

follow the original authors' theses, and many ecological principles and methods are described. An excellent list of references (29 pages), ranges from Defoe through the classical ecological works of Tansley, Watt and Elton to the latest scientific journals.

Dr Smith handles the wealth of detail with consummate ease, and his writing is refreshingly clear. He appears as a scientist of sense and an author of sensibility who is able to give an authoritative account of his subject, incidentally pointing out many gaps in our knowledge, and yet retaining the delight so many feel for this type of countryside. A useful textbook, it is also an important contribution to our overall knowledge of the English chalk.

JUDY POORE

**Flowers of Greece and the Balkans, a field guide, by Oleg Polunin. OUP, £40.00.**

The Balkans, here defined as Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece and the east Aegean islands, Bulgaria and European Turkey, have long been renowned for their rich flora; about half the species of flowering plants present in Europe occur there, and about a quarter of these are endemic. This floral treasurehouse is not fully described in this book. It is necessarily incomplete because of lacunae in our knowledge; furthermore, such families as the Gramineae, Cyperaceae, Polygonaceae and Chenopodiaceae, have been largely or completely omitted because they are 'difficult and unattractive', while large genera, such as *Campanula*, *Centaurea* and *Dianthus*, have been drastically curtailed. The author has treated about half the Balkan flora, the 3000 species most likely to be encountered, although many of them are only named; information on the latter, as well as the keys for identifying families and genera, must be sought in Polunin's earlier book – *Flowers of Europe*.

On the credit side, this book gives an excellent thumbnail sketch of the climate, topography, vegetation and history of the plant-cover of the area. It gives a delightful account (140 pages) of many 'plant-hunting' regions in the Balkans, with good, often spectacular, photographs of various botanical vistas. Of the 142 pages of illustrations, 80 are in colour. In an area which has endured almost 10,000 years of human influence, exacerbated during recent times by the tourist boom in some parts, conservation is clearly of tremendous importance. This is stressed in the book, with the 'danger status' of threatened species being fully indicated and the susceptibility of plant communities considered.

The book is aimed at English-speaking visitors to the Balkans who want to know something of its fascinating plant-life. This introduction they will get. Warts and all, it will make the journey of the botanically minded and conservation-conscious traveller more enjoyable and instructive than was hitherto possible.

D. M. MOORE

**Jungles, edited by Edward Ayensu. Cape £16.**

At first sight just another ornament for the coffee table, this is in fact much more. It is a beautiful and useful book which presents the variety and fascination of the tropical rain forest in an attractive, readable and authoritative manner. The introduction describes the nature, origin, distribution and different kinds of rain forest, its climates, soils and how it functions and regenerates. This is followed by sections dealing with the structure of the forest and the place of the different groups of plants and animals in it; plant and animal partnerships (the place of ants, pollinators, lianas, orchids, the fascinating stories of figs and stranglers); man and the jungle; and, almost in the form of an appendix, a description of some of the main products of the forest (timbers, spices, resins etc. but, surprisingly, not fruits). The emphasis throughout is on the undisturbed forest, though there is a short account of economic uses and the present rapid disappearance of the forest.

The text is generally excellent, as one would expect from the authors selected to contribute. Each account is balanced and accurate and avoids the exaggeration of so

much popular writing about the rain forest. The fascination and beauty of the forest and its organisms are allowed to speak for themselves; so is the seriousness of the threats facing them. An excellent combination of photographs, sketches, paintings and diagrams parallels the text and, at the cost of a little repetition, provides an illustrated summary of the book's whole theme. Small faults are captions that are occasionally meagre, or obscure, and a scanty index. Also, birds and invertebrates *are* animals. This is a book to please both professional and layman, a valuable addition to rain forest literature, fully deserving its recommendation from the World Wildlife Fund.

M.E.D. POORE

### **Orchids of Britain: A field guide, by David Lang. OUP, £9.50.**

After informative introductory chapters on orchid structure, life cycles, ecology and classification – the section on habitats being particularly useful – between one and three pages are devoted to each of the forty-nine native species in turn for a rather chatty but accurate specific account; this includes description, distribution, ecology, rarity and other interesting information. Many of the colour photographs that illustrate each species are, unfortunately, of indifferent quality, some being rather murky or pale, and others out of focus. It is also unfortunate that the illustrations do not accompany the text but are grouped together in the middle. Short sections on hybrids and erratics, distribution maps, in which occurrence is indicated on the basis of Watsonian vice-county distribution, a bibliography and a useful glossary conclude the book.

The author neatly summarises the available information on native orchids, many of which are now greatly endangered (14 of the 49 species are listed in the British Red Data Book), and this will prove a useful up-to-date reference work for conservationists. It is also a useful field guide, given the limitations of somewhat inadequate illustrations and larger-than-pocket-sized format. The cost may also be too daunting.

P.J. CRIBB

### **The Heyday of Natural History, 1820-1870, by Lynn Barber. Cape, £9.50.**

It will come as a revelation to most modern naturalists that the reason why natural history was so popular with their great-grandfathers was a religious one. It is to William Paley's writings that we owe the great outburst of activity in the mid-19th century that Lynn Barber chronicles in this fascinating book. It may seem strange that *Flora Europaea* and the *Handbook of the Birds of the Western Palaearctic* should be descendants of Paley's *Natural Theology*, but this, just as much as White's *Selborne*, is one of their progenitors. Having the Church's approval for searching for specimens in woods and on heaths, and especially in rock pools on the shore, greatly facilitated the development of public interest in what might otherwise have seemed to be a somewhat recherché hobby. It was all *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.

As Lynn Barber shows, it was just because everybody believed that God had created wildlife, and that to familiarise oneself with it was to praise Him, that Darwinism came as such an ugly shock. After reading this book one can better understand why it took nearly thirty years from Darwin's epoch-making revelation somewhere in the Galapagos Islands for him to be pushed by the much more hard-boiled Alfred Russel Wallace into actually writing *The Origin of Species*. And who is to say that the Victorians were not right? After all, we seem to be currently turning God into a computer, and the simile employed by the Victorians to buttress their belief that there *must* be some good somewhere in the universe seems preferable to those we employ nowadays to account for our evident non-belief in the existence of ultimate good.

But naturalists are basically more interested in the white and yellow archangels of our countryside than in the archangels of William Paley's world. Most of them will read this book for its sidelights on the foibles of their ancestors and how they set about garnering the knowledge we now take for granted. After all, when Paley first wrote, the few