FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Tiger Territory: A Story of the Chitwan Valley
Ann Whitehead Nagda
Ann Whitehead Nagda Illustrated by Paul Kratter
Paul Kratter, illustrator
Soundprints
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In his recent bestseller, Shadows in the Sun, ethnobiologist Wade Davis includes an unsettling theory from Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson. Wilson asserts that this past century will be remembered not for its wars or technological advances, but rather as the era in which men and women stood by and either passively endorsed or actively supported the massive destruction of biological diversity on this planet. Many children's book publishers have addressed this issue, as evidenced by the recent increase in books about animals and habitats. Soundprints, however, with its Nature Conservancy Habitat Series, has fully embraced the idea that only through education and awareness can we begin to reverse this disturbing trend.

Each title in this series pinpoints a specific habitat in the world whose preservation is crucial to the abundant animal and plant life found there. A portion of the sale price goes to support the Nature Conservancy. In return, the Conservancy reviews the titles for accuracy and content. It is a collaboration that benefits not only the publisher, but the reader as well.

Tiger Territory: A story of the Chitwan Valley, focuses on a National Park in Nepal that was established in 1973 as a protected area for Bengal tigers. Nagda's Tiger Territory is more a portrait, a sort of day in the life of a mother Bengal who is hunting to provide food for her three cubs. Though she is thwarted in her first few attempts, she eventually is successful in killing a sambar stag, and the entire tiger family is fed. In the course of her hunt, one is shown the wide variety of flora and fauna in this valley. The pages are not just filled with life, they are filled with specific species-langur monkeys, chital deer and phoenix palms. The strength of this title is in the illustrations, which are impressive. Perfectly executed watercolors by Kratter cover the pages from edge to edge, and give us a view of the action from a number of unique perspectives. Children will be drawn to the pages showing two male tigers fighting, with vultures shadowy in the background.

"Northern Refuge: A Story of a Canadian Boreal Forest" presents the first year of life for

a young moose calf. His mother teaches him to swim, browse and run from hungry wolves under colorful northern lights. At the end of the year, his antlers begin to grow, signaling his independence. The pages are full of familiar North American species, porcupines, mice and owls, as well as wolverines and spruce trees. Again it is the illustrations that carry the message. While not quite as powerful as Kratter, Forest does a good job of portraying both the density and the expanse of this habitat, which stretches across Canada.

One appealing feature of each book is the panoramic fold-out at the end of the story, containing all the species in one painting, and a picture glossary of things to look for in the spread. A section of informational text about the habitat is added to a world map, marking its location.

The audio tapes, which contain authentic animal sounds, unobtrusive background music and a clear, well-read narration, are an indispensable addition, and excellently produced. Given that young children may not be able to decipher the somewhat lengthy text, the tapes are almost a necessity. The featured animal character for each title is also available as a stuffed animal, making the kit a nice gift choice. In fact, each package in the series is a perfect, politically correct selection for those who wish children to begin to think about the importance of diversity on this planet.

Leigh Forrest