portrayal of Schaller the in the book, "Snow Leopard." On my best day I could not have kept up with Schaller on his worst. He notes in this volume that he hurt his knee at one point, the only injury he had suffered in thirty years. Unbelievable but no less, I am sure, true. Now Schaller, a few years my senior, seems to be facing the existential challenge of the meaning of his life. By nature Schaller is not the introspective type. He admits the greatest motive in his studies has been the desire to be out in the wilds, hiking, observing, taking in the beauties of exotic landscapes. In that he is not much different from friends who became marine biologists because they loved to dive, or why I was often absent from the university in the Fall. I could not stand being indoors that much, especially in New England autumn. Discounting the refuges and protections that his studies have lead to, Schaller feels that the most meaningful contribution he has made is in the training of naturalists and rangers. He is a wanderer: " ...in any...place... I feel rootless, unconnected, always traveling in my mind...never quite satisfied..." His compassion was aroused by the conflict between herders and snow leopards, but he "had no way of providing direct help during my fleeting visits..."

Schaller also mentions that telemetry, GPS, radio collars, camera traps, DNA and computers, while collecting data that would have either been very hard won or impossible, are shifting field work away from his kind of wandering and patient personal observation. He doesn't discuss the existential challenge that what has been called "fat man biology" is to the naturalist who loves to be immersed in nature. I never figured out whether Schaller speaks any of the languages in the countries he explored. And for Schaller's first 12 years his father worked for the Nazi government but Schaller does not mention if that had any influence on his life, positive or negative.

Trying to make this book more personal, (some of his studies are quite dry), Schaller's writing is not so juicy. Yet if he is not deeply introspective he is certainly a master of what he does: travel round the world seeking out endangered animals and places that need to be preserved. It is bewildering trying to follow his activities. Though not all in this book he bounces from the Himalayas to the Brazilian jungle. I read the book over a period of some four weeks. I would not recommend addressing it that way. I got confused as to places and dates, and having finished the book, I can't say what the organizing principal was. But each adventure is fascinating. Antelope, Goats, Bears, Snow Leopards. The wilds of Tibet, Mongolia, China, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan both independent and as part of the old Soviet Union. Only a few of the maps in the book are adequate to follow the narrative. So I resorted to Google Earth, something I have rarely used. Still it was difficult to follow. I didn't want to keep my computer on my lap while I was reading. I am old-fashioned enough to like the feel of a newspaper or book in my hands and the freedom to read in any position.

So what is controversial in the book. Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism, # 1. Schaller's book ends on a note of how Buddhism supports beliefs he see as necessary for conservation, but evidence in the book reveals it is often otherwise. A few monasteries he visits are conservation minded, but then the members there seem quite ordinary people with interests that are not dictated by some deep spiritual drive. In fact much of the Tibet Schaller describes seems the same. In his non-introspective way he does not go deeply into the political contradictions in the areas he visits. It would seem that the Chinese are the best at both dedicating resources and science to preservation even though there are corrupt elements undermining that effort. Despite the anti-Chinese, self-righteous comments of the Dalai Lama's celebrity acolytes, the railway between Golmund and Lhasa was built with great ecological care, the underpasses enabling chiru to migrate even though they were not built with that in mind. And during the Soviet period things were better for survival and conservation in both Tajikistan and the Afghani Wakan intrusion. As for the rest of the countries, their efforts seem more gestures than enforceable regulation. India is particularly bad. Schaller acknowledges the conflicts between setting land aside as reserves and the subsistence needs of the people who live nearby. His solution is to include them in the take of ecotourism or trophy hunting, but excluding the more distant although native

market extractors. And here despite their Buddhism, local Tibetans seem just as good at poaching and killing as their non-Buddhist neighbors. He is even accused in the 1990s of being pro-Chinese because the Tibetan diaspora wants the world to believe it is only the Han who despoil the environment and the not the Tibetans he shows poaching wild chiru for their fine wool. He mentions that when in 2006 the Dalai Lama criticized the killing of tigers and other fur animals, their pelts disappeared from the Lhasa markets and people gathered together to burn them. I find it a bit far fetched that all of a sudden traders would destroy their livelihoods, but who knows. Schaller claims the Han took over the trade. The Chinese keep captive wild animals whom they milk for bile. Tibetan herders kill picas because they believe they compete with sheep for forage. Schaller asks, "Does the Buddha urge....compassion toward all living being--except picas." So he wrote fables about picas directed at the herders.

You gotta love George Schaller. He is one of a kind. Few in the world match him. So do not think my comments are anything other than a loving examination of the world that he stirs up. I might have chosen to live his life rather than mine, but I neither had the physical strength nor the courage. It was probably much easier to live as he did without deep introspection. He certianly accomplished a lot more. This book is a worthy read and despite his 76 years he may produce many more.

Charlie Fisher, author of "Dismantling Discontent: Buddha's Way Through Darwin's World" and the forthcoming "Meditation in the Wild."

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Great book from a superstar of conservation

By Yeti

Tibet, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, western China, Nepal and restive north-east India all have one thing in common when it comes to making big news around the world: violence. That is unfortunate, but this is the area where the great Dr. Schaller has done fantastic work from surveys to helping establish new reserves for the wildlife he loves so much. This book is about ecology, conservation and his spiritual journey in the area. He's seen the area since the middle of the last century, and as a naturalist possesses the gift for observation.

I have tremendous respect for the work and life of Dr. Schaller and I think this book is a must read for all who've followed the work of this wonderful naturalist and gifted writer. It is especially a must-read for people who know nothing about the region as it opens up a new insight into a region that is often painted so negatively.

Then why is this book not worth a five star rating? Compressing five decades into ~300 pages can be difficult. I felt a lot of discontinuity and some experiences too short or skimmed in order to be able to put into a book. I'm sure even if it were 5 volumes of 500 pages each there wouldn't be space for all that he's seen and learned there, but I think it would do more justice to his work! Oddly, I came across several repeated information in the chiru chapters as I didn't expect that in a condensed book.

I didn't enjoy his preference to the use of pack animals. It was particularly sad that donkeys were overloaded and beaten and some died of exhaustion and cold and some abandoned when he went on with a professional trekking guide during one of his surveys. And then the yaks sitting down due to exhaustion. I'm not so sure the survey's are worth abusing animals or people, especially when the animals are not meant to do such things.

I also didn't enjoy his endless rebuking of local people from showing them as corrupt, lazy, dishonest, authoritative and what not. Unfortunately, a lot of that behavior comes not because people want to be that way, but they are forced to be that way due to their association, competition, culture or just out of

desperation. I know, because I'm from the region. One of the methods described as something that works - compensation - doesn't really work in its full potential. Yes, Dr. Schaller saw an official handing out rupees to the Ladakhi for compensation seems to show it works, but he's not there all the time. From what I understand, compensation rarely goes to the real victim, or at least not the full amount. Unfortunately, I worry about the corruption for any scheme where money is involved. However, such sensitive topics are best left to be written by local conservationists or the press will unfairly think of it as a race or other such nonsensical issues. And this the reason I felt that Dr. Schaller should have left out judging of people from this book as what's said is not the whole picture and has a complex background (tribe, caste, class, religion, color and all).

I liked his work on the proposal of the peace park in the Pamirs along the lines of other parks (Btw, it's Waterton Lakes bordering Glacier and not Banff!). Southern Africa has several of those near Okavango river and the Kgalagadi (Kalahari) and it's great to see animals not hindered by fences, passports and such. I do hope the Pamir Peace Park will become a reality in the lifetime of Dr. Schaller.

Overall, it's a great book by a wonderful naturalist. There's lots of interesting nuggets of wisdom.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

An inspiring read

By Sam R

What I enjoyed most in this great book was the glimpse into the life of a "feral biologist". While the descriptions of Tibet and it's people were wonderful, I found Schaller's reflections on his own life compelling, poignant and, ultimately, inspiring. His passion and dedication are obvious, and the fact that he is working alongside Tibetan and Han Chinese gives me hope for the future of wildlife on the Tibetan plateau. Thank you for writing this!

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