



## **New York Times Book Review November 10 1991 – US**

### **TIGRESS**

Written and illustrated by Helen Cowcher

New York : Farrar, Straus & Giroux 40pp 0-374-37567-4 (ages 4-8)

Ever since William Blake's tiger burned bright, lions, tigers and other big cats have fascinated children and challenged the best writers and illustrators. Feline images from children's books parade regularly through the mind's eye—James Daugherty's lion in "Andy and the Lion", Marcia Brown's tiger in "Once upon a mouse", Alice and Martin Provensen's tiger in "A Visit to William Blake's Inn", to name but a few. Into this familiar jungle stalk two newcomers with ecological themes.

Helen Cowcher is no newcomer to children's books. Her "Rainforest" and Antarctica" were both widely praised by critics. Her vibrant illustrations have always been striking, but have overshadowed her slender story lines . In "Tigress", Ms Cowcher has finally matched words with images to create her most satisfying storybook.

In an unspecified country, a tigress and her cubs live in a sanctuary bordering a grazing area that shelters turbaned herdsmen, their families and flocks. Ms Cowcher's first sentence establishes the tension : "the quick, sharp calls of monkeys in the forest sanctuary warn deer that a tigress is near." Scenting "camels' breath and goats' droppings," and seeking food for her cubs, the tigress attacks the herd precipitating an ecological crisis. How can the herdsmen protect their vulnerable flocks? How can the sanctuary ranger save the tigress and her cubs? Together the ranger and herdsmen devise a literally explosive, yet humane, solution.

Ms Cowcher's handsome tigers dominate the landscape with their bold orange and brown hues, black stripes and menacing white teeth. They move with a little stealth, so sleek one looks closely at the page to see if their stripes actually ripple. In comparison, the goats, camels, people and even the trees seem frail, easy pickings for the huge mother cat. Eyes tell the story. The tigress's eyes glare with eager anticipation and the herdsman's betray his fearful despair, while the ranger's cautiously assess the situation.

Her palette is so vibrant and her images are so memorable, it would be easy to overlook Ms Cowcher's spare, understated, yet dramatic text. When the tigress attacks, for example, "A hush descends. In one fell swoop a young bullock lies dead!" The reader feels the quickness and suddenness of the attack through the words, but sees only the lifeless body of the bullock lying at the feet of the herdsman. The pictures and words are in perfect harmony. The ecological lesson is embedded in the action of the characters, but never just baldly stated. The herdsman and ranger know the value of both domestic and wild creatures. Ms Cowcher's story and pictures reveal this with a graceful restraint that respects children. Yes, of course they will understand.

### **Linda Perkins**

*Linda Perkins, a children's librarian at the Berkeley (Calif.) Public Library is the president of the Association for Library Service to Children.*

## **BOOKLIST review - US**

### **TIGRESS** by Helen Cowcher

Aged 3-6. I another stunning volume voicing concerns about the environment and endangered animals, Cowcher paints the dramatic problem of a tigress who wanders out of her protected sanctuary and kills the livestock of local village herdsman. The ranger must simultaneously calm the people's fears and anger and entice the wild animal back to the sanctuary. Using diplomacy and firecrackers, the ranger accomplishes his mission. Cowcher's color paintings offer unusually perceptive landscapes as well as portraits of both people and animals. Her tigers have a naturally alive quality and piercing eyes that will haunt readers. First published in Great Britain, this picture book communicates a sense of time and place and a dilemma that will help even the youngest readers understand the need to respect two ways of life-that of humans and that of animals.

**Deborah Abbott** - *American Library Association*

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