

Ratcliffe, called the Big Country Mystique – that there are vast virgin areas ‘outback’. But the traveller finds the virgin lands recede like a mirage, and there is nowhere that Aborigines and the dingo, Europeans and their introduced sheep, cattle, rabbits, cats, foxes, camels or pigs have not colonised. These invaders, and many others inflicted on the native fauna, are given a separate chapter.

The role of the hunter (American usage) in the social and economic scene is also discussed and the author is generally sympathetic, except to the water buffalo ‘safari’ which he describes as ‘... not unlike ... shooting an unusually large and extra wary dairy cow with a high velocity rifle in exotic surroundings’.

The commercial use of Australian wildlife, native or introduced, poses many problems. Red and grey kangaroos are recognised not to be competing with stock to the extent usually thought, but seen as a valuable resource capable, with careful control, of supporting a meat and hide industry.

The study of rare or disappearing species is of special interest to the conservationist and may provide basic information on the reason for low density in one case or on inimical factors in the other. Over the last quarter century a great deal has been learnt of the ecology of some species, but Frith emphasises the need for greater integration of State fauna authorities and the provision of more trained wildlife managers if the 40,000 square miles of National Parks and Reserves and the remaining 3,000,000 square miles of Australia are to be adequately conserved. He ends on a note of qualified optimism about the future, provided that a unified, continent-wide approach can be developed, to include the monitoring of wild populations, both rare and common, so that planned management may become a reality.

HARRY V. THOMPSON

**A Guide to the Snakes of Uganda**, by Charles R. S. Pitman. Wheldon & Wesley, £12

**Snakes of the American West**, by Charles E. Shaw and Sheldon Campbell. Knopf, New York, \$12.50

This revised edition of Captain Pitman’s classic will be welcomed by herpetologists; its scope extends well beyond the borders of Uganda since many of the species described are also found in neighbouring African countries. The major part of the book is devoted to detailed synoptic accounts of the 98 Ugandan species; slightly over half of these are more or less poisonous, though less than a dozen (the cobras, mambas and big vipers) are serious hazards to human life. The descriptions are very thorough, and include notes on sex differences, habits and reproduction, and recorded parasites. There is also an introductory section dealing with zoogeography, classification (with keys to recognition), the treatment of snake-bite and the general characters of snakes. The book is illustrated by diagrams and by many fine drawings in colour, and the author has clearly been at great pains to compile a full and up-to-date bibliography.

In his preface the author says that ‘the “staccato” style adopted throughout achieved enormous reduction in superfluous words’. This style is suitable enough for descriptive detail, but in places it makes rather painful reading and occasionally even leads to scientific ambiguity. However, it hardly diminishes the book’s utility as a work of reference and is perhaps a small price to pay in view of the value of this otherwise handsomely produced volume.

The late Charles Shaw, Curator of Reptiles at the San Diego Zoo, and Sheldon Campbell have also produced an excellent contribution to regional herpetology in their account of the 70 or so snake species in the western states, pleasantly written and containing a great deal of interest to the general herpetologist; for example they describe some important recent experiments which demonstrate that snakes, contrary to general belief among zoologists, are able to hear airborne sounds. There are chapters on snake characteristics, on snakes as pets, and the treatment of snake-bite.



**ELEPHANT SEALS** by Bob Evans, one of over 150 superb colour illustrations in *Vanishing Species* published by Time-Life (\$11.95)

Occasionally one encounters a rather odd remark, such as the statement that the use of venom took hundreds of thousands of years to develop (some millions, surely!). On the whole, however, the information is sound, well presented and up-to-date. There is a synoptic guide to identification, a good bibliography and a series of excellent colour photos.

Both these books will be significant additions to the library of any herpetologist, even if he is not specifically concerned with the African or North American faunas.

A. D'A BELLAIRS

**All About Photographing Animals and Birds**, by David Hodgson. Pelham Books, £4.00

Photographing wild animals is not easy. So many combinations of subject, setting and light conditions can occur and usually when you least expect them, that only years of experience can prepare one to cope with them. The author of this book obviously has this experience and also the knack of passing on his knowledge in a readable way. Every page is full of practical and useful hints, and the technique of taking the reader through different photographic situations and explaining why a particular lens, speed and aperture were used is the best that I have encountered.

The book covers a wide field from natural shots in the wild through to the very contrived studio portrait of the family dog. The comprehensive opening chapter on equipment should enable the would-be photographer with no previous knowledge to decide exactly what camera, lenses, and film are suitable for his particular subjects.

For the naturalist wanting to use photography as a means of recording or learning more about his particular subject there is an excellent section on making and using devices that will automatically photograph animals as they pass close to the camera. Night time flash photography and the use of extension tubes and bellows for extreme close up pictures are also covered in depth, and there is an extensive and up-to-date glossary of photographic terms. At first I was rather put off by the large number of photographs of family pets in anthropomorphic poses, but these do not seriously detract from the overall excellence of a well written book.

NIGEL PHILLIPS