

## Book reviews

an assembly of colour photographs of Chinese mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fishes and birds, and is arranged group by group in that order with an introduction and three pages of text.

It is the first book of its kind and is very interesting. Some of the creatures depicted are wild and free, most are tame or captive, and a few appear to be stuffed specimens placed in natural settings. Double-page studies of creatures obviously in the wild include an impressive shot of three distantly silhouetted Tibetan antelopes, a herd of Asiatic wild asses also on the Tibetan-Quinhai plateau, and a flock of the near-endemic Chinese black-necked crane. Another rare crane, the Siberian, nests in the eastern USSR and winters in China on the middle reaches of the Yangtse. From there the book has a photograph with about 10 per cent of the world population in one shot! A demoiselle crane is shown swimming, not a common feature of crane behaviour. Two of the five cranes in a picture captioned red-crowned cranes are white-naped cranes, and one of those is pinioned. This picture must have been taken at Zhalong nature reserve in north-east China. None of the photos are provenanced; none of the photographers are credited, either individually or collectively. The captions, written by a panel of authorities, do tell us where in China each animal lives and a couple of facts about its biology.

Endemics featured include the inescapable giant panda, the golden monkey that shares the panda's forest habitat, the takin and Thorold's deer, both of which live above the tree line, and the two freshwater lowlanders, the Chinese alligator and the Chinese river dolphin. Swinhoe's pheasant, confined to Taiwan, is also there. Most, if not all, of these creatures are endangered, as are others like the white crested ibis, the last remaining colony of which nests in China, and the eastern white stork, a race so well marked that some experts consider it a different species from the bird found at the western end of Eurasia.

Essentially, however, this is a book of photographs, and among the most striking portraits are a Temminck's tragopan in the full frenzy of his extraordinary display, a pleasing study of a long-eared owl in a pine tree, an otter by an ice-fringed river, a golden monkey (in Chengdu zoo) and a lesser panda up a tree.

The photograph on p. 109 of the Chinese merganser could easily be the only published photograph of the species, which is a rare duck that I searched for in vain in the Changbaishan nature reserve on China's border with North Korea a few years ago. I am glad to have its photograph, and all the others in the book, to remind me of three visits to the world's most populous and third-largest country. There, 22 per cent of mankind lives on 7 per cent of the earth's arable land. Significantly, within China 95 per cent of the people live on 55 per cent of the country's surface. This means that vast areas in the west and north of China are very sparsely populated. It is here that many of the 350 nature reserves that have been established since 1956 exist. And it is in those sanctuaries that many of the creatures depicted in this book have their best hope of survival.

*Jeffery Boswall, BBC Natural History Unit, Bristol, UK.*

### **The Atlas of Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland**

Edited by Peter Lack

T. and A.D. Poyser for the British Trust for Ornithology and Irish Wildbird Conservancy, 1986, 447 pp, £19.00

A reviewer of this splendid book has to beware lest he lay himself open to a charge of hagiography—an accusation difficult to avoid, since there is so much in it to praise.

Indeed, this new volume may eventually be recognized as an even greater contribution to ornithological literature than its predecessor, *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland* (1976), for which it is designed as a companion, since, unlike the latter, which is selective for breeding birds only and is concerned solely with a species's absence or presence within each 10-km square, the new work includes all species seen during the period of the survey and assesses their abundance in each square. Compiled from the reports of some 10,000 observers who together spent a total of nearly 180,000 man-hours in the field during the winters of 1981–84, the various species accounts—each illustrated by a charming line drawing contributed by 23 artists, and complemented by a detailed distribution map—have been written by a team of more than 100 special-

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ists; together they are the result of a notable co-operative exercise and form one of the most comprehensive studies of birds in the British Isles ever to have been undertaken.

Nor are the BTO and IWC content to rest on their laurels. Now they are preparing to take part in the compilation of the 1987 European Breeding Atlas, and are planning the updating—this time with quantification—of their 1976 publication: even the ambitious project of spring and autumn passage Atlases for the British Isles is being contemplated. Such initiative and ambition deserve success. *The Wintering Atlas*, like its predecessor, is an essential acquisition for any serious ornithologist, and is outstanding value for money. *Christopher Lever.*

## Off-Beat Biologist

Sir Alan Parkes

The Galton Foundation, 1986, £20 (US\$30)

Sir Alan Parkes has set out the terms of reference for his autobiography thus: 'I had no intention of trying to produce a definitive history of anything. My aim was to write a light-hearted account of my personal contact with a lot of things over many years. . . . Expecting nothing more personally, I can look back with warm nostalgia on successes and failures, on good times and bad times, on friends and colleagues and, above all, on the fun of having lived.'

The *Off-beat Biologist* will be of greatest interest to those professionally conversant with Sir Alan Parkes's field of investigation—reproductive biology in its many facets and its wider implications—who can see the application of his pioneering work in various aspects of this field as management techniques for the conservation of animal species, especially our own. Indeed, the fact of publication of the book by the Galton Foundation is evidence enough of the socio-biological impact of his work. The less scientifically minded will be given some insight into the author's versatility and achievement through the accounts of his involvement in various initiatives concerned with the captive breeding of wild animal species and with the mobilization of international action and opinion on the control of human population levels. His own thoughts on the ethics of these matters are provocative and

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fascinating. Despite his professed light-hearted approach, the author has observed strict scientific discipline in constructing his work. Each chapter is carefully annotated by footnotes or expanded in an appendix, while the acknowledgments constitute a formidable list of those who have reviewed them. Epigrammatists will find a number of quotes worth remembering.

*Tony Mence, Editor of Parks, IUCN Conservation Monitoring Unit, Cambridge, UK.*

## International Zoo Yearbook 24/25

Edited by P.J.S. Olney

Zoological Society of London, 1986, 651 pp, HB £46.00, SB £39.00

Section 1 of Volume 24/25 of the International Zoo Yearbook is devoted to the Proceedings of the Fourth World Conference on Breeding Endangered Species in Captivity, which was held in September 1984 and was organized by the FFPS in conjunction with the Zoological Society of London and the Royal Rotterdam Zoological and Botanical Gardens. Section 2 focuses on new developments in the zoo world and includes papers on breeding broad-nosed caimans *Caiman latirostris* and red-billed curassows *Crax blumenbachi* in captivity. Section 3 provides an updated list of the world's zoos and aquaria, two years' data on animals bred in captivity and the census of rare animals in captivity.

*Editor.*

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