

of the fauna and flora, many of them endemic and some so rare as to be in danger of extinction. It is unfortunate, if inevitable, that the book's scope should have precluded a fuller treatment of this aspect as he has much to tell us which he has not had the space to set down. One of the species most endangered is the magpie robin or 'pie chanteuse' on Frigate. It would be interesting to know whether expert opinion has ruled out the possibility of establishing this bird in the recently-formed Cousin Island sanctuary. To compensate for the brevity of this chapter it might be possible in a later edition to expand the section in the bibliography which relates to it. There is, for example, only a passing reference to the expeditions led by Professor Stanley Gardiner under the auspices of the Percy Sladen Trust. The 142 reports on these expeditions published in the Transactions of the Linnean Society of London are a mine of information for those interested in the fauna of Seychelles.

OXFORD AND ASQUITH

Life on Coral Reefs in the Seychelles, by Peter Vine.

If one is looking for an earthly paradise, one can more easily find it on one of the Seychelles than anywhere else, especially one of those removed from Mahé, the capital and aptly bearing a name such as Frigate, Silhouette, Curieuse, Praslin, Cousin and Cousine. And beyond these jungle-covered granite islands that support a wealth of wildlife, in the air on the land and in the sea, are the faraway coral atolls, Cosmoledo and the Amirantes.

The combination of true tropical islands and coral atolls has produced a unique richness and diversity in the living world of coral. Cousteau has written that the Seychelles are not particularly well endowed so far as coral reefs are concerned, but Peter Vine was not looking through the eyes of a writer and photographer seeking the dramatic. He was a scientist and recorder seeking—and I believe he found—a very special field for research, a complete ecosystem which reflects its existence in his recording. He gives information on just about every life form in the Seychelle sea, covering the structure of a coral reef, its life and death, animals and plants, worms and crustaceans, molluscs and echinoderms and of course, fish.

During my recent visit, on a diving and filming expedition, I found myself continually turning to Vine's book to check on a name of some sea creature or to seek inspiration for a particular film sequence, either from the text or from the superb variety of colour plates, more than thirty, by Walt Deas, an Englishman who emigrated to Australia for the love of diving and photography.

This is a book to assure any 'fish watcher', whether a qualified marine biologist or just plain interested, that he, or she, will find life on the coral reefs in the Seychelles.

LEY KENYON

Azraq: Desert Oasis, by Bryan Nelson. Allen Lane, £6.

No more different biotope could be imagined for a seabird specialist, with considerable field experience in the Galapagos Islands in the eastern Pacific, than the oasis of Azraq, on the north-western edge of the great deserts of Arabia, as I can vouch for myself, having visited both. But it is the hallmark of a good ecologist to be equally at home in diverse environments, and *Azraq: Desert Oasis* proves to be just as good as *Galapagos: Islands of Birds*, the fruit of Dr. Nelson's previous sojourn.

Azraq is indeed a fascinating place, never more so than when the great tides of Palaearctic bird migrants flood through it twice a year. Bryan Nelson not only deals comprehensively and readably with the wildlife,

Libyan jirds, drawing by John Busby reproduced from 'Azraq: Desert Oasis'



vegetation and ecology of the area, but has excellent chapters on adaptation to desert living, and the relation of the human settlements and inhabitants to their harsh environment. He went out in 1968 to start a research station linked with the International Biological Program, and it is sad indeed that the gale of war that blew through the Middle East swept away this promising beginning. His chapter on this tentative start and decisive end, when various kinds of Arab military understandably refused to accept a civilian scientist from overseas in what had become one of their most important staging posts, will be read with the greatest interest by all those who, in the past or in the future, have been or will be concerned with the setting up of that most rewarding type of enterprise, an international biological research station. So far, only the Charles Darwin Station in the Galapagos has really worked, but it is clear that, but for the chances of war, such was the excellent cooperation of the Jordan authorities, ever prodded by the indefatigable Max Nicholson, Azraq would have had an excellent chance of working too.

John Busby's distinctive and helpful drawings of birds and mammals and Eric Hosking's fine photographs both help to make this a first-class book.

RICHARD FITTER

The National Parks of England and Wales, by Roger Bush.
Dent, £3.95.

Roger Bush is a tonic. There were the rest of us thinking evil thoughts about our national parks, worrying that mining excavators were about to scoop great holes in them, wondering about the legislation and even doubtful whether they should be called national parks. But Mr Bush waves a hand airily over such thinking, consenting that some 'disadvantages' have arisen from the 'compromise solutions' of the Parks Act, but adds that the 'parks have achieved a good deal' and have 'considerable merits'.

We wonder what on earth we have been worrying about. We may have tied ourselves in knots, particularly after a frustrating visit to a park, but Mr Bush's comforting tone should unravel our cares at once. For example: 'When an area is selected as a national park there is no change in the ownership of land. Nor is there any special right of access for walkers, climbers or riders, or for picnicing'. The facts are plain. He is calm about them and yet obviously loves the parks. So why fret a moment longer?

The bulk of the book is balm of a different kind, with 120 photographs showing some of the considerable beauty within the park areas. The text is factual stuff about each region, with history and anecdote, geology and helpful hints. It is a sensible, intelligent guide to the many virtues of these different places (Mr Bush having served as head of publicity at the Countryside Commission). The book is a brochure more than an examination, and public relations more than a private enquiry. It is always wrong to suggest that any book should have been a quite different kind of book, but I fell upon this volume eagerly and then retreated. Money, for