

oneers Who Risked Their Lives to Bring Medicine into the Modern Age, the prose in the book sometimes tends toward the breathless — an inclination hardly new in the genre of popular science.

This book may interest clinicians who are drawn to history, professors of basic science who are seeking historical perspectives to include in their teaching, young people who are hoping to pursue careers in biomedicine, and members of the general public who are interested in the field of medicine. Even in this age of television and the Internet, such printed medical tales — generally more detailed and enduring than their counterparts in the newer media — have a worthy place.

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TEARS OF THE CHEETAH AND OTHER
TALES FROM THE GENETIC FRONTIER

By Stephen J. O'Brien. 287 pp., illustrated. New York, St. Martin's, 2003. \$25.95. ISBN 0-312-27286-3.

FOR A MOLECULAR BIOLOGIST, STEPHEN O'Brien has led an adventuresome life. *Tears of the Cheetah* recounts how the pursuit of molecular biology in his laboratory led to some of his far-flung pursuits. He collected sperm from wild East African cheetahs on the Serengeti Plain; placated a Dutch princess who thought he was shooting Tanzanian lions with bullets, rather than with anesthetizing darts; chased humpback whales in a Zodiac rubber raft; cuddled a baby giant panda in a thick Chinese bamboo forest; confronted a crown prosecutor during a Prince Edward Island murder trial in reference to the identification of a cat by DNA from a hair; and tracked orangutans in Borneo to perform skin biopsies.

O'Brien is chief of the Laboratory of Genomic Diversity at the National Cancer Institute. His book tells how the institute is applying molecular biology to the problems of endangered species. A recurrent theme is how a population bottleneck, reduc-

ing a population to a small number, can lead to a reduction in genetic variation as the surviving population increases. The resulting reductions in sperm count and testosterone levels and increases in infant mortality and birth defects imperil the survival of the population, as in the examples of East African cheetahs, African and Asiatic lions, and the Florida panther.

Other examples of how techniques from the discipline of molecular genetics have helped ameliorate the problems of endangered species include working out how to tell when a species is genuinely an endangered species and therefore entitled to protection; detecting the DNA of whales of endangered species (not to be hunted) in "fish" from Japanese and Korean fish markets, thus proving illegal whaling; and deciding whether giant pandas are bears or raccoons (they are bears, and their reduced population size is due to reduced habitat, not inbreeding). O'Brien also illuminates how and when AIDS jumped from monkeys to people, underscoring the fact that the consumption of "bushmeat" from illegally slaughtered monkeys is a deadly, but ignored, practice that threatens us all.

The language is clear, though an occasional surfeit of detail may become a little tedious. Most physicians have sufficient knowledge of DNA terminology to follow the molecular story, and if the reader is not on intimate terms with RFLPs, SNPs, microsatellites, and mitochondrial chromosomes, the gist of the book is still evident, and it will broaden the reader's horizons considerably.

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CORRECTION

Combination Estrogen-Progestin Oral Contraceptives (October 9, 2003;349:1443-50). In Table 1, on page 1444, the entry "norgestimate" should not have been followed by a footnote symbol (‡), as printed. All the products listed in this row of the table are combination estrogen-progestin oral contraceptives currently marketed in the United States.