

peep-show, and the tally of spectators at the nesting site must now be nearing the million mark.

This RSPB triumph was primarily due to the faith and courage of a small group of dedicated conservationists, but it would have been impossible without a very considerable expenditure of manpower and money. I cannot help thinking that a comparable expenditure of resources in some poor country might have saved a whole doomed habitat and not just a few members of one species, which was not universally endangered. This is not meant even remotely as a criticism. I know that I am not comparing like with like and that gifts left by Loch Garten visitors must have handsomely covered the outlay. But the greatest value of this success story, quite apart from boosting RSPB membership, would be if it provided inspiration to devote equal efforts to more important projects further from home. Time is not on the side of conservation, so it is little comfort to recall that Operation Osprey could not have been mounted 50 years earlier. In their different ways, these two books do illustrate the growing concern for wildlife, even if indirectly they demonstrate the need to quicken our pace, widen our horizons, and dig deeper into our pockets.

G.T. CORLEY SMITH

The Tidal Thames: The History of a River and Its Fishes, by Alwyne Wheeler. Routledge, £8.95.

The cleansing of the polluted Thames is one of the great conservation successes of the last half of the century. In *The Thames Transformed* the late Jeffrey Harrison and Peter Grant described its impact on the bird population of the Thames estuary. Now Alwyne Wheeler of the British Museum (Natural History) tells the story from the angle of the fish populations. From a time when there were virtually no fish in the river between Richmond and Gravesend, we have reached a period when some fish can be caught by anglers throughout this once highly polluted stretch. The first part of the book describes how the river became progressively polluted by sewage and industrial discharge during and after the Industrial Revolution and how the once rich fisheries of the estuary were destroyed. With the post-war decision to clean the river up, the author is able to chronicle the gradual recolonisation of the river below Teddington Lock. Today the smelt is once more a common fish, and salmon and sea trout are beginning to re-enter the estuary. The last part of the book describes the new status of each fish, freshwater, migratory and marine.

This is a fine book that deserves to be widely read. The Thames Water Authority ought to distribute it widely to show what can be done.

R.S.R. FITTER

The Sinking Ark, by Norman Myers. Pergamon, £4.50.

As Norman Myers rightly says in his very first line: 'This is not the first book on disappearing species'. The difference with this one, he claims, is that it takes the theme further, by looking at the prospects for *all* species and by asking *why* species are being allowed to disappear. On the first point, instead of the traditional cry that we are losing one species a year, Myers suggests that it may be one a day, bearing in mind the 5-10 million thought to exist. On the second point he feels we should examine (and he does) every aspect impinging upon species disappearance, such as the political, economic, legal, social and cultural sides of the question.

The result is a very well thought-out book. Its chapters, with all their sub-headings, have been arranged extremely academically. Most of the subjects that he discusses, however important, have only a single index entry, a sure sign of advanced planning. In essence, the book has three sections: the problem in general, the tropical forests in particular, and conservation strategies that should be adopted to deal with them. The last section is, alas, the shortest, as those of us who are already converted (and who read *Oryx*) know the problems well enough but are lacking in solutions. I would like to have

read more about 'national taxes for international purposes', 'global taxes', 'subsidy payments for tropical-forest countries', and the like. We know the ark is sinking, but we want to know how best to keep it floating a little longer. Norman Myers is a good adviser but seems exhausted at this stage of his 284-page book and is at his peak when describing the problems.

On style he is relentless, pouring out facts, having little change in pace, and using long words rather than the short ones (which Churchill said were better, the shortest being best of all). However the facts are here for us, most breathlessly. It is good to have such a compendium, both of information and of argument, all packaged for our use.

ANTHONY SMITH

The Wandering Gorillas, by Alan Goodall. Collins, £6.50.

Well-written, entertaining, even at times exciting, this book is a good buy for anyone who wants to know about the frustrations and joys of studying wildlife in Africa. Its difference from other such accounts is that those who study gorillas do so on foot, not from a Land Rover. A gorilla-watcher meets the animals on their terms, not his, and this book portrays well the awe and utter delight that a person feels as, alone and unarmed, he comes finally to be accepted by the totally wild gorillas that he is studying.

You will not, however, find much about gorilla social behaviour here – about the close bonds between the leading male and his females, the gentleness with which older youngsters play with small infants, or about the strong ties between a gorilla mother and her offspring, even into adulthood of the offspring. Only the last two of the book's 15 chapters are devoted to telling us about the gorillas themselves, as opposed to the author's experiences during his two years with them. These two chapters give an account of the gorillas' feeding and ranging behaviour – the author's particular subjects of study – of their future, and of what we should do to conserve them and their ever-dwindling forest habitat.

In countries like Rwanda, where population pressures are so great and natural resources so scarce, the Government has far more to worry about than the fate of a few gorillas. If these magnificent animals and the forests in which they live are to be saved, international help is needed. I have only one major criticism of the book and that is that the publishers have gratuitously resurrected the old 19th century Du Chaillu image of the vicious gorilla. The front-cover picture and three of the book's six colour plates depict charging, screaming gorillas, mouth open and canines bared. The author, with his obvious love of the animals, should not have permitted this blatant sensationalism.

A. H. HARCOURT

The Breakdown and Restoration of Ecosystems, edited by M.W. Holdgate and M.J. Woodman. Plenum Press, \$36.

This is the third volume to be published in a series of conference reports on ecological topics under the rather surprising umbrella of NATO. This conference was held in Reykjavik in 1976, when it was known as the Conference on the Rehabilitation of Severely Damaged Land and Freshwater Ecosystems in Temperate Zones; the original title, if cumbersome, is somewhat more accurate. The volume contains 24 papers and various introductions, conclusions, and verbatim discussions, which would have benefited from more active editing. In particular the discussions show a disconcerting degree of precognition amongst the participants: in discussing both Parkinson's and Bradshaw's papers, speakers refer to subsequent papers.

The volume opens with a section on 'Basic Ecological Principles', which serves to demonstrate how far ecology is from understanding the operation of whole ecosystems, despite recent advances. The modern approach to single-species population dynamics is well summarised by R.M. May, but a very long paper by G.M. Van Dyne and others, on models for grazed ecosystem management, clearly provoked considerable discussion at the meeting, on the question of both cost and general applicability. J.N. Jeffers, in a