

## Book Reviews

**A New Dictionary of Birds, Edited by Sir A. Landsborough Thompson.** Nelson, £5 5s.

In the original *Dictionary of Birds*, Alfred Newton, writing in 1896 and thinking of the future of Ornithology (which, as he reminded us meant much more than a perfect Taxonomy) said that the "despairing mind may fear the possibility of its favourite study expiring through being smothered by its own literature". The flood has not abated during the fifty or sixty years since, but present-day ornithologists may feel cheered by the publication of this *New Dictionary*. New in every sense, it is able, by its enlarged scope and plan, to take full account of the great expansion of knowledge since Newton's work was published. It brings together and epitomises a vast mass of current conclusions and ascertained new facts about birds and bird life, otherwise only available in the voluminous international literature in which the fruits of scientific research and the observations of field-workers are scattered. Sixteen coloured plates by leading bird artists and thirty-two black and white illustrations by well-known bird photographers enliven its pages.

Articles by some two hundred specialists of international repute cover the main general subjects which concern ornithologists and give authority to the text; they include contributions on the physiology, ecology, ethology and evolution of birds and indeed on every detailed aspect of their study, as well as brief discussions and descriptions of the orders and sub-orders in the classification. One interesting group comprises articles on Conservation and Control (the latter described as the "negative aspect" of conservation and a method too often in the past "ignorantly applied"), on Protection (a most useful historical summary) and on Extinct and Naturalised Birds. But it is to the editor himself that we feel most indebted. In addition to some forty substantial signed articles, Sir Landsborough is responsible for scores of shorter unsigned contributions, which are a triumph of clarity, concision and helpfulness. No important topic is neglected or inadequately treated. In thanking and congratulating him, the Society will wish to extend both thanks and congratulations to the British Ornithologists' Union to which the whole enterprise owes its origin.

HURCOMB

**The Biology of the Living Landscape, by Paul B. Sears.** Allen & Unwin, 21s.

Surprisingly, this unusual biological book contains no photographs of landscapes, illustrations or tables. Without such aids, the author succeeds remarkably well in describing vividly the factors affecting numerous diverse landscapes, both past and present, and interpreting them in terms of modern, dynamic ecology. Landscapes are viewed as living entities, subject, for better or worse, to growing human intervention, and particular stress is placed on the need for water to maintain life. Professor Sears emphasises that there is still time for man to choose the kind of environment he wishes to live in, and that ecologists have the great responsibility of assessing the many complex biological relationships at work in moulding landscapes. The ecologist is likened to the general practitioner in medicine, obliged to consult specialists in various fields in order to understand better the living organisms and the non-living world of earth, air and water.

Based on sound ecological principles and a penetrating insight into human influences, the book should serve both scientists and laymen as an introduction to the study of outdoor biological processes and permit them to gain a better perspective of the role of ecologists in the modern world. Undoubtedly some of the author's general conclusions are debatable, as for instance in the discussion of energy flow in relation to maximum production and landscape equilibrium, but this is to be expected in such a complex subject and saves the book from becoming complacent and dull.

J. D. OVINGTON

**Europe : A Natural History**, by Kai Curry-Lindahl. Hamish Hamilton, 4½ gns.

It is not surprising that there has been no comprehensive account of the natural history of Europe before. The continent is so extensive and varied that no one man, one would have thought, could ever encompass it. But the stupendous feat has been achieved by that indefatigable traveller, the tireless Director of Natural History at the Nordiska Museum in Stockholm.

He has dealt with his subject, partly country by country, but also habitat by habitat, covering, for instance, the Mediterranean lands in one chapter, the coastlands of the Atlantic in another, the great taiga or coniferous forests of northern Europe in a third. I particularly like his way of sandwiching accounts of the typical animals of a country in with the geographical information; in Britain, for instance, the rook, the robin, the red deer and the grey seal.

Inevitably one judges such a book by the country one knows best, one's own, and there are certainly things one would have worded differently, for instance, the reference to the Dartford warbler in Devon, and surely the Rock dove breeds in Faeroe, further north than Shetland; but such instances are remarkably few. The photographs, both in colour and black and white, are superb. Altogether a book to treasure as well as to use.

R. S. R. FITTER

**The Highlands and Islands**, by F. Fraser Darling and J. Morton Boyd. Collins, 30s.

This is a revised and re-written version of F. Fraser Darling's *Natural History in the Highlands and Islands*, published in the New Naturalist series in 1949, and as Fraser Darling points out, the advance of our knowledge during the period that has elapsed has been greater than at any time since the publication last century of the works of Hugh Miller, Archibald Geikie and J. A. Harvie-Brown. The most important single factor influencing this has been the establishment of the Nature Conservancy. With the setting-up of many important nature reserves and research stations in the area, there has been an enormous expansion of activity, particularly at St. Kilda, Rhum, Beinn Eighe and in the Cairngorms. The Grouse and Moorland Ecology Unit has added greatly to our knowledge of the dynamics of red grouse populations, and research has been intensified on the populations and breeding ecology of red deer and grey seals, following Fraser Darling's pioneer studies. We have also learned a great deal from the vegetation studies of McVean and Ratcliffe.

Dr. Morton Boyd, the Nature Conservancy's Regional Officer for West Scotland, who, with his wide knowledge, was the obvious choice for a revision of this work, has now brought us up-to-date with all the latest