

# Book Reviews

**So Excellent a Fishe** by Archie Carr. The Natural History Press, New York. \$5.95.

Dr. Carr is Professor of Zoology at the University of Florida as well as a Research Associate of the American Museum of Natural History, which both prepared the (excellent) line illustrations for this (excellent) book, and sponsored its publication in a pleasant format, with many photographic illustrations in addition. Moreover, Archie Carr can write well, and the result is a fascinating book, essential to the understanding of a top priority in wildlife conservation. It is largely concerned with the author's own researches in the Caribbean, now famous through his articles in the *National Geographic Magazine*, and carried out with characteristic American competence and finance in support of Professor Carr's own intuitions and patient fieldwork. The results add greatly to our knowledge of what nevertheless remain creatures of marine mystery. Carr reports his own studies of turtle breeding, hatching, rearing, migration and much else, and he is also more than generous to others of us who have been carrying out similar, if less adequate, fieldwork in other parts of the world! But if anyone even doubted who was the world's master turtler, *So Excellent a Fishe* finally dispels such doubt: the crown goes, deservedly, to Archie Carr. But it is a pity he chose so abstruse a title (from a pioneer 1620 Bermuda Assembly Law to control turtle poaching!) for so scientific, albeit popular, a work, and it is rather less comprehensive than the subtitle: "A Natural History of Sea Turtles". It deserves a more descriptive main title when published in Europe, as it must be – and in as many languages as possible.

The final chapter, "Sea Turtles and the Future", is full of gloom tempered with the author's own constructive optimism. In fact, the world turtle situation is now deteriorating so fast that we cannot afford to wait for completed research or perfect co-ordination of policies. Only drastic *action* in all three tropical oceans will save these lovely, placid reptiles from the same fate as the great mammals of the seas in this century.

TOM HARRISON

**Future Environments of North America**, edited by F. Fraser Darling and John P. Milton. Natural History Press, \$12.50.

Faced with a volume of 792 pages, how can one poor reviewer hope to give an idea of its essence, especially when its two editors, one of them among the most eminent of living conservationists, have not essayed the task of summing up its contents? Nonetheless here is a volume from which men will be quarrying in 1984, perhaps even in 2084. The development of North America in the past 300 years is the most gigantic experiment in applied ecology that man has ever undertaken. Man did not know that he was experimenting, of course; he just laid waste the land and its rich resources. And until he had nearly finished nobody had ever heard of ecology. Here is the chart for the next, perhaps not 300 but at least 50 years.

The most hopeful thing that I distilled from all these words come from Frank Darling himself. He points out that the destruction of habitat is not necessarily a bad thing. Fresh and more complex secondary habitats, which might never have existed, can appear. The influence of man may produce by overgrazing the ghastly desert that lies not far inland from the Californian coast; or it may, as in the English chalk downland now so rapidly vanishing, produce an extremely rich habitat, full of specialised plants and insects, held in equilibrium by controlled