

The Mammals of the Palaearctic Region: a taxonomic review, by G.B. Corbet. British Museum (Natural History) and Cornell U.P., £25.

With more and more zoologists beavering away all over the globe, it is not surprising that standard works of reference go out of date more rapidly than they used to. Even such majestic tomes as Ellerman and Morrison-Scott's *Checklist of Palaearctic Mammals*, first published in 1951, have their value eroded by time. All mammalogists, and conservationists who deal with mammals, will therefore be delighted that Dr Corbet of the British Museum (Natural History), and a member of the FPS Council, has undertaken this review, regretting only that he has omitted the Indian subcontinent that formed part of the original work. The Palaearctic Region, as defined here, includes all the territory of those North African states that have a Mediterranean littoral, all Arabia, and most of Afghanistan, Tibet and Japan, together with a large part of China. In addition the islands of Spitzbergen, Iceland, Azores, Madeira and Canaries, but not the Cape Verdes, are included.

One great advantage of Corbet over his predecessors is that he gives us keys. He also reminds us, which laymen tend to forget, that the pronouncements of any taxonomist are only subjective judgements, not immutable scientific truths, and are all too often based on ridiculously small samples of the population being described. Hence the many changes since Ellerman and Morrison-Scott, as larger and more extensive samples of often little-known species become available. Nor can we possibly be at the end of the road, especially with the rodents, many of which are likely to become extinct before they can be described by scientists; some, indeed, must have already become extinct. However, Corbet will do very well as our guide to the end of the century.

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Mammals in the Seas, Vol. 1. Report of the FAO ACMRR working party on marine mammals. FAO.

The dismal history of the whaling industry and horror stories of the seal hunt have attracted so much public attention that we must all be aware of the dangers which face many marine mammals today. There are other, more subtle threats, which may yet prove ultimately more important — competition with man for unpolluted food and living space is one.

With this in mind FAO's Advisory Committee on Marine Resources Research decided in 1972 to set up a working party to examine the status of marine mammals. The working party organised a Scientific Committee on the Conservation and Management of Marine Mammals and their Environment, held in Bergen in 1976 and attended by over 200 experts. *Mammals in the Seas* consists largely of the proceedings of this consultation.

The value of the meeting, and this is well reflected in the book, lay not so much in the extensive exchange of facts about marine mammals, as in the discussion and development of new concepts relevant to management and conservation. One can use the book to check on the status of, for example, the white fin dolphin or a summary of the effects of pollution and human disturbance on pinnipeds (it will be necessary to wait till Volume 2 appears for more detailed information on the various species of pinnipeds and sirenians), but it is the later chapters, ranging from general aspects of population biology to a review of management strategies that provide the most important contribution to new thought about marine mammals. I can give only two examples here. Many biologists have grown up thinking that the concept of maximum sustainable yield provided the best philosophy for the exploitation of wild animal populations. The application of this view to marine mammals was challenged by several of the groups at Bergen, on both biological and economic grounds; other possible strategies were discussed and the importance of recognising that there may be multiple management objectives stressed. Prior to the