

The Swans, by Peter Scott and the Wildfowl Trust. Michael Joseph, £4.20.

Handsomely produced, with 49 pages of plates and 242 pages of text, including bibliography and index, with a short personal introduction by Peter Scott, the meat of the book is by experts in their own fields, mostly connected with the Wildfowl Trust. The information is of the kind to be expected in a systematic work, but instead of being grouped under each species, the chapters cover separate aspects of the group as a whole, such as classification, distribution, migration, food, mortality and conservation. This is particularly apt when the subject is 'Art and mythology'. In other cases it enables comparisons between the species to be made easily. With so small a group there is no great difficulty in finding information about a particular species.

The frontispiece is a colour reproduction of a Peter Scott painting of Bewick swans in flight. One regrets it was not a more formalised painting of the whole group in the manner usual to a book of this kind; the sacrifice of art to utility would have been worthwhile. The photographic reproductions are of uneven quality, understandably when some species seem to have been little photographed. The mute swan must be among the most photographed! In some cases the illustrative value is nil as, for example, the female swan on a nest which is barely visible although the landscape looks fine. It is nice to see again some of the classic swan photographs. There are also numerous text figures, illustrations and decorations, the last unduly numerous, and one of the distribution maps may be criticised for lack of clear differentiation between the stippling and hatching.

Dr Matthews writes the conservation chapter with clarity and simplicity, setting the particular position of the swans against the general conservation background. The most intractable difficulties relate to the breeding of Bewick's, whistling and whooper swans and the handful of trumpeters. Spreading themselves thinly over the Arctic tundra, the preservation of their habitat from disturbance and exploitation seems a slim hope. Yet these are the truly migratory swans which make the most dramatic appeal.

G. DES FORGES

Alaska the Embattled Frontier, by George Laycock. Houghton Mifflin, \$6.95

Written by a Field Editor of *Audubon* and introduced by the Editor, Les Line, this first title of the Audubon Library series discusses some of the conflicts that have arisen in the Alaska environmental scene: north slope oil, Amchitka underground bomb tests and softwood clear-cutting practices in the south-eastern panhandle. The style ranges from rhetorical to polemical, an approach which has severely limited the book's potential effectiveness, value and underlying message. The author is right to draw attention to the philosophical implications of altering (irrevocably, one should add) the wilderness character of the land through exploitation of the natural resources. Furthermore, he is right in stating that the Alaskan wilderness and its wildlife belongs to the nation as a whole and that industrial interests – notably oil – and some political factions have pursued a development policy with arrogance and ecological ineptitude. But to attack this with another kind of arrogance and ineptitude will win no useful converts and will only add to the extreme polarisation that currently inhibits com-