

centres of endemism conclude by drawing attention to present threats, and conservation measures needed to counteract them.

Chapter 12, 'Man-made islands—Reserves and National Parks', complements the main subject by drawing attention to the fragmentation of range of originally widespread species, which the author assesses as comprising about three-quarters of the total. The map on page 238 shows the national parks of sub-Saharan Africa, which represent what will be, and in many cases already are, the isolated refuges to which the more vulnerable species will be limited. They do of course include parts of the centres of endemism too. In theory these man-made islands could in time become centres of endemism acting on the isolated remaining populations of formerly widespread species. But many are unfortunately refuges only on paper with little or nothing being done on the ground, so the immediate concern must be to improve their status in the short- and medium-term future. The last chapter addresses some of the difficulties of conserving the centres of endemism, which in practice apply equally to the non-endemic conservation areas as well. There is today a heartening tendency, albeit belated by several decades, towards involving local communities in wildlife conservation and the author rightly stresses the importance of this.

Appendix I lists typical endemic species of the islands and enclaves, while Appendices II–V outline conservation needs in the countries in which centres of endemism lie, world heritage sites, biosphere reserves, national parks and reserves, and finally various conservation organizations

with African interests both in and outside the continent.

Though it will be of considerable value to biologists and biogeographers, this is not a scientific treatise, but rather aimed at a broader readership, one of its declared objects being to advertise the existence of African centres of endemism and draw the attention of those interested outside Africa to their moral obligation to assist in conservation of these areas. It should do this and one hopes that it will. This book is good value at £25, being attractively produced, with a wealth of coloured and pencil illustrations in the author's characteristic and inimitable style. I recommend it to anyone interested in the wonderful fauna and flora it describes.

W. F. H. Ansell.

The Natural History of Seals

Nigel Bonner

Christopher Helm, 1989, 196pp., HB £14.95

This is an admirable summary of the natural history of seals, by a zoologist who is not only well qualified by his long service in the Antarctic but, unlike so many scientists, has a most pleasing writing style. It is not often that one can repeat oneself in reviewing successive books, but I am happy to be able to repeat the above sentence from my review of another book by the same author in the October 1989 *Oryx*, substituting only 'seals' for 'whales, porpoises and dolphins'. Marine mammal specialists usually cover both cetaceans and pinnipeds, but it is unusual to find one who couples thorough knowledge of both groups with such ability to convey scientific information in non-technical English.

To continue in the former

vein, in only 196 well illustrated pages he has managed both to include much unusual information and to be right up to date on the true seals of the family Phocidae, the common, grey, harp and hooded seals and their relatives. The fur seals, sealions or walrus are not included.

While 'Save the Whale' has become the battle-cry of the activist section of the conservation movement, the activists have also chalked up the bans on harvesting and marketing the pelts of juvenile harp and hooded seals, especially from the Gulf of St Lawrence, as one of their major successes. Nigel Bonner deals percipitently with this vexed conflict between would-be but ham-handed sustainable harvesters and the out-and-out 'no killing' animal welfare advocates. Seals have been a legitimate human prey since man began to occupy the northern part of the northern hemisphere, but when modern commercial pressures, including the media's taste for a good story with plenty of red blood on white fur, become dominant, the old relationship between hunter and hunted is gone forever. This was basically a political problem, appallingly badly handled by politicians, who were as reluctant as ever to be guided by impartial scientific advice and so became prisoners of the emotional crusade of the media and the activists.

Another aspect of man-seal relationships that Nigel Bonner deals with admirably is the age-old enmity between seals and fishermen, who want to kill seals primarily as competitors for fish, and only secondarily as a source of income. Fishermen are as reluctant as politicians (who are often guided by fishermen) to listen to scientists and their inconvenient facts, and believe the wildest

estimates of how much of their own preferred cod and other prey are eaten by all those thousands of seals. It is no good telling them that there is no convincing evidence that seals, and for that matter other marine mammals, influence the abundance of fish stocks. They know that seals eat fish and that is enough. So while I would recommend them to read Nigel Bonner on the subject, I fear that the truth will go in at one eye and out at the other.

Richard Fitter, Vice-President, FFPS.

Snakeman: The Story of a Naturalist

Zai Whitaker

The India Magazine Books, Business India Group, 18th Floor, Nirmal, Nariman Point, Bombay 400021, India, 1989, 185 pp, HB Rs 195.00 (or \$US15.00 including registered airmail postage)

Rom Whitaker's life-long involvement with reptiles makes a fascinating story, well told by his wife Zai and decorated by the delightful black-and-white illustrations of Bruce Peck. The tale begins in New York State, where Rom was born and where his interest in snakes began, describes his schooldays in India, where he kept snakes under his bed, and follows his early career in Miami Serpentarium.

The bulk of the book, though, describes his important work in India, where he has lived for 20 years. Among his most notable achievements have been the establishment of the Snake Park and the Crocodile Bank in Madras, fine examples of education and conservation practice, and the setting up of the Irula Snake-Catchers' Co-operative, a

model of sustainable wildlife utilization.

This is a heartening account of how an enthusiastic and dedicated man with few financial resources can achieve inspired yet sound conservation. It is a very personal story but this only adds to its interest; many well-known conservationists of the last two decades appear in its pages and there are interesting reflections on how attitudes to conservation, even within the international organizations, have evolved over that time. It will appeal to anyone interested in conservation, its practitioners, reptiles or in India itself.

Editor.

African Mammals 1938–1988

W. F. H. Ansell

The Trendrine Press, Zennor, St Ives, Cornwall, UK, 1989, 77pp., SB £10.60 including postage in the UK or £10.90 by overseas surface mail (air-mail price on request)

Since 1939, when G. M. Allen's *A Checklist of African Mammals* was published, there has been a great expansion of African mammalogy and many new taxa have been described and named. *African Mammals 1938–1988* is an essential complement to Allen's work, listing names published from July 1938 to 31 December 1988, with reference list and index.

Editor.

A Field Guide to British Bats

Frank Greenaway and A. M. Hutson

Bruce Coleman Books, Uxbridge, Middlesex, 1990, 52 pp., HB £10.99

In recent years bat study has

moved out of the Dark Ages as interest has blossomed throughout the British Isles.

After decades of handbooks and general mammal guides we have reached the age of the field identification guides for bats. This latest guide consists of a superb collection of colour photographs of all our native bats photographed from all angles so that important identification features can be seen. Opposite each plate is a comprehensive text, highlighting identification details and providing useful information about roosting sites, habits and distribution. Although no new identification features have been described this guide has the advantage over others in the variety of photographs of each species so we can, at last, try to see for ourselves all those features peculiar to each bat species.

Frank Greenaway's original photographs were of excellent quality but this, unfortunately, has been lost to some extent both in crispness of the reproduction and in layout in this book. It has been many years since I have seen photographs cut out and set out in plates in this fashion (odd thumbs, tail tips and goodness knows what else have been chopped off). Nevertheless bat fanatics will still buy this useful guide.

Some of the photographs remain unadulterated and they should attract those with only minor interests in bats as they are first class. The final moan—the price. At £10.99 this is perhaps rather pricey for the 52 pages. Doubtless the hard cover is partly to blame. Personally, I would have found it much easier to slip into a pocket if a paperback version had been available. It is a field guide when all is said and done.

Phil Richardson.