

those parts of Africa with which he is familiar, but he feels that for many, and particularly some of the larger, species of wild life, there is still a future. One hopefully echoes such sentiments.

C. R. S. P.

SNAKES. By H. W. PARKER. Robert Hale. 21s.

Several handbooks to the reptiles have appeared in recent years but this is the first to deal exclusively with the snakes and will, therefore, find a useful place on library bookshelves. It certainly contains much more information than any of the handbooks previously reviewed but, even so, a tremendously wide field has been covered and deciding what to include must have been a major headache for the author. Despite the compression, and the amount of information included, this is a very readable handbook as well as a source of facts.

With a handbook of this type it will always be possible to find fault on minor points and there would be no purpose in calling attention to any. Possibly it will be field workers who have most to criticize but, here again, about what is included and what is omitted rather than anything else.

It is the reviewer's personal opinion that advice on the treatment of snake bite is out of place in a biology text book. In view of the amount of controversy that seems to be going on in the medical world, especially about the "cut and suck" method, the reviewer feels that a biologist should not enter the discussion at all. This is purely a medical matter and, if intended for the general public, should find its proper place in first-aid manuals.

Having said all this the reviewer can only add "unreservedly recommended" for both amateur and professional zoologists, his only real criticism being that the book is rather austere produced. If for a few extra shillings a better production could have been made, they would have been well spent. After all, this is the kind of book that has to last through continual reference for a great many years.

J. I. M.

LIFE WITH IONIDES. By MARGARET LANE. Hamish Hamilton. 25s.

What a man! and one might echo "What a woman!" for Margaret Lane who travelled to Tanganyika to observe Ionides at his strange craft—snake-catching—inevitably found herself learning to catch and handle large, deadly species, as well as how to sex them alive. Where he has made his home dangerous snakes abound. For those for whom serpents exert a special fascination the vivid portrayal of the hazardous occupation of this remarkable character provides a wealth of exciting reading. Described as a romantic and singular personality, he is a peculiar combination of "authority and courtesy, ferocity and gentleness". His strikingly handsome profile is that of an aristocrat of a bygone age. A born naturalist and an enthusiastic conservationist, his knowledge of the lesser fauna is extensive. The facile way in which he catches large, deadly snakes—some exceptionally active—and his nonchalant demeanour, have given rise to stories that he is casual in operation, but in fact no one could be more careful. However, having been bitten on a number of occasions by a variety of poisonous species he has evidently developed a high degree of immunity.

In his self-imposed role of recluse Ionides has, apart from snakes, a hobby

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one would scarcely expect—he is an ardent student of history, and a prodigious memory enables him to expatiate with authority on the great leaders of the past.

Snakes do not constitute the sole theme for there is much of interest about the country, local customs, such oddities as the stilt dancers, duck-billed women and the whip scorpion, as well as Africa of the past; and, in particular, about the changing Africa. The illustrations are wonderful and those in colour, superb; if one had to select one for special mention there is little doubt that the choice would be the green mamba “making her magical rope-bridge through the air”.

C. R. S. P.

THE CURIOUS WORLD OF SNAKES. By ALFRED LEUTSCHER. The Bodley Head. 13s. 6d.

This is a small book about snakes, nicely illustrated by Barrie Driscoll, though why the publisher's blurb should describe these illustrations as “a dramatic accompaniment to the text” I cannot imagine.

The first half of the book gives some general information about snakes; the second half describes, in no very great detail, some particular species in various parts of the world. The book is intended for children—not younger than nine and not older than fourteen I would say—and a child with an interest in natural history, or a dawning interest in snakes, might enjoy it. It would, however, be of no use to him as a reference book and this is, I think, its weakness. The book is not detailed nor informative enough and there is really no attempt at scientific classification or description. Latin names are not given. When a snake is shown with another creature—as for example the anaconda with a coypu—this animal's name is not given and this might be irritating to an enquiring child. The book is unlikely to be read by any but an enquiring child and for this child it would, I think, be unsatisfying.

In format the book is rather like the Puffin picture books but these are, of course, far more precisely informative and detailed. They also cost less. 13s. 6d. seems to me too much for this book. It is agreeable and, in its limited way, interesting.

M. J. D.

OKAVANGO. By JUNE KAY. Hutchinson. 21s.

Here is a book that is a simple account of travels through Africa by an author interested in natural history. Unfortunately it has been boosted right out of its own class and into one for which it is not qualified by the addition of an introduction by a well-known television personality. Without the introduction the book could have been dismissed as an entertaining and very readable travelogue. If a book of this type must have an introduction, obviously the introducer will say it is a good book, but to imply that it is good because most of the others are bad is a peculiar form of praise, and to say that five times is unnecessary.

The purpose of the travels is never very clearly stated, though there is a suggestion of photography and observation. This is not borne out by the plates, out of seventeen photos only three are of wild life and those three are disappointing. There is also a suggestion of fauna preservation—in the dedication—but much of the text is concerned with crocodile hunting. Nor is the attitude of the people concerned very consistent. For example, on p. 77 a hyena is shot as “vermin”, when doing nothing more harmful