CONCLUSION

The foregoing study of Gerald Durrell's unique style of writing and his theme of living harmoniously with the flora and fauna of this world, reveals him to be a person not only dedicated to the only mission in his life - to save animals from extinction, but also as a writer who pursued writing to fulfil this mission.

Through his writings, Durrell is actually urging the readers to save our planet from total annihilation. For this he adopted the technique of presenting animals as characters much similar to human characters seen in any other works of literature. The detailed and innumerable descriptions of living creatures, whether an insect, reptile or a mammal, has been rendered fascinatingly and this detail makes each one to emerge as a striking individual, different from all others, even others of the same species.

Though Durrell deals with a scientific subject namely biology, he has very cleverly, by his descriptive technique, transformed this subject into aesthetic literature. We find him seeing everything with the eye of a poet and he uses the language of a poet to convey them. The beauteous forms of nature arouses poetic feelings in him and many of his descriptions of colour, sound and scent touch lyric heights. This is seen not only in the renderings of scenic-beauty but in portraits of people as well; for instance in the description of the Rose-beetle man in his My Family and other Animals. Similarly the portrayal
of his family members, his friend and tutor Theodore Stephanides, the Fon of Bafut, Captain Creech etc. has been done faithfully.

Durrell’s uncanny ability in expressing vividly whatever he sees and feels is a remarkable feature of his writing. The use of imagery is very striking and appropriate in various situations. Many examples highlighting his metaphysical taste for metaphor and simile can be found throughout his books. An interesting feature of his style is the way in which he frequently describes humans in terms of animals, and animals in terms of humans; for instance Bob who was trying to noose a python from a cave with a long stick, reminded Durrell of “a lanky and earnest black bird tugging an outsize worm from its hole” (A Zoo 36), while the bush baby that was caught in the collecting bag looked up at him “with the horror-stricken expression of an elderly spinster who had discovered a man in the bathroom cupboard” (A Zoo 62).

Imagery enhances the vividness of the descriptive passages. There is a rich choice of imagery which enables us to see the objects described in a new light. For instance combining metaphor and simile he writes: “Along the shore curved beaches as white as tusks among tottering cities of brilliant gold, red and white rocks” (My Family 20). Again while “lying in the silky water, gazing into the sky, . . . I was looking at the Milky Way that stretched like a chiffon scarf across the sky. . .”(My Family 119).

Durrell’s feeling for diction is also quite impressive. The words he chooses seem just right to enhance the vividness and exactness of what he is
describing, whether they are animate or inanimate objects. Everything comes under his keen and discerning eye.

One of Durrell's greatest achievements as a writer would be his ability to describe anything impressionistically. The description of marine life in My Family or the life in the garden wall where he comes across scorpions, mantids, geckos, centipedes, snails etc. gives us a general impression of life in sharp and clearly-defined detail.

Perhaps Durrell's success as a writer rests on his ability to describe things humorously. He has a keen eye for the ludicrous, which he describes with an infectious enthusiasm. Most of the humour springs from quirks of character, mainly of his family members and close associates. Sometimes his description of situations is funny because of an element of anticlimax. Again humour also arises out of incongruity and unexpectedness of situation. Dialogue too is rendered more striking and amusing by understatement and irony, overstatement or fantastic comparison and sometimes from unexpected juxtaposition. Often the humour of an incident depends much on the cool and detached manner it is told.

Despite Durrell's success as a writer, he has been accused by some critics of the trick of attributing human motives and feelings to the animals he describes. For instance a dog has "a ridiculous grin"; a tortoise has "an expression of bemused good humour on his face"; tortoises wander about "with an air of preoccupied determination" and so on. This sort of writing has earned
him the title of being anthropomorphic. But Durrell’s comment, according to Botting, is that his attitude to animals was not anthropomorphic, as some people believed. He didn’t look on animals as little furry humans and he would have no compunction in shooting one and eating it, if need be (300).

It can be seen that by his descriptive technique Durrell has shown that animals do have emotions. They are beings capable of expressing feelings such as love, anger, curiosity jealousy and even sympathy. By portraying the feelings of animals in such a striking way Durrell is urging people to view them in a different perspective. His aim was to jolt people from their ignorance and arrogance about living creatures. He must have hoped that by portraying them with human attributes, he could bring people to understand the interesting traits of animal characters. Thus by realising the value and worth of these animals, Durrell wanted people to regard them as fellow beings of this universe with much the same right to exist as man. Probably that is why in his books he presented his family and animals as co-existing peacefully. He wanted people to treat this planet and its inhabitants as a large family – a family where everybody regarded everything with love and respect. Any harm committed on any member of any species should be considered as an attack inflicted on a member of one’s own family. Such a view would inspire people to desist from plaguing animals thoughtlessly.

This was the saintly mission Durrell pursued and comparing him to St. Francis Botting says:
In his way he was a latter-day St Francis, confronting a problem that St Francis could never have conceived in his worst nightmare. Since his struggle with that problem helped to kill him, it could be said that Gerald Durrell laid down his life for the animal kingdom and the world of nature he loved. (xviii)

Durrell loved all animals, big and small, attractive as well as the ugly ones. They all belonged to him as one family without any differentiation. The most significant aspect of his character was that, unlike other humans he lacked arrogance in his dealings with animals. “Animals,” according to Botting were Durrell’s equals “no matter how small, or ugly, or undistinguished; they were, at a level beyond the merely sentimental, his friends and companions – often his only ones, for he had no great rapport with other children” (49). The animals in turn reciprocated his love not only when he was a boy but throughout the years of his life.

Being embittered, when people fancied the bigger varieties of animals like lions and tigers to the smaller and less attractive ones, Durrell used to say: “A sparrow can be as interesting as a bird of paradise, the behaviour of a mouse as interesting as that of a tiger” (qtd in Botting 599). This fact indeed is an eye opener to all, as it becomes the quintessence of elevating and creating awareness in human beings. He further declares:

Many people think that conservation is just about saving fluffy animals – what they don’t realise is that we’re trying to prevent the human race from committing suicide . . . We have declared war on the biological world, the world that supports us . . . At the
moment the human race is in the position of a man sawing off the
tree branch he is sitting on. (qtd in Botting 600)

Durrell had infinite faith in animals. It was his firm conviction that if
animals were given a chance in an unspoilt world, they might turn into
“animals much superior to man.” Rhetorically speaking he says that “if man
was removed from the map (not a bad idea), if the world went on ticking
without pollution or man’s interference for another trillion million years” our
planet would change into a better place. Perhaps one might come back and find
a “gorilla in charge of West Africa,” and an “orang-utan sitting in Djakarta”
(qtd in Hughes 130–31).

It is evident that Durrell preferred animals to man since they were,
according to him, “straightforward and honest,” without pretensions of any sort
and above all they didn’t pretend to be God (qtd in Botting 600). And maybe
that is why he wished to be reborn as an animal. Would he have wished for the
whole of mankind to be reborn as animals and transform this earth into an Eden
? Who knows ? One wonders. Thus hopefully, he could ensure the survival of
different species on earth for many more years to come without their fear of
becoming extinct.

We are in the grip of an ecological collapse right now. Man cannot
escape the fate of the natural world much as he believes he can. Maybe in the
long run we may, according to the laws of evolution, “pass through successive
stages of extinction from whatever causes to universal oblivion” (Botting 607).
Though such things do happen, one cannot, as Gerald Durrell reiterated, “stand idly by and watch it all happen without lifting a finger.” Conservation efforts are done in a grand scale but, “unless some very drastic changes are made by the human race as a whole, there is no escaping the fact that most practitioners in the field of conservation will only go down in history as chroniclers of extinction!” (Chellam 11). Therefore it is our prime duty to protect our planet from its imminent collapse and bear in mind Durrell’s reminder: “The world is to us what the Garden of Eden was supposed to be to Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were banished, but we are banishing ourselves from Eden. The difference is that Adam and Eve had somewhere else to go. We have nowhere else to go” (qtd in Botting 554). The Native American Chief Seattle is believed to have said: “When all the eagles and fish are gone and the waters killed by pollution, only then will we realise that money cannot be eaten” (qtd in Taneja and Kothari 9).

Durrell wanted to avert such a situation and promote his theme of living harmoniously in the world of nature; so he wrote books full of humour to draw in readers to help him with this mission. At the end of every book Durrell pleads:

If you have read this book with interest and some amusement, I hope I have managed to show you the complexities and difficulties of making progress in what I believe to be the most important work we humans have to do: the preservation of our planet. If you agree, and would like to join us, we would welcome you with open arms. The more members we have the
greater our voice becomes, and in consequence the greater our power for the cause of conservation. We have already built ourselves up from a minuscule project to a world force in conservation, but we have done this only by the support of our worldwide membership. If this book has given you pleasure, has perhaps given you pause for thought, may I ask you to become one of our supporters? (Ark's Ann 174).

Durrell in his own way contributed much to the conservation of species and motivated an even larger number of people to do so; in fact he still continues to inspire millions of people throughout the world through his books, his trainees and his zoo. Praising Durrell’s help to “stitch and darn our planet’s threadbare ecology,” Princess Anne comments that Durrell’s books are worth waiting for as they “serve to convince many more people that where there is a will and a well thought out way, the impossible becomes commonplace and even miracles don’t take quite so long” (Ark’s Ann 12).

Durrell may not have achieved all that he intended to on the conservation front, but people whom he inspired would, hopefully, carry on his mission and that should allow him to rest in peace. The love and empathy for animals shown by Durrell is so extraordinary that, I’m sure the readers cannot escape from visualising them in a different perspective as fellow beings in this universe.