

REVIEWS

BIG RED. HENRY G. LAMOND. Faber and Faber. 15s.

In his brief introductory note, the writer tells us that the names of "pastoral properties, towns, and creeks are entirely fictitious. They exist only in the author's imagination". He warns the reader that it would be a wasted effort on his part to "search the map for any of the stations named". This would seem to be an unnecessary lack of candour on the part of one who aims at giving a veracious account of the life history of any animal not excessively rare or local in its distribution. The account of the habits of the red kangaroo and other animals would appear to be derived from various sources, mainly from a kangaroo shooter, described by the author as a "keen student of natural history", but who declares himself to be "a hunter an' a killer". Perhaps too much reliance has been placed on the information supplied by this "Larry Grant": perhaps undue importance has been attached to conversations "on pub verandas"; in either event, the outcome is the ornate presentation of a mass of unreliable and inaccurate information.

The main purpose of the book appears to be recording of the life history and habits of the red kangaroo (*Macropus rufus*); it is therefore disappointing to find at the outset the statement that when the young kangaroo enters the pouch and grasps the nipple, "the teat made an adhesion, became part of the joey in the manner of the umbilical cord." Such a statement, so often proved untrue, can only tend to undermine the reader's confidence in the author's reliability concerning the natural history of the marsupials. Combats of male kangaroos are described with a wealth of remarkable and picturesque detail. The ripping kick delivered by the downward movement of the foot is a characteristic method of attack with many of the diprotodont marsupials; but that the kangaroo, when delivering the blow, supports himself only on the tail and kicks with both hind feet simultaneously, is surely a very surprising thing. This action is described more than once in the book as is also the remarkable circumstance of the combatants sinking their "daggers of teeth" into each other's jugular veins. The writing employed in describing these encounters is picturesque in the extreme: "He drove with teeth which glinted when the sun struck them, which protruded like slanting daggers from his mouth. He drove those teeth. He closed them. He jerked his head back. Streamers of sinews and slivers of flesh hung from

his teeth ; blood spurted in the air and spread as a mist when the wind sprayed it." But by far the most wonderful information that "Larry" gives us is that 10 per cent of kangaroos in some districts are hermaphrodites ; and "I don't suppose they are under 5 per cent anywhere in th' west". As place-names are admittedly fictitious, it is only a guess that by the term "west", some part of Western Queensland is the home of these remarkable creatures. "Larry" admits that "most men don't see 'em", and adds the helpful suggestion that "a roo's a monotreme". Regarding one that he has just shot, he says : "This bloke's got a big purse and a little pouch. That means his inside organs is all female." These strange animals are said to be known to bushmen as "moffs". Perhaps it is unnecessary to discuss any further the additions to our knowledge of the Macropodidae made by the author.

Concerning other animals, almost equally strange things are recorded. We are told about the doings of a "bull goanna" and what is evidently the common Jew lizard is described as sounding "his throaty gurgle which was bell-like in its clarity as he called for his mate to come to him". Ornithology is not neglected. Scientists are made responsible for the statement that emus "have the smallest brains of any bird" and they are presumably the authorities relied on for the information that the caution displayed by these birds is "a relic of the days of the sabre-toothed tiger".

Some revolting accounts are given of the wholesale slaughter of kangaroos by "Larry" and his like and these appear to evoke no expression of disapproval from the author ; even when he records that, after 600 skins had been obtained in less than a fortnight "more than that number of 'roos had been shot—a percentage had been wounded, staggered away to die under trees and out on the plains".

As for the manner of the book, apart from the grotesque inaccuracies of its matter, local colour is freely given by the adoption of slang terms and by such descriptive writing as that concerning "a mob of galahs asleep in the coolibah trees on the creek". The author's literary style is represented in innumerable pieces of ornamental verbiage such as that describing the movements of a flock of budgerigars when attacked by a bird designated as a "black falcon". The falcon "dived in a hissing streak straight at the near-centre of the mob" and "the midget wings" of the budgerigars "churned as they bit in hissing strokes ; they left a wake of bubbled air behind them". Previously to this an eagle, in attacking a young kangaroo had

“ churned eddies and bubbles of broken air as it rose in a grand sweep ”.

It may be that this leaning towards ornate writing has affected not only the author's literary style but has left its mark on his method of dealing with zoological facts. The book is one in which no Australian can take pride and on which no zoologist may place any reliance.

F. WOOD JONES.

RECORDS OF PARROTS BRED IN CAPTIVITY. By A. A. PRESTWICH.

Published by Arthur A. Prestwich, Chelmsford Road, Southgate, London, N. 14. 35s.

Mr. A. A. Prestwich's very thorough and carefully compiled book, *Records of Parrots Bred in Captivity*, is primarily of interest to aviculturists. It is, however, not without importance to those who are concerned with fauna preservation, as it indicates very plainly how many parrot-like birds could be saved from extinction by breeding in captivity if conditions in their natural habitat became so unfavourable that they were no longer able to survive there. At one time it was feared that the lovely little Australian turquoise grass parrakeet and the splendid grass parrakeet were on the verge of extinction, if not actually extinct, and that Bourke's parrakeet was also exceedingly rare. Fortunately, however, this estimate of the birds' status has proved to be unduly pessimistic, but even if it had been fully justified, all three species just mentioned are now so well established in captivity, either in their own country or in other parts of the world, as to be independent of the need of any introduction of wild blood. There is not the slightest doubt that if American aviculturists had been alive to their opportunity, the Carolina conure could have been preserved.

BEDFORD.

DIE WILD KATZEN DER ALTEN WELT (Eine Übersicht über die Untergattung *Felis*). By Dr. M. HALTENORTH. (*The Wild Cats of the Old World—a Review of the sub-genus Felis.*)

Published, 1953, by Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, Leipzig.

This is a detailed monograph on the sub-genus *Felis* as recognized by the author, of which he considers one species—*F. silvestris*—to contain most of the wild cats found in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Dr. Haltenorth has reviewed every form with great care, under the main headings, synonyms, type locality, characteristics, and distribution. He unites under *F. silvestris* all forms previously considered to belong to the