

Book reviews

should conserve species. It is less sure on 'how'. In his 'Coda' (Chapter 12) the author admits that we do not yet know how to achieve the two very simple aims of maintaining the habitat of animals and plants, and of not over-exploiting them. In fact, we do have the technical knowledge but lack the political power or will to take effective conservation action. It is to be hoped that this excellent book will come to the attention of those politicians who can do something about it.

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The State of the Ark

Lee Durrell

Bodley Head, London, 1986, 224 pp, HB £12.95

In *The State of the Ark* Lee Durrell has attempted the near impossible—an up-to-the-minute balance sheet of the current standing and the future prospects of our plant and animal fellow travellers on the earth, our latter-day ark. In this formidable task she was aided by a team of researchers working in collaboration with the IUCN. Together they have covered an amazing amount of ground: the first chapter considers the basic life-support systems of climate, water, carbon and nitrogen cycles and the web of living things that have evolved on our planet. The diversity of ecosystems and plant and animal species follow and their well-being (or otherwise) is dealt with on a mainly biogeographic basis. The final chapter is concerned with the development of conservation ideas and bodies.

Throughout, the relationships of animals with all aspects of their environment are stressed, and man is generally seen as the destroyer. No punches are pulled over the problems of soaring human populations or the belief, too often held by governments and big business, that the future is well mortgaged for today's quick buck. Yet not all is gloom, and the good sense and good will towards the environment shown by some people shine through many of the 'case studies' that give supporting details to the main themes of the book. These case studies include such diverse topics as soil loss through agricultural malpractice, the effect of dune buggies in the California Desert, caribou and the Alaska oil pipeline, crocodile farms in Papua New Guinea, survival of the

cahow, and the Chipko movement, which protects trees in India.

So wide-ranging a book must to some extent be superficial and some mistakes are inevitable, although these are mostly minor misidentifications and misspellings. More aggravating to me is the basic layout, with the main text often interrupted by two or more pages of case studies, photographs or maps, which break the thread of the argument. The photographs are, on the whole, stunning, but the artwork does not match their standard, and the maps, for which the book is subtitled 'An atlas of conservation in action', are too frequently overcrowded with detail and are not easy to read.

But these are minor quibbles, for this will be a valuable book for students at all but the most elementary levels. Specially useful are the references to sources of information, which are given in far more detail than is usual in a popular work. They will allow readers to follow up any subject that has aroused their interest, and surely, with so much to choose from on so vital a topic, nobody reading this book can remain totally indifferent.

Joyce Pope, Department of Zoology, British Museum (Natural History).

Iceland: Nature's Meeting Place

Mark Carwardine

Iceland Review, 1986, £9.50

Iceland is much more than a convenient location for Reagan–Gorbachev summit meetings. Nothing like as bleak and inhospitable as its name implies, Iceland has warmer weather than might be expected, the scenery is magnificent, and there is an abundance of wildlife. Twenty million breeding puffins, 200 pairs of the majestic gyrfalcon, pods of killer whales patrolling the coastal waters and the odd polar bear that has wandered too far south are just some of the highlights.

Surprisingly, relatively little has been written about Iceland's fauna and flora—until this book, that is, which more than makes up for the existing gaps. It provides a comprehensive and very readable account of everything you could want to know about Iceland's birds, mammals, fish, invertebrates and plants—where to find them and how to get there—and has a complete species

Oryx Vol 21 No 3, July 1987