

Book Reviews

Observations of Wildlife, by Peter Scott. Foreword by HRH the Duke of Edinburgh. Phaidon, £7.95.

This is essentially a picture book consisting of beautifully reproduced paintings and drawings in colour and black and white, chosen from Sir Peter's production stretching over half a century. As he points out, his pictures ought to speak for themselves – and so they do. Nevertheless, the supporting text dealing with the artist's problems, both of style and technique, is full of interest. It throws sidelights on events and personalities connected with the development of wildlife conservation in our time, more particularly with the organisations in which Sir Peter has been so deeply involved, the Wildfowl Trust, fFPS, IUCN and WWF. He touches on a wide variety of bird topics – bird-lore, how to create a reserve or build a hide, the problems of arousing public support or of breeding in captivity, and his travels as a naturalist in many lands.

But the essence of the book is in the pictures. Sir Peter argues that, without trying to outdo the photographer in realism, the artist should produce a portrait of man or bird which is recognisable. He is glad that it is obvious whether his pictures have been hung right way up or not and that any knowledgeable naturalist can identify the species he paints. Views on style differ and your reviewer has no qualifications as an art critic. The most he can say is that Sir Peter's pictures have their own character and individuality: when you see one, even on the opposite wall of an art gallery, you know it is a Peter Scott. This collection is a delight to the bird-lover and reveals the artist's predilections as well as his skill. There are a few drawings of mammals and paintings of fishes, whales and even Nessies, but the bulk of the book is devoted to ducks, geese and swans. Sir Peter writes, 'I like to draw or paint something every day of my life.' This artistic urge and the love of nature that shines through all his pictures together account for the book.

G. T. CORLEY SMITH

Stones of Silence, by George B. Schaller, Deutsch, £6.95.

George Schaller, already famous for highly original work on the gorilla and the lion (among others), must have found such creatures child's play relative to seeking out the larger animals among the largest mountain range on Earth. His travels, and travails, are the material of this latest book, sub-titled 'Journeys in the Himalaya'. The reader, astounded by Schaller's tenacity and ability, is knocked sideways further by the foreign profusion of people, places, animals. Who or what, in this land of Swat and Shey, are Argali, Altai, Aoudad, Arkari, Bharal, Bhote kosi, Dhole, Chitral, Gaur, Dolpo, Goral, Dir, Markhor, Salt, Tahr, Yasin? Ten out of ten for all *Oryx* readers who recognised the odd-numbered animals against the even-numbered places.

Logically Schaller starts off this book where his scientific treatise on the Himalayan sheep and goats ends. He quotes the naturalist William Beebe's need for 'softening facts with quiet meditation, leavening science with thoughts of the sheer joy of existence'. This he does excellently. 'I can feel the difference,' Schaller writes, when there is no large predator in the area. 'There is less vitality, less natural tension.' 'My ancestors lived like this,' he muses, when passing through a primitive village, before adding: 'And perhaps some day my descendants.' But always the driving force is not for experience, or people, or places new. It is for the animals. 'Poets may praise the deer and the nightingale. I celebrate the wild goat.' And so he does in this book, along with every other aspect of nature that strikes his eye and fancy.

It is a muddle of a book, much as any walk is a muddle, with thoughts trampling upon each other, and observations, and bits of fact, and practical problems. There is bureaucracy, political awkwardness, and mere domestic hazard: he liked coffee, the staff liked tea, so they made it half and half. Anyway, what a journey (it took three

years, off and on), what a project, and what a dogged behaviourist! Who else, these days, would even contemplate studying the snow leopard in its lonely, awesome home?

ANTHONY SMITH

The Common Ground: a Place for Nature Conservation in Britain's Future? by **Richard Mabey**. Hutchinson, Nature Conservancy Council, £8.95.

Richard Mabey has succeeded in a very difficult task, writing a sponsored book without losing his own independence of judgment. Having passed this first test, what are its inevitable drawbacks? The main one is that, just because he had so much help from the NCC, he seems to me not to take sufficient account of the substantial contribution of the voluntary side of the conservation movement. Somehow it always seems to be a bonus, rather than the core of a movement which, after all, began 60 years before the Nature Conservancy was created. The NCC is a professional body and naturally thinks nature conservation is something to be done by professionals, with help, no doubt, from the voluntary side. To those who join and work in, for example, a county trust, it is a task for ordinary naturalists and nature lovers, who work because they feel deeply about the movement and its aims, though they do admit they need some professional help. In practice the two sides usually work excellently together, but only by fusing completely their different points of view shall we be able to give an affirmative answer to Richard Mabey's question.

He starts by setting the movement in its historical perspective, with due obeisance to John Clare, who experienced the last great land-use storm, when the medieval farming system was destroyed to make way for industrial Victorian England, and who is more and more coming into his own as a prophet of nature conservation. Then he examines the inevitable tensions between nature conservation and the demands of agriculture, forestry and recreation. Finally, he makes a valuable analysis of, and asks many pertinent questions about, policies and priorities in the immediate past and the immediate future. The analysis should be read by the many administrators, engineers and businessmen who still have no idea at all what nature conservation is all about, and the questions by conservationists who cling to habitat and species protection as the ultimate good. Despite the splendid pioneer work of publicists such as James Fisher, Peter Scott and David Attenborough, there is still a most massive ignorance about the significance of the natural ecosystems to the health and welfare of human societies. We have a long way to go. Richard Mabey has advanced us another step. But many shoulders will have to be put to the wheel to shift the immobile mass of public opinion significantly towards our common aim: to secure the common ground for the common people.

RICHARD FITTER

The Red Fox, by **H.G. Lloyd**. Batsford, £15.

Two categories of animal catch the conservationist's attention: the species whose relationship with man pushes them towards extinction – and the red fox *Vulpes vulpes* is certainly not among these – and the species which, although not globally threatened by human activities, are nevertheless subject to widespread persecution – and no species could better exemplify this category than the fox. Many a voice, whether it be from farmer, pest officer, gamekeeper or neurotic, is raised against the fox, and may only be quelled or tempered by the good sense that rests on knowledge. Consequently the publication of a semi-popular general account of fox biology is a welcome event.

Lloyd's book is probably not going to be read from cover to cover by anyone other than a fox specialist, but it ranges across topics from the fox's angle of vision to its fleas, from courtship to diet. It will doubtless resolve many discussions of the size, habits, and distances foxes travel, and the breadth of material presented will provide ideal