

to suggest that the book is not worth reading. However, despite its shortcomings, it might be a good starting point for a student. As Dr Johnson said of another matter. it 'is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all.'

John A. Burton

MAMMALS

Rare and Endangered Biota of Florida. Volume I Mammals edited by Stephen R. Humphrey (University Press of Florida, ISBN 0 8130 1128 0, 392 pp., £20.75)

In the period since the rather different, equivalent volume on Mammals was published in 1978, the increase in interest in the subject has been dramatic. This is reflected in both the length of the present work (the 1978 edition was a mere 52 pages) and the detail contained. Clearly, one does not sit and read a book like this – it is a work of reference to be dipped into, and used in research. Suffice to say that those accounts that I have read are all written by specialists, are thorough and have enough detail to satisfy the most critical. The taxa are described at subspecific level, using a format very similar to the (now extinct?) IUCN Red Data Books. While many zoologist might argue against the use of subspecific taxa, at least as freely as is done in North America, the conservation justification is illustrated by the Playboy or Lower Keys Marsh rabbit *Sylvilagus palustris heffneri*, so called because its description was partly financed by the Playboy Foundation. If naming discrete, threatened populations after wealthy foundations, companies or individ-

uals, can raise funds for their conservation this seems to me far better than naming them simply for the sake of it and naming them after professional colleagues – dishing out honorary membership of the International Taxonomists Mutual Admiration Society.

My criticisms are few: a summary of the differences between the 1978 edition and the 1992, presented in tabular form, would have been useful.

Although not a criticism of the information given, a special mention should be made of the bats. Most are listed as 'Status Undetermined', but this appears to be scientific pedantry. After reading the accounts I find it difficult to conclude anything other than that Florida's bats are in a very bad way. There is a burgeoning human population, massive destruction of habitat and excessive use of pesticides. Practically all the accounts record declines when any data is available – and where there is no data it does not mean that all is well. When the North American populations of species such as *Tadarida brasiliensis* are known to have declined by perhaps 90 per cent it is difficult to accept the classification of the species as simply 'Insufficiently Known'. Scientific pedantry should not be allowed to stand in the way of sounding the alarm bell, for this or any other species. The American Society of Mammalogists recently published Guidelines for the Protection of Bat Roosts (1992, *J. Mammalogy*, 4, 707–710), which recommended 'that any species of cave-dwelling bat be treated as though their populations are in decline; exceptions should be limited only to those cases for which substantial evidence exists to the contrary'.

John A. Burton

BIRDS

The Birds of Cyprus (2nd edn) by Peter R. Flint and Peter F. Stewart (British Ornithologists' Union, c/o Zoological Museum, Tring, Herts. HP23 6AP, 1992, ISBN 0 907446 14 0, 234 pp., HB £18 including p. & p. [UK]; £20 including p. & p. [overseas])

This book is subtitled as an annotated checklist, but this is misleading because, in addition to the systematic list, there are over 60 pages devoted to sites of ornithological interest, the history of Cyprus's ornithology, geography, geology, climate, vegetation, migration, breeding, bird-killing and conservation, thus making it a valuable reference work. The book is well illustrated with colour and monochrome plates of habitats, and resident and migrant species and includes a poignant photograph of the first recorded white-tailed plover from the island. This beautiful bird soon succumbed to the hunter's gun, its body adding to the mountain of an estimated annual slaughter of 5 million birds. Heavy and sustained killing by over 40,000 licensed hunters is permitted throughout most of the year. An estimated 375,000 song thrushes were shot on one January day and bee-eaters die in their tens of thousands. This appalling carnage makes one wonder if there will be much of a systematic list to publish in future editions.

Bruce Coleman

Crane Music by Paul A. Johnsgard (Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, 1991, ISBN 1 56098 051 6, 136 pp., HB £15.50, \$23.95)

This, Paul Johnsgard's third book on these splendid birds,

deals primarily with the natural history of the American sandhill crane, the most abundant crane in the world, and the whooping crane, one of the rarest. There is a good introductory chapter on cranes in mythology, religion and history and on their spectacular ritualized displays and general biology, written with an admirable economy of words, which is a pleasing feature of the whole book. Each spring for the last 30 years the author has witnessed the gathering of half a million sandhill cranes at the River Platte Valley in Nebraska on their way to their northern tundra breeding grounds. This is the starting point of an excellent account encompassing their yearly cycle: migration, territorial behaviour and complex dances, plumage painting, breeding biology and their eventual return home.

The conservation programme and biology of the whooping crane is also well chronicled. The improved status of this species from its 1940s low is heartening, but the dangers of disease, oil spills, hurricanes and other potential disasters mean that its survival is still on a knife's edge.

Bruce Coleman

Birds of the Great Basin by Fred A. Ryser Jr (University of Nevada Press, UCL Press Ltd, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, 1992, ISBN 0 87417 080 X, 624 pp., SB £24.95)

Birds of the Great Basin is one of a series on the natural history of the Great Basin of Idaho, Nevada, Wyoming, Oregon and California. Unfortunately the book suffers from over-indulgence on the part of its author so that much of the 600 pages of ornithological facts have little relevance to learning about

the ecology and status of the birds of the region.

Bruce Coleman

TRAVEL

On Safari in East Africa: A Background Guide by Ernest Neal (Harper Collins, London, 1992, ISBN 0 00 219928 9, 192pp., SB £9.99)

With more than 40 years of safaris behind him, Ernest Neal is well-placed to provide this welcome new edition to the list of East African guidebooks. There are already plenty of good field guides for the identification of East Africa's mammals and its many hundreds of birds. What Ernest Neal offers is a deeper insight into the ways of wild Africa; how species behave and adapt to take their place within the complex and beautiful ecosystems of the East African bush. Thus we learn of the relationship between ants and whistling thorns and giraffes, and how it takes about 2.5 sq km of savannah grassland to sustain 100 gazelles, which in turn are needed to support a single lion. There are excellent chapters on major species such as elephant, buffalo and the big cats; on savannah birds and Africa at night. In short, an ideal safari companion, and just the right size to slip into your bush jacket pocket.

Brian Jackman

Australia's Southwest and our Future by Jan Taylor (Kangaroo Press, Kenthurst NSW, 1990, ISBN 0 86417 350 4, 176 pp., SB \$14.95. Available from Gazelle Book Services, Falcon House, Queen Square, Lancaster LA1 1RN for £8.95 + £0.80 p. & p.)

Biologist Jan Taylor shares with us a naturalist's excursion around southwest Australia. He does do with a pleasant style and an informative mixture of fact and philosophy. The western European assault on Australia has been more systematically covered by many others, but Taylor's personal and anecdotal style will appeal to a wide clientele of armchair travellers and serious naturalists. As with any such account, the success of this book is measured by how much it stimulates one to travel there and see the larger environmental messages it portrays. On both counts the book does well. The author's aim to seek out a viable conservation future by appreciating the evolutionary past and landscape change over time is a bold and mostly useful one. Had he tied it together in a 'summing up' it would have strengthened his case considerably. Bottom line: take this book with you on your next trip southwest.

Jim Thorsell