

*The Desert* is a more attractive book physically because of its beautiful collection of finely produced colour plates. They are so numerous that one wonders how the price has been kept as low as it has. I suspect that more people will look at the pictures than read the text, but this will not matter if they have read the first book since large chunks of it are reproduced here, often verbatim. All deserts, both hot and cold, are considered and the various adaptations shown by the animals and plants to desert life are discussed in an interesting and informative fashion. The author seems to make heavy weather of the section on Man and Deserts when he tries to explain hairlessness in man. He considers all the various theories that have been put forward and rightly concludes that none can satisfactorily explain the condition. Yet surely an organism that has evolved through neoteny and shows the proportions of a foetal ape might be expected also to have retained the hair pattern of a simian foetus. Instead of looking for the adaptive significance of hairlessness, perhaps we should accept that it is potentially a disadvantage but that it is the price that we have to pay for having a large brain. After all, it is not too difficult to invent clothes.

As always with Professor Cloudsley-Thompson's books, these are well written in an interesting style and can be recommended as useful background reading for conservation problems.

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**Amazon Jungle: Green Hell to Red Desert?** by R. J. A. Goodland and H. S. Irwin. Elsevier, \$13.25.

This is a shrill, strident, polemic of a book, with its opinions plain at every turn of the page. It is an alarm call, caused by the very sudden construction in Brazil of 14,000 kilometres of new highway through the old forest. The purpose, according to the North American authors, is 'to show what little is known of this immense but fragile area, to relate what is being done, to predict what the environmental results may be, and to suggest some means of averting or at least blunting predictably vast and tragic consequences that lie ahead'. In the 122 pages of text they pull no punches, waste no time, and apparently see no good in any aspect of Brazil's new plans for opening up the second half of its country.

Basically the two men are against cutting down the trees. They hate the quick-term gains and long-scale losses implicit in such destruction. Instead, they insist that the nutrient cycle must be maintained. What is taken out must only equal what is returned. (Virtually nothing goes back in at present.) The forest canopy must be preserved so that sunlight cannot destroy the forest floor, as it does over millions more acres every year, and far more information about the area (this 'vacuum of science') must be discovered before anything more is done. If such (and other) steps are not taken we will all have cause to remember that 'the tropical wet forest is ecologically a desert covered by trees.'

For my taste, as one who prefers discussion to oratorical clamour, I like encountering all conclusions at the end rather than at the beginning and middle of every argument. I also stumble again and again in this book over words: autochthonous, societal, nosogeography. And I wonder if 'forest ecosystem' tells me more than 'forest' does. The authors may well claim that the subject is too urgent for a more polished approach. They may even feel that an attack will have most effect upon the Brazilians who, it can not be forgotten, have national charge of this international resource. Anyhow, they have created a passionate book, stacked with references, embroiled with fact, and one that had to be written. Let us hope it is also read, even in Brazil.

ANTHONY SMITH