

The price is not unreasonable for such an illustrated work, whose usefulness could outspan a decade or more and stimulate work in the habitats of this Linnaeus-obscured group of animals. European field workers should not be without it. One anticipates with interest the possibility of a sequel on the Mediterranean and Near Eastern species to complement the southern and south-eastern European species' ranges that are alluded to in the text.

M.R.K. LAMBERT.

The Sulidae—Gannets and Boobies, by J. Bryan Nelson. Oxford U. P., for the University of Aberdeen, £40.

The aim of this in every sense great book, as set out by the author in an admirably concise introduction to the half-million words of its 1012 pages, is to marshal the results of nearly 20-years-worth of obsession with one of the most fascinating and distinctive of avian families. It was to be done in such a way that details of any particular aspect of the life history of the nine species (Dr. Nelson treats the anciently differentiated trio of gannets, North Atlantic, Cape and Australian, as members of a superspecies, and there are six boobies) can readily be located; that it 'makes sense' of the details; and that it presents them in a style that preserves the seabird atmosphere, thus ensuring that the book is 'browsable' as well as authoritative.

The task, for which the adjective 'mammoth' is almost unavoidable, has been carried out with skill and success. Although four-fifths of the space is devoted to species-by-species accounts (and over a fifth of that to the archetypal bird of the Bass Rock), the frequent comparisons made in the course of discussion are drawn together and analysed in a final 100-page chapter and also reflected in several of the 116 appendices. The latter include contributions by Drs C.J.O. Harrison and W.R.P. Bourne on the fossil record and the impacts of marine pollution respectively. Enormous trouble has been taken to assist both researcher and browser by cross-references, summaries at the end of chapters, and a comprehensive index. Although it is not surprising with such a mass of material that some errors have crept in, they are commendably few.

The main emphasis of the book is on ecology and behaviour, the masterly exposition of which is illustrated by John Busby's beautiful line drawings of behaviour patterns and by a remarkable range of photographs, in which those of breeding sites are of special interest. The two together, with diagrams, total over 400 figures and there are also 32 superb plates, 14 in colour. Altogether a real *magnum opus* at a price not too out of keeping with the pleasure and inexhaustible fountain of data it should provide.

HUGH F.I. ELLIOTT

Ecosystems of the World: Volume 1, Wet Coastal Ecosystems, edited by V.J. Chapman. Elsevier, US\$49.95.

This is the start of an ambitious series of 29 volumes (overall editor, D.W. Goodall) which 'will become a basic work of reference, indispensable for any library serving ecological needs'. Apart from the problem of finding some \$1500 at present prices, this could well be a valid statement. Certainly this first volume is very impressive and beautifully produced.

It deals with salt marshes and mangal (mangrove swamps) down to extreme high water mark; the seaward beds of intertidal vegetation are to be considered in a separate volume. There are general chapters on physiography, soils and animals which set the scene in thorough detail, followed by accounts of the formations as they occur in the different geographical regions, each by an acknowledged expert. Finally there are two chapters on exploitation which are of particular interest to the conservationist, since, after centuries of mild exploitation, destruction has become the order of the day. 'Reclamation' for industrial sites and airports and infilling with city waste are widespread; the Japanese pulpwood hunger is a new danger to mangal; pollution by oil, warm