

The Territorial Imperative, by Robert Ardrey. Collins, 36s.

Robert Ardrey is a playwright who has confidently ventured into biology. He believes that much of human conflict can be attributed to man's territorial behaviour and that this supposed trait can be better understood by comparing it with similar behaviour in other animals. It is a view which is at least worth considering. However, the arguments on which he bases his conclusions are shot through with such elementary mistakes, and his definitions are so loose, that he will surely mislead anyone who takes him seriously. Take, for example, his inability to distinguish process and function. He sees territory not as a result of behaviour but as a mechanism which is basically similar in all territorial animals. He discerns the evolutionary beginnings of this process in slime moulds and traces it through a heterogeneous collection of species up to man. The near certainty that territorial defence has evolved at different times and for different reasons never seems to occur to him.

Ardrey is at his best when he is merely reporting. Some of his descriptions of behaviour are marvellously vivid and exciting. I suspect that his qualities as a writer are just those which make him so poor as a thinker. For the sake of a good story, complex issues are reduced to glib alternatives; either structure affects the evolution of behaviour or the other way about; either behaviour patterns are learned or they are inherited. This makes for good journalism but bad science. Indeed, Ardrey seems to be scarcely aware of the interactions involved in biological processes and to know nothing of scientific method, which probably accounts for the worthless theorising at the end of the book. All of this is a pity because some of the issues which he raises are important. Before the face of the world changes too much, it is essential that the requirements of threatened animals are understood. In many species, including man, it may be necessary to take account, among other things, of territorial behaviour. However, the need to do so has yet to be established.

P. P. G. BATESON

The Penguin Dictionary of British Natural History, by Richard and Maisie Fitter, 8s. 6d.

Richard Fitter is the Hon. Secretary of the Fauna Preservation Society, Maisie Fitter edits *ORYX*, and together they have written this dictionary. Consequently the reviewing of their book for this journal must be puritanically objective, and one must reflect upon their joint endeavour with the unfeeling obduracy of a plate glass mirror. To be objective in this sense means determinedly describing all the warts, every blemish.

The trouble is I personally relish works of reference. To me the money spent on an atlas or a dictionary, for example, is incalculably well spent. And works of reference that are cheap will surely repay any modest outlay before they crumble to their premature paperback deaths. Apart from these merits this particular book by the Fitters has much else to commend it. The style is often pleasing ("beetles familiar for their bumbling flight at dusk") and there are delightful extras to the ordinary definitions ("The plant popularly known as the bulrush, thanks to the Victorian painting of Moses in the bulrushes, is actually the great reed-mace *Typha*"). Many dictionaries are totally unhuman, in that they are written soullessly like the instructions with card-games and car manuals. Being more human the Fitter dictionary is more likely to be imprecise – "whose larvae feed on carrion and other decaying animal matter," an eyrie "is usually placed on a more or less inaccessible rock ledge." Would not pedants say that carrion *is* decaying animal matter, and eyries are quite accessible to eagles. Why, I wonder, is dextral "Of snails coiling right-handed" when sinistral is "Spiralling left-handed, especially of snail shells"?