

The Monsters of Loch Ness, by **Roy P. Mackal**. Swallow Press, £12.50.

This is a book for the naturalist, the first to be written by a scientist on this difficult subject since Dr Maurice Burton's *The Elusive Monster* in 1961. Much has happened in the intervening fifteen years. As a response to the growing evidence, a central organisation, the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau (LNIB) was set up by David James MP to sponsor continuing research. Professor Mackal's story of how he came to be selected as scientific advisor to this group is a valuable record of its achievements. It is not only a most painstaking analysis of the evidence, but a bold account of the strategy and technique of inquiry. No devotee of the 'monster cult', the author never dabbles with the paranormal, nor stretches the imagination too far, requiring his quarry to conform to zoological principles. He is certainly not gullible, as he ruthlessly dismisses 90 per cent of the catalogue of evidence, including most of the classic photographs. And he wastes no time in attacking the zoological establishment for their inertia. As the man responsible for the funding of the LNIB's more ambitious projects, he knows the difficulties involved all too well, and gets down to the job himself. The book reveals great flair in utilising the evidence in a rational selection of methods and practical ingenuity in the invention and construction of equipment.

Mackal's self-confidence certainly exposes some of his assertions to debate. Accustomed to having to work in the dark, he makes his own estimate of salmon stocks, forgetting perhaps that this is one area in which scientific work has been well established. But the resulting exaggeration in no way invalidates his contention that migratory salmonid fishes are a major potential food source in a lake of low primary productivity. Seeking clues to the creature's identity, his discussion of the possible candidates remains objective, and when he briefly admits to a personal inclination towards an amphibian, he is fully aware of the objections to this view, suggesting an eel for the more conservative!

Professor Mackal is much more interested in converting us to his principles than to his conclusions. His arguments are intended as a guide to further action, and his book is a clear prospectus for what that action must be.

ADRIAN SHINE

Bird Books in Brief

The Birdman (Collins, £4.95) is Henry Douglas-Home's entertaining memories from a life-time of birdwatching, with a foreword by his elder brother, Lord Home of the Hirsel, one of the few ex-prime ministers who knows a hawk from a handsaw. Much of it naturally centres on the Scottish Borders, where the Homes now watch birds instead of reiving their neighbours' cattle.

Eric Hardy's *A Guide to the Birds of Scotland* (Constable, £3.95) is a fairly detailed gazetteer of birdwatching sites over the whole of Scotland, fortunately omitting the precise location of many rarities. To maintain the balance between legitimate public desire to see wildlife and the harassment that may follow undue publicity for individual sites is increasingly difficult.

A Guide to the Birds of Venezuela (Princeton U.P., £33.40) brings together two highly qualified authors, Rodolphe Meyer de Schauensee, who has already written three books on South American birds, and William H. Phelps, who has studied Venezuelan birds for many years. The result is one of the best books yet in English on the birds of any South American country, though still, tantalisingly, very little on status, as distinct from habitat and range. The excellent colour plates are mainly by Guy Tudor.

A Field Guide to the Nests, Eggs and Nestlings of North American Birds (Collins, £7.95) is Colin Harrison's sequel to his European guide, and of equal excellence. Nowadays the colour plates of chicks, all by Philip Burton, are more likely to be useful than those of eggs.