

## Book Reviews

### **African Birds of Prey, by Leslie Brown. Collins, £2.25.**

Obviously less ambitious than the author's two-volume *Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of the World* (written with Dean Amadon), this book lacks the detailed treatment of individual species, but it contains much that is new, and furthermore includes the nocturnal as well as the diurnal birds of prey – 30 of the former and 90 of the latter. It can be recommended to all interested in birds of prey as a whole. Part I discusses their behaviour, physical adaptations for predation, and their variety. A table lists each species, defines its status and assigns it to one or more of seven habitats, with brief notes on prey preference. Part II (nearly half the book) considers the species in relative detail, dividing them into twelve groups, in which those which perform the same function in nature (not necessarily closely related) are placed together. Some species are still only known from specimens, and one, a forest owlet in Liberia, has not yet even been named.

Part III, the most interesting and novel part, indicates some of the many problems. It is still not known how the Eastern red-footed falcon reaches its winter quarters in south-central Africa, where it occurs in enormous congregations, and the movements of the African races of the black kite are not yet fully understood. Chapters on migrants, ecology and distribution, numbers (with supporting tables of pioneering work on counts in southern and eastern Africa), effects of predation, and breeding seasons lead to the final chapter, on the relationship of birds of prey and man, accompanied by a figure suggesting that 85.4 per cent of diurnal raptors in East Africa are beneficial to man, 11.2 per cent neutral, and only 3.4 per cent harmful.

Illustrations include 23 photographs, a vegetation map of Africa, and a variety of figures, on subjects ranging from binocular vision to the home ranges of seven pairs of fish eagles.

C. W. BENSON

### **Man and Birds by R. K. Murton. Collins, £2.50.**

### **The Bird Gardener's Book, by Rupert Barrington. Wolfe, £1.50.**

Twenty years ago, writing from an exceptionally intimate acquaintance with all our symbiotic or commensal species, E. M. Nicholson contributed a volume to the New Naturalist series dealing with the relationship between Birds and Men (in that order) in its many more or less familiar bearings. Dr Murton approaches the same theme, with close knowledge of all the research and specialised study which has gone on in the interval, primarily from the angle of an economic ornithologist himself engaged in such research. Though he has reversed the order in the title the treatment necessarily covers much the same field. Incidentally one may note that, seventy years ago, W. H. Hudson published his 'Birds and Man' and Dr Murton seems a little hard on that great naturalist and writer in condemning its 'pompous subjectivity and misplaced sentimentality'. We owe much to Hudson. And was Dr Dorst altogether wrong when he said recently that, if we are going to save Nature before it dies, it will be from our hearts rather than our heads that salvation will come?

Dr Murton himself goes along with Nicholson in the conclusion that, with the close and growing similarity between the interests of birds and people in the shaping of the landscape, Britain can be improved as a

habitat for both. He devotes the earlier part of this valuable book to general ecological considerations, accepting the view that populations are controlled in a density-dependent manner and discussing the predator-prey relationship with reference to particular species. Chapters on Birds in Forests, on the Farm, in Horticulture, in Fishing Waters and in Industry review the results of recent ecological research and experience. His examination of the effects of agricultural changes since the war, the study of how much and what birds eat, their pests and chemical warfare on those pests provide perhaps the most interesting part of the whole book. The extent to which adaptations to these changes may be showing us evolution in progress is illuminated by a great deal of detail which merits careful perusal. An example is the development in the reed bunting of new habitat tolerances and even food preferences. One could have wished that Dr Murton had found room for a more satisfying final chapter. What is his answer to the questions which in effect he poses: Can we afford the absolute or attainable maximum requirement of quantitative productivity at the expense of destroying or gravely impairing our traditional environment? Should man maximise his own numbers at the expense of wildlife or regulate them to a level which will allow him to enjoy something of his natural heritage?

Mr Rupert Barrington is to be congratulated on having managed to pack into his book so many sound and practical suggestions for conserving a wide range of common birds, and attracting more marginal visitors in, and into, suburban and other gardens by careful planning and planting, by providing nest boxes and nesting sites – and by excluding enemies, of which cats may be the worst.

HURCOMB

**The Life of Mammals, Volume 2, by L. Harrison Matthews. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £4.25.**

The first volume of this work, dealing with many aspects of mammals in general, appeared in 1969. This second volume completes the task with a systematic account dealing with the enormous diversity of the world's mammals, family by family, with some mention of almost every genus. Primates, however, are regrettably excluded with the excuse that they have already been dealt with in a separate volume of this series: *The Life of Primates* by A.H. Schultz. Those whose enthusiasm for primates does not stretch to paying an extra £3.15 may well feel blackmailed!

The subject matter, dealing as it does with the diversity of mammals, is very different from that of the excellent book with identical title (surely an unnecessary source of confusion) by Professor J.Z. Young. Nor does it attempt to compete with the many books that depend primarily upon illustration: with thirty monochrome photographs and a very few line drawings, it is not copiously illustrated.

Having made these remarks, more by way of defining the scope of the book than in criticism, it remains to say what an extraordinarily skilful job the author has done. While the emphasis is on what mammals do, the behaviour is closely correlated with structure, producing a nice compromise between the anatomical approach and the more recent tendency to go to the other extreme and treat mammals as statistics in life-tables (or even replace them by mathematical models). The material has been carefully selected, with valuable summaries of some very recent studies, and the text is repeatedly enhanced by the author's great