

a solitary animal and its habitat is limited. A sudden change in circumstances could quite rapidly bring the otter to the verge of extinction in Great Britain.

G. F.

**FIELD GUIDE TO BRITISH DEER.** Compiled and edited by F. J. TAYLOR PAGE. Mammal Society of the British Isles (Brock Cottage, Lyndhurst, Hants). 10s. 6d.

Congratulations: to the Mammal Society of the British Isles for sponsoring and publishing, and to its Deer Group and Jim Taylor Page for providing the material for the best guide that I know to the field identification of any group of British wild animals. The Group had the advantage of needing to consider only six species, two natives, the red and roe deer; one long-established alien, the fallow; and three recent aliens, the sika, muntjac and Chinese water deer. Of these the Chinese water deer is so locally distributed, in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Hampshire, that it does not receive the full treatment of the other five. These five are discussed in great detail, and with profuse illustration, under the headings of habitat, tracks (where useful outlines show the differences between the spoor of deer and domestic animals), droppings, voice, antler development, seasonal change of coat, gait, food and feeding habits, daily activities and seasonal rhythm of behaviour, i.e. when calves are born, antlers grown, rutting occurs, etc. There are also most useful hints on clothing and equipment for deer watchers, and suggestions for observation and research. Finally, there is a detailed, county-by-county survey of the known distribution of the six species.

The gaps still remaining in our knowledge of the habits and distribution of the feral deer especially, are due to two factors, the ignorance of most naturalists on how to identify deer and the difficulty of observing deer in the wild, even if you do know them apart. Both these difficulties are largely solved by this admirable little book and there is no longer the slightest excuse for deer remaining a neglected group of British mammals. As one twelve-year old has already remarked, "Even I can understand it."

R. S. R. F.

**WILD ENCOUNTERS.** By EILEEN A. SOPER. Routledge and Kegan Paul. 25s.

There are some books which, for one reason or another, maybe the charm of their writing, or their sincerity, or for

some other reason, defy criticism. *Wild Encounters* is one of these books. I found it disarming. Although considering it afterwards in the critical way reviewers have, I felt it had faults, while reading it I was completely carried away. So well is Miss Soper able to convey atmosphere in her writing, so beautifully has she illustrated her book (there is an exquisite picture on each page), that, reading it in a flat in a large modern block in the middle of a town, I felt that the busy world around me was hushed, that I was with Miss Soper in her garden watching young wrens fly, or smelling the delicious scent of *Chimonanthus fragrans*.

What then *are* the faults of this mainly delightful book? They can be found, I think, in the answer to the question—for whom is the book intended? For the knowledgeable naturalist or, as distinct from him, the ordinary nature lover? Or, as the first three chapters might suggest, for the gardener who wishes to turn his garden into a nature sanctuary? Perhaps for all of these people? But the book is, I would think, in many places too exact and meticulous for the everyday, not specialist, nature lover. Could it not border on tedium to be told, for example, that a badger emerged from a sett at 9.23 B.S.T., a cub came out at 9.30—and so on and so on. This is the stuff of serious naturalists. But a good deal of the book chattily recounts simple everyday events that would appeal more obviously to the everyday nature lover. The first three chapters instruct us how to set about attracting birds to our garden, how to make nest boxes, what things to plant. Yet others presume a precise interest in the minutiae of badgers' lives.

This, I think, makes the book uneven and means that it will appeal to a smaller public than it otherwise might. Nevertheless, it is a book of tremendous vitality, charm and beauty. Miss Soper is obviously a naturalist of love and skill, as well as an accomplished artist. And what a good idea to name, in Latin, all the more unusual plants and flowers illustrated in the book.

M. D.