

Book reviews

precaution, Prince and Harriet were each responsible for the death of a child, although only as the result of precautions having been ignored. It says much for the author's determination and powers of persuasion that he was permitted to continue with his leopard project after these tragedies. Prince lived free for at least ten years, though the other leopards did not survive for long. In the concluding chapter Arjan Singh examines the project with admirable objectivity. He does not hesitate to admit that errors arose from his devotion to his subjects, a devotion which, though free from anthropomorphism, at times prevented a completely detached judgment. It was a brave admission, which in no way detracts from a fascinating study of considerable value to our understanding of a much-maligned species.

Guy Mountfort

Mammals of Britain and Europe

Iain Bishop

Kingfisher Books, £2.95

As value for money, this hard-cover, 123-page book has few rivals. About 150 species are illustrated in colour (often showing winter and summer coats where appropriate) in a way that actually shows some of the differences between the various species of bats and small rodents! Normally such niceties are ignored in cheap books like this. Whether you could identify a specimen from them is another matter, but in most cases you would probably not be far wrong, and that is the most you can expect when trying to identify small mammals on external features alone. With a few exceptions, these colour pictures are attractive and there are also 15 colour photographs.

Identification is further assisted in some cases by the inclusion of tiny distribution maps but, sensibly, maps for many widespread or highly localised species have been omitted. The text is very brief indeed and concentrates on recognition features. You would have to plough through a lot of detailed measurements to confirm identifications. Unfortunately no effort is made to emphasise the key features which differentiate

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similar species, nor to indicate which are common species likely to be seen and which are not.

The species covered range from 19 bats to musk ox, chamois, walrus and polar bear. Fine, but personally I think the 16 pages devoted to whales (attractive though they are) would have been better spent providing more details about terrestrial species and their recognition. The full-page fuzzy silhouette of a red deer could also perhaps have been replaced by something more useful. But these are minor quibbles about a praiseworthy inexpensive book, and its pocket-size would make it most useful on a Continental holiday.

Pat Morris

The Guinness Book of Mammals

John A. Burton

Guinness Superlatives Ltd, £4.50

This 160-page book is one of the 'Britain's Natural Heritage' series which aim to illustrate and describe 50 species of the appropriate group. In this mammal volume, the species description, line drawing and a distribution map appear on the left hand page and face a colour photo on the right. This gives an attractive air of simplicity to the book, especially as the photographs are extremely good. There are actually more than 50 species of British mammals, but all the major ones are illustrated in the 50 colour pictures and the rest (e.g. edible dormouse and yellow-necked mouse) are mentioned in the text relating to a similar species. There are also about 50 pages devoted to general aspects of the mammal fauna of Britain and how to study the animals in the field.

The most obvious flaw in the book is the standard of line drawings; these are unattractive and even a bit crude. Less obvious, but perhaps more serious are deficiencies in the text, and bibliography, suggesting that the writing was hurried and rather 'off-the-cuff'. This is not a book for the specialist or the critical reader. However, at the price it is good value for money and would make an attractive, useful gift for a youngster interested in learning how to find and recognise British mammals.

Pat Morris

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