

The Przewalsky Horse, by **Sándor Bökönyi**, translated by Lili Halápy. Souvenir Press, £2.75

This popular Hungarian account of the rare *Equus przewalskii*, with good illustrations and many important and interesting facts, covers a wide ground in small compass: probable – perhaps better said possible – evolution and relation to domestic and other wild horses; history, description, and changes in captivity, with a glance at the future.

By comparison with the late Dr Erna Mohr's *Asiatic Wild Horse* (Allen 1959, reprinted in English four years ago) this one is able to consider most of the recent work; on the other hand the writing, translation, editing and, worse still, the decision among competing conjectures are slipshod. In the sense that the data are more complete, the later book is in general more reliable; in the sense that detail or expression are often confused or contradictory it is not reliable at all.

For example, the transliterations are eccentric and variable – the same Cyrillic letters are rendered in several ways. The name 'Przewalski' is treated as if it were Russian, whereas of course the explorer was a Pole, serving in the Russian army, so that the Latinised spelling of his name in the horse's specific name is correct. Sometimes a totally dubious conjecture is baldly reported as unchallenged fact: 'The wolf and the bear are the main natural enemies of the wild horse'; no instance of such an attack is either known to me or cited by the author. The natural enemies are cold and frost.

The text discredits, and for the right reasons, the earlier reports of two separate races, a dark one in the mountains and a light one in the plains, but this error has already been noted as a fact on a previous page. Vexed questions, such as proper nomenclature, are too easily disposed of, tall stories, like the carcass frozen in the Siberian tundra, too credulously reproduced. Perhaps a slightly misplaced chauvinism accounts for the fact that the sighting and photo by the Hungarian zoologist Dr Kaszab are reported (and republished) as though these had never been questioned or debated anywhere, let alone appeared originally in this very journal.

For the layman or very keen youngster, less insistent on accuracy of detail, more likely to respond to a full, and generally fair, easily readable account, this may be welcomed as the best book available. But the zoologist will be wise to give it shelf-room only in the safer company of Mohr and the two 'Equus' symposia.

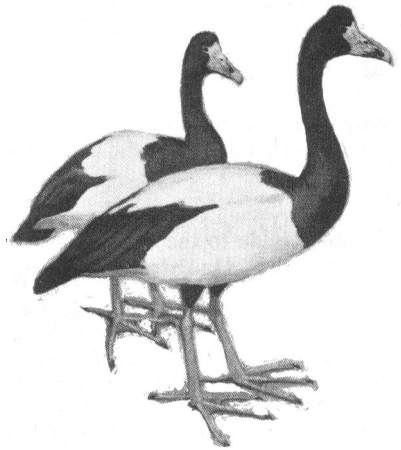
IVOR MONTAGU

The Dictionary of Birds in Colour, by **Bruce Campbell**. Michael Joseph, £6.00
The Mitchell Beazley World Atlas of Birds. Mitchell Beazley, £10.95

These are two handsome and massive books on birds of the world, contrasted in their method of illustration and in their approach. Either could become a treasured possession. In Dr Campbell's the illustrations are from colour photographs. These average about five plates to the large page and are arranged in systematic order as a single compact section. They are mostly very successful in presenting the species in natural posture, colours and setting. There are 1008 plates, so that scarcely an eighth of the known species are figured; but the selection seems to be reasonably representative. The following section comprises a series of paragraphs corresponding with convenient cross-references under English names. There is also a relatively short Introduction dealing generally with faunal regions, evolution, anatomy and classification. The whole is a scholarly production.

The Mitchell Beazley atlas appears to be the product of a publisher's staff team, aided by a galaxy of expert editors and contributors whose individual parts are not made clear. Apart from photographs of habitats, the illustrations are the work of artists; some are beautiful, but others are less satisfactory in their rendering of natural form and colour. They are often usefully combined with maps and other

MAGPIE GEESE by Peter Scott, reproduced from *Waterfowl of the World* by Jean Delacour with paintings by Sir Peter Scott. Country Life has produced a straight reprint of this standard work (£40.00 in case). In these four volumes a major bird artist has married his art to his lifetime study of a bird grouping. The important additions are two short personal paragraphs on the author and the artist, and, in Volume 4, 'New General Corrections and Additions (1972)'; these follow the corrections and additions in the original Vol. 4, which, appearing in 1964, lagged ten years behind the original Vol. 1.



material to give an informative diagrammatic presentation. The general design is imaginative.

The approach is mainly geographical and ecological. The main part of the book traverses in turn the faunal regions of the world, and within each of these the main habitats and the birds characteristic of them. It is unfortunate, however, that the recognised scientific term 'region', which has served for over a century since the concept was originally formulated, should have here been irresponsibly replaced by 'realm' (which has had another usage in zoogeography). Particular notice is taken of species that have become extinct within historic times or are now endangered. A final section gives summary information about the different families of birds, with drawings of representative species.

A. LANDBOROUGH THOMSON

Wild Flowers of Britain and Northern Europe, by Richard Fitter, Alastair Fitter and Marjorie Blamey. Collins £1.60

This handy textbook compresses a wealth of information of particular value to the botanical beginner, for whom the main key is specially designed. The emphasis is on identification, for which simplicity and clarity are essential. A practical key such as this one, based on physical features easily recognised by the naked eye and avoiding botanical jargon, is what is needed.

The book's scope extends to all trees, shrubs and flowering plants – 'flowering' is the operative word – growing wild in the British Isles, including Ireland, and Northern Europe from the Alps, excluding Switzerland, to the Arctic, including Iceland. Consequently, grasses, sedges, rushes, ferns and horsetails are omitted.

The excellence of delineation of Marjorie Blamey's illustrations renders detailed description unnecessary. The orchids deserve special mention, their identity virtually unmistakable by the inclusion of a flower of each species precisely depicted.

More than a thousand species are illustrated in colour, mostly life size. Generally they are superb, but some suffer in reproduction – no fault of the artist – from a tendency to be too pallid, and the yellow coloration may be either absent or faint. A minor criticism concerns the bogbean illustration which shows too much leaf, for it is the upright flower spikes of this attractive water plant that are so conspicuous.

The text describes distribution and the habitat but omits specific localities. All items on the British List are marked with an asterisk. Text abbreviations and symbols are lucidly explained. The simple keys (except the waterweeds) are illustrated in colour and based primarily on flower design and, for the trees, leaf shape. A map shows the principal limestone/chalk areas. 'Take the book to the plant and not the plant to the book' is a plea that warrants repetition – a plant plucked may be a plant lost for ever.

Highly recommended for all those interested in wild flowers, this handbook is a