

background for many fox projects. The eight chapters describe the classification, anatomy and distribution of foxes before going on to aspects of behaviour and ecology, such as diet and hunting behaviour, courtship and parental care, population dynamics, territoriality and dispersion. There are two interesting chapters on the history, theory and practice of man's varied relationships with foxes, which include not only some unusual material but a thoughtful perspective on 'fox problems'. A most notable feature is an excellent bibliography. The black and white photographs are not amongst the most thrilling of fox pictures, but they certainly make some telling points.

Gwyn Lloyd has spent a significant part of his working life studying foxes, and his text, although following a scientifically impersonal style for the most part, does allow his humour and his sensitivity for his subject to shine through. There is one sentence about the fox which, more than any other, I am sure will be quoted until the type is almost rubbed from the page: 'Perhaps it deserves its reputation as a rascal but it does not deserve to die the squalid death that is so often its fate.'

DAVID W. MACDONALD

Why Big Fierce Animals are Rare, by Paul Colinvaux. Allen & Unwin, £7.95.

In spite of its title, this book, of North American origin, consists of a series of essays on the working of the natural world generally. Each chapter deals with a separate theme, usually arising from a paradox that is apparent in earlier literature, from Darwin and before, and explaining it in the light of modern knowledge. The title of the book is also that of the third chapter which discusses Elton's Pyramid of Numbers and explains how the rarity of large and fierce animals is understandable through the work of Raymond Lindeman and Evelyn Hutchinson at Yale in regarding food and bodies as calories rather than flesh.

In eighteen thought-provoking chapters most of the problems of modern ecology are discussed: the necessity for a definite niche for every plant and animal; the social life of plants and plant succession; peaceful coexistence in the struggle for existence; territory ('the social imperatives of space'); why there are so many species of organisms; and the fallacy of stability in nature.

A final chapter explores the ecological problems of man – the supreme example of a big, fierce animal that is not rare! A Postlude, an expanded list of further ecological reading and an index complete the book.

There are no illustrations in the text, but a frontispiece and attractive symbolic chapter headings are by Vana Haggerty.

JOHN CLEGG

Rabies and Wildlife, a Biologist's Perspective, by D.W. Macdonald. OUP, with Earth Resources Research, £3.95.

There have been a number of publications on rabies in the last few years, but this is undoubtedly the most readable and the best all round account of the subject to date. Most of the earlier publications have dealt more with the medical aspects and the pathology of the disease. This book adequately reviews this subject, but as the title suggests, it looks more widely at the natural history of rabies from a biologist's point of view. Much of the book covers the available knowledge on the red fox, the species which is most likely to be the principal wildlife carrier of the virus should the disease come to Britain again. A comprehensive account of the behavioural ecology of the fox, much of it based on the author's own work, is given and related to the epidemiology of rabies as it would probably occur in Britain. Attention is drawn to the fact that as foxes have adapted extremely well to urban environments, the possibility of transmission of the virus to small domestic animals and then on to man becomes more acute. Methods