

## Book Reviews

**The Beagle Record:** Selections from the original pictorial records and written accounts, edited by **Richard Darwin Keynes**. Cambridge UP, £30.

What! Another book about the Beagle? Yes, but this one is different. Professor Keynes, with his intimate knowledge of Darwiniana, has contrived to show the voyage in the round, doing justice to the parts played not only by Darwin but also by Captain FitzRoy, a distinguished hydrographer and meteorologist, and other members of the gallant company who shared in the great adventure. Extracts from FitzRoy's less-known *Narrative* (not reprinted since 1839) are balanced with selections from Darwin's frequently republished *Journal* and interlaced with their revealing private letters and passages from Darwin's actual diary. Anything these last may lack in literary elegance is amply made up by freshness and spontaneity. Their immediacy is heightened by copious illustrations, chiefly watercolours by Beagle's official artist, Conrad Martens.

This documentary history is particularly timely as the BBC's splendid television series, *The Voyage of Charles Darwin*, distorted chronology for dramatic purposes by introducing violent clashes over Genesis during the cruise. Darwin's own vivid accounts show him still struggling to understand his exciting discoveries while FitzRoy confesses that he was at that time inclined 'to doubt, if not disbelieve, the inspired History written by Moses'. By extraordinary fortune these two young men, both highly talented, both with strong scientific bents, both tireless in their quest for certainty, set out round the world together. They sometimes quarrelled. Considering their cramped quarters, the hardships and dangers, with FitzRoy suffering from his difficult temper and manic-depressive tendencies and Darwin from unrelenting seasickness and homesickness, the miracle is that after five years they returned with respect and indeed affection for one another. FitzRoy's denunciation of Darwin's heresies came a generation later. The record leaves the impression of a remarkably fine group of men, who together made possible the completion of H.M.S. Beagle's historic voyage, which led to the *Origin of Species* and to what Julian Huxley called 'the greatest of all revolutions in human thought'.

This is a massive and beautifully produced book: hence the price.

G.T. CORLEY SMITH

**Audubon**, by **John Chancellor**. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, £6.95.

He must have been a very nasty man. According to this book he was 'vain and vulgar', an extravagant deceiver (stating 'My own name I have never been permitted to speak', the implication being that he was the French Dauphin), a man often disliked, despised and distrusted, a liar (writing, for example, two entirely different accounts of a return journey), and a person rich in 'vanity, ingratitude and ill-temper'. A thoroughly worthless fellow? Or, as Georges Cuvier phrased it, the creator of 'the most magnificent monument which has yet been raised to ornithology'? Or both?

John James Audubon's paintings are remarkable. The life he led was also remarkable, as he criss-crossed the new United States, shooting determinedly (100 birds a day, on average, and once gunning down 25 brown pelicans to draw a single male), forgetting those who helped him (who has ever heard of William Lizars or Joseph Mason, both crucial to the Audubon plates?) and never forgetting money for an instant. The 1830 price for *The Birds of America* was £168, a sizeable sum, but in the 12 years up to 1838 Audubon spent £28,910 on its publication, and this money had to be recouped. What author today spends that kind of figure on a publication, even when the pound is so relatively meaningless? No wonder the struggling artist has to scrimp, save, lie, deceive and all the rest to make ends meet. No one less determined or selfish could have pulled off this act.

The style of Chancellor's book is compact. It would seem that no discovered fact has been omitted. For example: 'After landing in New York, Audubon did not make straight for Mill Grove. Instead, he walked thirty miles to Greenwich, Connecticut, to cash a letter of credit. On the way he succumbed to yellow fever . . .' and we learn that two Quaker ladies 'saved his life'. But there is no further or prior mention of these ladies, or of yellow fever, or Greenwich, or why the money was there. But, I suppose, life is like that, and certainly Audubon's was, as he moved from meeting Sir Walter Scott (each lauded the other), antagonising John Keats (of all people, but some of brother George Keats's money had gone down the Audubon drain), being captured by HMS Rattlesnake (not T. H. Huxley's vessel), suffering patrons (the Earl of Kinnoull thought his birds 'alike' and a 'swindle'), and generally promoting his image of a backwoodsman who occasionally hit town.

The appearance of the book is splendid, a sort of poor man's *Birds of America*, with several colour and many black and white illustrations of the famous watercolours. They alone are sufficient for us to agree that 'John James Audubon is the patron saint of birds', and the text is equally adamant that he is patron saint of nothing else.

ANTHONY SMITH

### **Encounters with Nature**, by **Leslie Brown**. Oxford UP, £6.50.

For many years Leslie Brown has been entertaining and instructing us about the wildlife and ecology of Africa and elsewhere and has established a reputation for original observation, lively description and lucid comment. In this new book he looks back on his life as a naturalist and recounts some of his outstanding experiences and adventures. So in one volume we have what might be called 'the quintessence of Leslie Brown' — a welcome summary of several of his earlier books along with other material.

His themes range widely: aardvarks, badgers and honey badgers, beavers, chimpanzees, nightjars, otters, pelicans, tigers and whale sharks. How he sought long and hard for that rare and splendid antelope, the mountain nyala, makes a most engaging narrative that takes us up into the vast, bandit-infested, rainy, cold (yet sometimes scorching) uplands of Ethiopia, which are also the home of Simien foxes, walia ibexes and lammergeiers.

But for most of us Leslie Brown is the eagle man or the flamingo man and for me it is the accounts of these two groups of birds that make the best chapters. The flamingo episodes are especially vivid: we rarely do get to feel how almost unlivable life can be on an equatorial soda lake — the lead-weight heat, the awesome stench, the stultifying glare and then, totally in contrast with these horrors, the unbelievable beauty of a great throng of pink and white flamingos and their brown young ones. Few of us can go and experience truly wilderness Africa, so it is good to be assured that it still survives here and there. And it is well that writers like Leslie Brown can picture it for us so convincingly. To complement the text each of the thirteen chapters is prefaced by very lively, full-page drawings by Doris Tischler; and the colour photograph of flamingos on the dust jacket is altogether beautiful.

WILLIAM CONDRY

### **The End of the Game**, by **Peter H. Beard**. Collins, £10.

That *The End of the Game* has run into a second edition suggests either that the patient is an unconscionable time dying or that the title is prematurely pessimistic. This is a strange book. According to the dust jacket, it retails the decline of Tsavo National Park in Kenya, but, with three of the five chapters concerned with other regions, there is little space left in which to develop the Tsavo theme, particularly as only 70 of the 280 or so pages contain