

## Book reviews

to the widespread Ol Tukai woodlands. The later photograph shows the semi-dry swamp replaced by the open waters of the Simek river, only a battered remnant of the fringing trees remaining, and open plains where the woodlands formerly existed.

In a final chapter, discussing this and other changes seen on a return visit in 1985, the author attributes the disappearance of the Ol Tukai and other woodlands solely to the over-abundance of elephants. Here he is on dangerous ground; the generally accepted view is that the death of the woodlands was caused by a widespread rise in the water table at about the time the Ngong Narok springs increased their flow, which brought the roots of the trees into contact with toxic concentrations of salts leached from below. However, there can be no doubt that elephants have everywhere increased the destruction by attacking those fever trees that were able to survive because their roots still tapped fresh water, including those in the 1956 photograph.

*Major Ian R. Grimwood, FFPS Vice-President (Kenya).*

### **Latvijas Putni (Birds of Latvia)**

Viesturs Klimpins

Avots, Riga, Latvia, USSR, 1986, £17.50

Available from Collets, Denington Estate, Wellingborough, Northants NN8 2QT, UK

I was entertained by the author in December 1985 to a show of his slides at the Institute of Biology of the Latvian Academy of Sciences. Now he has brought together 150 pages worth of his colour photos and put with them 30 pages of text. Text and captions are all in three languages: Latvian, Russian and English. The title is translated as *Birds of Latvia*, but would be better as 'Birds in Latvia—a photographic album'. (The most recent reference work on the birds of Latvia is that edited by Janis Viksne under the title *Birds of Latvia: Territorial Distribution and Numbers* and published in 1983 by Zinatne in Riga. It has a most helpful 18-page systematic list in English.)

Although educated as a biologist, Klimpins is employed as an engineer in the Ornithological Laboratory. Photographing birds is his hobby, and this rich volume brings together the fruit of

much labour and love over 25 years: 108 of Latvia's 217 breeding species are represented, many by more than one photograph. As is the custom in eastern countries, there is a good proportion of photographs of eggs and of nests. There is also a number of pleasing habitat photographs. With very few exceptions all the birds are obviously wild and free (the white pelican is no doubt in a zoo, and a few birds, e.g. the blue-throat, appear to be held in the hand). On page 102 there is a pleasing portrait of the rarely photographed middle-spotted woodpecker, and on page 127 there is a long-tailed tit of the white-headed race. Otherwise the birds are mostly very familiar to ornithologists of western Europe.

The quality of the photographs varies somewhat, due no doubt to the differing film stocks over the years, to relative difficulties of different species, and so on. There appears to be inconsistency even in the printing, some pages (e.g. 111) being over-inked, many (e.g. 18) being fine.

All in all a colourful and varied feast for the eyes, a galaxy of grand images from a small but characterful country.

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

### **South African Red Data Book—Terrestrial Mammals**

(South African National Scientific Programmes Report No. 125)

Reay H. N. Smithers

Foundation for Research Development, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, PO Box 395, Pretoria 0001, South Africa, 1986, 216 pp, SB (no price given).

Of the 243 species of terrestrial mammals known to occur in the wild in South Africa, 42 (17 per cent) are, to a greater or lesser extent, considered to be under some threat of extinction. Three are categorized as Endangered, 14 as Vulnerable, and 25 as Rare. A further two (the quagga *Equus quagga* and blue antelope *Hippotragus leucophaeus*) have become extinct since the arrival in the Cape of the first settlers in 1652, and another, Lichtenstein's hartebeest *Sigmoceros lichtensteinii*, has died out in the Republic, although it still occurs in some countries to the north. Two more, the cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* and African

*Oryx Vol 21 No 3, July 1987*

# Book reviews

elephant *Loxodonta africana*, are now classified as Out of Danger.

A comprehensive summation under a dozen separate headings is given of the conservation status of all these species, while more limited data are supplied for a further 45 whose status, for want of detailed information, is classified as Indeterminate. There are brief discussions on mammal conservation, including the need for further investigations into various aspects of individual species, and legislation in the Republic in 1985, as well as a comprehensive bibliography. This is a valuable addition to the RDB list.

*Christopher Lever, Newell House, Winkfield, Windsor, Berkshire, UK.*

## Fraser Darling's Islands

John Morton Boyd

Edinburgh University Press, 1986, 252 pp, HB £12.95

*Fraser Darling's Islands* is the first volume of a new 'Island Biology' series published by Edinburgh University Press. The author, who is also General Editor of the series, uses the occasion to pay tribute to a doyen of conservation philosophy, Sir Frank Fraser Darling. He takes full advantage of the general aim of the series—to present the results of island biological investigation within a biographical context—to draw on a careful selection of Fraser Darling's personal records. He has chosen especially those concerning his work on the Scottish islands in the 1930s and early 1940s, when many of his ideas on relationships in nature were developed and moulded into what we now take for granted as 'ecology'. These descriptions, in his own words of his activities, thoughts and feelings of the time, bring out Fraser Darling's personality and disposition sufficiently vividly to suggest 'The Islands' Fraser Darling' as an equally apposite title.

John Morton Boyd explains that this volume should be regarded as leading into, rather than representative of, the series. He has allowed himself the liberty of concentrating on biographical detail, letting the scientific aspect emerge from within it or by implication from

Fraser Darling's professional reputation; this is not a technique likely to be appropriate for future volumes, since it inevitably involves straying beyond 'island biology' limits. Thus, an account is given of Fraser Darling's early life and the development of his scientific career, while a short epilogue touches his closing years.

As a friend, John Morton Boyd writes of Fraser Darling with sensitivity and affection; as a Scot he understands and interprets the special love Fraser Darling had for Scotland, its islands, highlands and people. Those of us who knew Fraser Darling will find many pleasant and evocative reminders of his character, at once direct and secret, simple and complex. We will be able to recall, reading the extracts of his journals, his measured, well-chosen and picturesque way of conveying his ideas. Those who did not know him will be able to gain very personal impressions of a man who was aware of ecology before it had a name as an acceptable discipline of biological study, and of natural resource conservation when the voices of its few prophets were crying in the wilderness.

The quality of presentation hardly lives up to that of its contents. The book is of small format and some of the photographic reproductions are poor.

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

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