

grave is that on some deeper matters the account of the views of specialists could profitably have done with a more liberal dose of salt. The pretensions of palaeontologists to align family trees exactly are highly speculative (after all, equids extant are very variable animals, and no one knows what the owner of skulls, teeth and limb bones were really like). 'Experts' purporting to account for the variety and history of present-day domestics ride all manner of hobby-horses, and common sense about the behavioural psychology of the systematists themselves is the essential key to understanding the vast array of subspecies and local races invented in the nineteenth century (there were more than 40 of *E. burchelli* alone).

The author would have been wise *inter alia* to treat the gulf between the Asian and African asses (the half-ass and the true-ass) as more important, the division between onager and kiang as less; to pay more attention to fertile crossing or its absence as a criterion of specific difference; to remember that behaviour in captivity is not decisive proof of behaviour in the wild; not to overlook the early depiction of wholesale importation of Libyan asses into Egypt as a possible hint on the origin of the donkey; and to accept less readily the speculation about wild factors in certain western European feral horses and, in particular, the legend of the Siberian white horse as gospel.

The author is perhaps too pessimistic about the survival of remnant herds of *E. przewalskii* in the Mongolian wild. Though numbers must be very small, Mongolian zoologists have in the last year accepted several sightings as genuine—and they are the best people to know.*

On the whole, however, he has managed without disaster to get through a vast amount of controversial matter in what is intended as an introduction to the group, and our gratitude for the wealth of pertinent material and views should be unqualified. Particularly noteworthy are the clear distribution maps and the photographs of rare forms—Cape mountain zebra, Nubian wild ass and the now extinct Syrian half-ass, the last specimen of which died at Schönbrunn Zoo; only recently that zoo reported that its photographs were destroyed in the war. The sentiments on conservation are impeccable.

IVOR MONTAGU

A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago, by Richard French. Livingston, \$12.50

The Life of the Hummingbird, by Alexander F. Skutch. Octopus Books, £3.95

An encouraging feature of recent bird books has been a rapid filling of gaps, triggered partly by improved facilities for getting almost anywhere in search of birds. Forty years ago the bird-watcher in Africa had almost no books to help with discovery or identification. The same situation persisted much later in tropical America: of over 150 books and papers listed in the bibliography of the Trinidad and Tobago guide, only a couple of dozen antedate 1945.

Trinidad and Tobago have been more fortunate than most of the American tropics in that a Field Guide (by G. A. C. Herklots) has been available for just on fifteen years, and, for considerably longer, Trinidad has been something of a spawning ground of tropical ornithologists. The new guide nevertheless takes a substantial step forward in its comprehen-

*See *Oryx*, February 1974, page 364, Wild Horses and other Endangered Wildlife in Mongolia, by D. Tsevegmid and A. Dashdorj, who accept three sightings in 1966, one in 1967 (and also a track sighting), and two in 1968. These references are not included in the book. *Editor*

sive review of the 417 species which have or may have occurred up to 1972. The information is slotted away most neatly, and includes such unusual and welcome features as an indication of which museums hold specimens and precise dates of rare occurrences. As there are, also, full page paintings of eight species by Don Eckelberry, a set of 28 colour plates by John O'Neill showing 219 species (including a fair number of females and immatures), and 41 line drawings and photographs, the former covering 26 more species and the latter illustrating an account of the island habitats, one gets a really good idea of the bird faunas. One of my few grumbles about the book, which could easily be carried in one's pocket or knapsack, is that there are no cross-references from plates to text.

Alexander Skutch's look at the hummingbirds is something different, to be read and savoured rather than thumbed, although it could, for instance, well be used to illumine Richard French's account of the 18 hummingbirds recorded in his islands. The author mentions, and/or the attractive pictures by Arthur Singer depict, 106 of the 320 known hummingbird species, but both kinds of references are woven into a tapestry in which aspects of life history, ranging through adornments, flight, food, temperament, courtship, nesting, enemies and friends, past and future, are vividly portrayed—and leave one marvelling.

Both authors talk about conservation and it seems that, even in the islands, where, both on paper and in practice, more has been done to maintain the superb display of birdlife than in most of the mainland countries, much senseless and profitless destruction continues. Let us hope that in 20 years' time these books will not be sad memorials to a beauty that has gone.

HUGH F. I. ELLIOTT

The Seabirds of Britain and Ireland, by Stanley Cramp, W. R. P. Bourne and David Saunders. Collins, £3.50.

It is now, I was astonished to find when I looked it up, twenty years since the last monograph on British seabirds, the New Naturalist volume by James Fisher and Ronald Lockley. The scope of the present one is both narrower, being confined to the British Isles and excluding the North Atlantic, and more detailed, in that it is able to draw on the results of Operation Seafarer, in which James Fisher himself played a leading part up to his death. Its appearance makes one realise not only how badly it was needed for seabirds, but also how badly needed similar volumes are for other groups of British birds. The British Trust for Ornithology's forthcoming atlas will provide the factual basis for such analyses, but it is the analyses themselves that are so valuable. With the ecological background changing as rapidly as it is at present, twenty years is far from being too long an interval between assessments of what is happening to our bird populations.

The three authors are exceptionally well qualified to deal with their subject (some authors nowadays seem to be not qualified at all). Stanley Cramp is senior editor of the monumental *Birds of the Western Palearctic*, reportedly about to give birth to its first volume. W. R. P. Bourne, one of our most dynamic ornithologists today, has made seabirds his specialism, and is even interested in that unfashionable subject, taxonomy. David Saunders was in charge of Operation Seafarer, that Domesday Book census of British and Irish seabirds, carried out by more than a thousand volunteer observers in 1969–70. The bulk of the resulting book is a systematic examination of the distribution and breeding and feeding