

The Mammals of the Palaearctic Region: a taxonomic review, by G.B. Corbet. British Museum (Natural History) and Cornell U.P., £25.

With more and more zoologists beavering away all over the globe, it is not surprising that standard works of reference go out of date more rapidly than they used to. Even such majestic tomes as Ellerman and Morrison-Scott's *Checklist of Palaearctic Mammals*, first published in 1951, have their value eroded by time. All mammalogists, and conservationists who deal with mammals, will therefore be delighted that Dr Corbet of the British Museum (Natural History), and a member of the FPS Council, has undertaken this review, regretting only that he has omitted the Indian subcontinent that formed part of the original work. The Palaearctic Region, as defined here, includes all the territory of those North African states that have a Mediterranean littoral, all Arabia, and most of Afghanistan, Tibet and Japan, together with a large part of China. In addition the islands of Spitzbergen, Iceland, Azores, Madeira and Canaries, but not the Cape Verdes, are included.

One great advantage of Corbet over his predecessors is that he gives us keys. He also reminds us, which laymen tend to forget, that the pronouncements of any taxonomist are only subjective judgements, not immutable scientific truths, and are all too often based on ridiculously small samples of the population being described. Hence the many changes since Ellerman and Morrison-Scott, as larger and more extensive samples of often little-known species become available. Nor can we possibly be at the end of the road, especially with the rodents, many of which are likely to become extinct before they can be described by scientists; some, indeed, must have already become extinct. However, Corbet will do very well as our guide to the end of the century.

R.S.R. FITTER

Mammals in the Seas, Vol. 1. Report of the FAO ACMRR working party on marine mammals. FAO.

The dismal history of the whaling industry and horror stories of the seal hunt have attracted so much public attention that we must all be aware of the dangers which face many marine mammals today. There are other, more subtle threats, which may yet prove ultimately more important — competition with man for unpolluted food and living space is one.

With this in mind FAO's Advisory Committee on Marine Resources Research decided in 1972 to set up a working party to examine the status of marine mammals. The working party organised a Scientific Committee on the Conservation and Management of Marine Mammals and their Environment, held in Bergen in 1976 and attended by over 200 experts. *Mammals in the Seas* consists largely of the proceedings of this consultation.

The value of the meeting, and this is well reflected in the book, lay not so much in the extensive exchange of facts about marine mammals, as in the discussion and development of new concepts relevant to management and conservation. One can use the book to check on the status of, for example, the white fin dolphin or a summary of the effects of pollution and human disturbance on pinnipeds (it will be necessary to wait till Volume 2 appears for more detailed information on the various species of pinnipeds and sirenians), but it is the later chapters, ranging from general aspects of population biology to a review of management strategies that provide the most important contribution to new thought about marine mammals. I can give only two examples here. Many biologists have grown up thinking that the concept of maximum sustainable yield provided the best philosophy for the exploitation of wild animal populations. The application of this view to marine mammals was challenged by several of the groups at Bergen, on both biological and economic grounds; other possible strategies were discussed and the importance of recognising that there may be multiple management objectives stressed. Prior to the

Bergen meeting few people had realised that there existed a large and complex industry dependent on marine mammals but causing the deaths of few of them. This 'low-consumption use' as it was called, ranged from the organisation of cruises to watch them, to the publishing of books about them, and generates a turnover of the order of hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

Future plans for the management of marine mammals will need to take account of findings such as these. The bodies that control the exploitation of marine mammals have not in recent years lacked good scientific advice. It remains to be seen to what extent they will benefit from the findings of the Bergen Consultation. In the meantime those interested in conservation should read *Mammals in the Seas*. They will find much food for thought.

NIGEL BONNER

Carnivores of Europe, by **Robert Burton**. Batsford, £8.50.

The Mammals of Surinam, by **A. M. Husson**. Brill, Leiden, 225 guilders.

The individual species of carnivore have received a great deal of attention from zoologists in recent years, spurred on by the development of techniques, such as radio-tracking, that help to overcome the enormous obstacles in studying elusive, nocturnal animals with large home ranges and often very low population densities. Robert Burton's compilation brings together a great deal of information on the lives of European carnivores, drawn from old and recent sources. Each species is dealt with separately, including a distribution map, and all but three are illustrated by either a colour or monochrome photograph. While the literature on recent British work has been well covered, the accounts of those species that are confined to the continent depend upon what must be a very small selection of the available literature and not always the most recent. It is especially disappointing that almost no mention is made of present status in the accounts of individual species, although a few grains of information can be gleaned from the short final chapter on 'The fate of the carnivores'. Although introductions such as the raccoon are included, the information is badly out of date — the map for raccoon shows them in a small area in West Germany such as was occupied perhaps in the 1940s. Today the raccoon is almost ubiquitous in West and East Germany and is rapidly invading adjoining countries. On the other hand neither the account of the otter nor the map give any hint of its current rarity, although it gets a brief mention as 'endangered' in the final chapter.

In contrast, 'Mammals of Surinam' is a world away in style as well as location. It is a detailed descriptive monograph covering all species known from Surinam, based primarily upon the unique collections of the Leiden Museum. Since Surinam was one of the first parts of South America to be explored by European zoologists, many South American species were first described from there. This historical aspect is very fully dealt with by Dr Husson and the results will form a valuable basis for future work on the taxonomy of South American mammals. The book is profusely illustrated with drawings and photographs of whole animals and of skulls (to the extent that much of the detailed verbal description is superfluous), and there are keys for the identification of all species. This is in fact the only comprehensive monograph on the mammals of any South American country to be published for many years and as such will be useful far beyond the limited bounds of Surinam. It is therefore frustrating that information on life-history, ecology etc. is almost confined to a few anecdotal facts and no attempt has been made to summarise the relevant literature from outside Surinam. But that is perhaps hoping for too much. As it is, it is a fitting monument to Dr Husson's persistence in the face of failing health and to the support of his colleagues in Leiden who have ensured its completion and publication.

GORDON B. CORBET