

nature conservation can only be successful if it forms part of an integrated national policy, embracing all kinds of land use, none of which can any longer be regarded in isolation.

HURCOMB

Seals, by K.M. Backhouse. Arthur Barker, 21s.

The author "had the advantage of working with Professor H.R. Hewer for some fifteen years, sometimes in solitary confinement on lonely seal-breeding islands", but here his desire is "to produce a readable book rather than a research review". The result of avoiding scientific jargon is a plain, if sometimes awkwardly phrased, resumé of the papers on the life cycle of *Halichoerus grypus*, the Atlantic or grey seal, by Hewer and others, which accounts for about half the text of this slim volume. The balance reviews recent research on some of the other true seals (Phocidae) of the world, with brief interesting biographies of the rare monk seals, the Weddell, harp and elephant seals.

In the last chapter—on seals and man—Dr. Backhouse blames the Grey Seals Protection Act of 1932 for the great increase in this species in recent years, but does not mention that for eight months of the year grey seals can be killed legally, or that the close season of four months is little protection on lonely unpoliced islands visited by determined fishermen and pelt hunters. He states however that "the grey seal has never been numerous enough for large scale cropping, but it has played an important part in local coastal economy where it was numerous." Meanwhile *Phoca vitulina*, the common seal, ignored in this chapter, continues to be without protection and the victim of bloody battles in the Wash. He does not mention the new Seal Conservation Bill, which this reviewer and other members of the FPS hope will eventually become law and, by licensed control of killings, save both seals in adequate numbers.

As an introduction to seal study this attractively produced book is good value at the price, with 16 colour and 60 black and white photographs.

R. M. LOCKLEY

The Twilight of India's Wildlife, by Balakrishna Seshadri. John Baker, 52s.

Now that interest in India's wildlife is beginning to 'catch on', and, not a moment too soon, most states of the Indian Union at least recognise its existence and the need to do something to safeguard the resources on which it depends, the publication of this book is timely. For over twenty years the author has watched, with an uncommon understanding of what is at stake, and why, the decline of his country's marvellous heritage of animal life. In a couple of hundred pages he distils this experience, supported by avid research into the literature and a good varied selection of photographs (a third of the fifty-eight taken by himself). He does so in a readable, evocative and above all essentially Indian way, which means that sentiment, while not eschewed, is tempered by a keen sense of history and tradition, flashes of wit and real feeling for beauty.

An introductory chapter rightly makes the point that habitat destruction is the key to a gloomy picture, but also stresses more hopefully that the solution is a national conservation policy to replace the valiant but piecemeal efforts of States, organisations and individuals. The bulk of the book is devoted to a chapter each on the circumstances, or more often plight, of the 'special' Indian mammals, tiger, elephant, rhino, deer and wild oxen; but under the heading 'extinct and near extinct' short but pointed accounts

are given of cheetah, lion, bears, antelopes, primates and many others, including several smaller creatures such as pangolin, ratel and giant squirrel, whose fate tends to be overlooked. The last chapter, which could well have been presented as an appendix, reviews current conservation policy and the features of some 48 existing reserves, which (excluding one inaccessible area in eastern Assam) add up to 4700 square miles. It is to be hoped that a firmly negative answer will soon be given to the author's question—"Can it really be true that in a country of 1.8 million square miles some fifty areas (averaging) no more than ten miles by ten . . . cannot be left alone . . . free of exploitation?"

HUGH ELLIOTT

Giraffes, by **C.A.W. Guggisberg**. Arthur Barker, 21s.

Spiders of Southern Africa, by **J.H. Yates**; **Snakes of Africa**, by **R.M. Isemonger**. Books of Africa, Rs.3.50 each.

Wild Africa's Silent Call, by **Derek Townsend**. Allen and Unwin, 45s.

The author of *Giraffes* is well-known for his long (20) years of extensive field experience, besides being an expert wild animal photographer. Succinct and lucid, his book is a comprehensive, carefully compiled account, historically, zoologically and ecologically, of an extraordinary creature, well illustrated in black-and-white and colour. One picture shows clearly the giraffe's long, dark blue tongue (basal third pink), an organ which leaves a rubbery coating after a bare arm is licked, and another, of five giraffes lying, or rather sitting down, is a masterpiece. The final chapter outlines the discovery, distribution, ecology and zoology of the forest-dwelling okapi.

Spiders do not arouse general enthusiasm, but this is a book of absorbing interest, well written, skilfully presented and incredibly informative. Most spiders are small; the largest, with a body length up to 50 millimetres, most fearsome looking and with an unpleasantly poisonous bite, is the repulsive, hairy, 'baboon' spider, erroneously called 'tarantula'. There are also ant mimics, a fishing spider, the bewildering camouflage of the 'bark' spider, terrestrial and arboreal 'trap-door' spiders, the brightly coloured 'hard-backs' with enamel-like carapace, and many others. Some are distributed over vast distances when the hatchlings become air-borne on gossamer threads from their spinnerets.

Snakes of Africa is the first attempt at a field guide dealing with the snakes of the whole continent. Identification is based on description, size (inches instead of millimetres), colour and behaviour; distribution is also given. Scale counts at mid-body, ventrals and subcaudals could usefully have been included. The publisher's blurb—"subject full of surprises to the reader"—must be interpreted in a way not intended, for the systematic list contains far too many errors in distribution—unfortunately now on permanent record—numerous omissions and occasional faulty classification. The colour illustrations from photographs are mainly good, though some are extremely pallid. An index of popular names is conveniently separated from the scientific index.

For those unacquainted with East Africa, Derek Townsend's book will certainly prove a fascinating story, crammed with all manner of adventure, though not a good advertisement for local communications, amenities or accommodation. Difficulties are exaggerated; zoological inexactitudes and extravagances are frequent. Illustrations good.

C.R.S. PITMAN