

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

background for many fox projects. The eight chapters describe the classification, anatomy and distribution of foxes before going on to aspects of behaviour and ecology, such as diet and hunting behaviour, courtship and parental care, population dynamics, territoriality and dispersion. There are two interesting chapters on the history, theory and practice of man's varied relationships with foxes, which include not only some unusual material but a thoughtful perspective on 'fox problems'. A most notable feature is an excellent bibliography. The black and white photographs are not amongst the most thrilling of fox pictures, but they certainly make some telling points.

Gwyn Lloyd has spent a significant part of his working life studying foxes, and his text, although following a scientifically impersonal style for the most part, does allow his humour and his sensitivity for his subject to shine through. There is one sentence about the fox which, more than any other, I am sure will be quoted until the type is almost rubbed from the page: 'Perhaps it deserves its reputation as a rascal but it does not deserve to die the squalid death that is so often its fate.'

DAVID W. MACDONALD

Why Big Fierce Animals are Rare, by Paul Colinvaux. Allen & Unwin, £7.95.

In spite of its title, this book, of North American origin, consists of a series of essays on the working of the natural world generally. Each chapter deals with a separate theme, usually arising from a paradox that is apparent in earlier literature, from Darwin and before, and explaining it in the light of modern knowledge. The title of the book is also that of the third chapter which discusses Elton's Pyramid of Numbers and explains how the rarity of large and fierce animals is understandable through the work of Raymond Lindeman and Evelyn Hutchinson at Yale in regarding food and bodies as calories rather than flesh.

In eighteen thought-provoking chapters most of the problems of modern ecology are discussed: the necessity for a definite niche for every plant and animal; the social life of plants and plant succession; peaceful coexistence in the struggle for existence; territory ('the social imperatives of space'); why there are so many species of organisms; and the fallacy of stability in nature.

A final chapter explores the ecological problems of man – the supreme example of a big, fierce animal that is not rare! A Postlude, an expanded list of further ecological reading and an index complete the book.

There are no illustrations in the text, but a frontispiece and attractive symbolic chapter headings are by Vana Haggerty.

JOHN CLEGG

Rabies and Wildlife, a Biologist's Perspective, by D.W. Macdonald. OUP, with Earth Resources Research, £3.95.

There have been a number of publications on rabies in the last few years, but this is undoubtedly the most readable and the best all round account of the subject to date. Most of the earlier publications have dealt more with the medical aspects and the pathology of the disease. This book adequately reviews this subject, but as the title suggests, it looks more widely at the natural history of rabies from a biologist's point of view. Much of the book covers the available knowledge on the red fox, the species which is most likely to be the principal wildlife carrier of the virus should the disease come to Britain again. A comprehensive account of the behavioural ecology of the fox, much of it based on the author's own work, is given and related to the epidemiology of rabies as it would probably occur in Britain. Attention is drawn to the fact that as foxes have adapted extremely well to urban environments, the possibility of transmission of the virus to small domestic animals and then on to man becomes more acute. Methods