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checklist. There is also an interesting chapter on conservation problems and policy. Wouldn't it be nice if the book managed to persuade the Icelandic Government to drop its flagrant abuse of the 'scientific whaling' exemption in the International Whaling Convention under which the Icelandic commercial whaling industry is being kept alive. . . .

Written by Mark Carwardine, a naturalist and consultant to the World Wildlife Fund, the book is beautifully illustrated with 90 colour photographs. It is good value at £9.50 and has the merit of being small enough to fit conveniently into a coat pocket. A must for any naturalist planning to visit 'the Jewel of the North'.

Simon Lyster, International Treaties Officer for the World Wildlife Fund.

The Botany of Mangroves

P.B. Tomlinson

Cambridge University Press, 1986, 413 pp, HB £47.50 (\$69.50)

Mangroves occur throughout many parts of the world and are invariably encountered by most tropical travellers because they occupy the most sheltered parts of shore lines. At one time people did not like to enter them because of their reputation as infested swamps, but to the ecologist, naturalist and conservationist they represent an intriguing interface between the marine and terrestrial communities. Nowadays they are also considered as ideal arenas for water sports, and the ever-increasing marine leisure industry is creating havoc in places like the Everglades. Mangrove ecosystems are extremely rich and varied, containing a wealth of different organisms of considerable importance to complex food chains, but are also a major source of revenue to fishing, forestry and agriculture. A lot is known about them, but because they represent diverse habitats when viewed on a world scale they are rarely considered in one volume. This book aims to plug that gap. It is a concise compendium of taxonomic, geographical, ecological, floristic, architectural, morphological, anatomical and physiological information of mangrove specializations, and for this reason it will be of considerable value to students and professionals alike. I can warmly recommend it.

C.J. Humphries, Botany Department, British Museum (Natural History), London, UK.

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Amboseli: Nothing Short of a Miracle

David Lovatt Smith

East African Publishing House Ltd, PO Box 30571, Nairobi, Kenya, 1986, £8.00, K Shs 98.50, US\$12.00.

Purchasers of this 95-page paperback could be misled by its title because it is neither a guidebook nor a history of Amboseli. The 'miracle' of the title refers to the sudden enormous increase, late in 1957, in the output of the springs that feed the Ngong Narok swamp.

The author, who at the time was Assistant Warden of the then much larger Amboseli National Reserve relates how by the frantic efforts of its skeleton staff the added water was made to flow along an ancient and partly blocked depression, now known as the Simek river, and then, by means of a cutting, through higher ground to the edge of the long-dry Amboseli lake 6 km away, where it created the small Conch lake, and later still the Longolong swamp.

These events, which are largely unknown or forgotten only 30 years after they occurred, resulted in a six-fold increase in available water in the core area of Amboseli and a consequent respite in the then critical competition for watering places between wildlife and the ever-increasing Maasai herds.

The author tells his tale in a straightforward manner and the book is well illustrated, mainly with his own colour and black-and-white photographs depicting the events he describes. One or two of the photographs could have been better reproduced, and something has gone wrong with the colour gradient of the relief map on pages 24 and 25. An oddity of the text is the general, but not invariable, use of capital initial letters in the names of animals and plants; this becomes irritating when the yellow-barked acacia or fever tree is referred to as the 'Yellow Fever tree', seemingly implying some connection with the disease of that name.

The background of some of the pictures shows the tremendous change the vegetation of Amboseli has undergone. This is very clearly seen in a pair of photographs of the same view from Observation Hill taken in 1956 and 1985. The first shows the fever-tree-fringed lower end of the Ngong Narok swamp and looks across the plains

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to the widespread Ol Tukai woodlands. The later photograph shows the semi-dry swamp replaced by the open waters of the Simek river, only a battered remnant of the fringing trees remaining, and open plains where the woodlands formerly existed.

In a final chapter, discussing this and other changes seen on a return visit in 1985, the author attributes the disappearance of the Ol Tukai and other woodlands solely to the over-abundance of elephants. Here he is on dangerous ground; the generally accepted view is that the death of the woodlands was caused by a widespread rise in the water table at about the time the Ngong Narok springs increased their flow, which brought the roots of the trees into contact with toxic concentrations of salts leached from below. However, there can be no doubt that elephants have everywhere increased the destruction by attacking those fever trees that were able to survive because their roots still tapped fresh water, including those in the 1956 photograph.

Major Ian R. Grimwood, FFPS Vice-President (Kenya).

Latvijas Putni (Birds of Latvia)

Viesturs Klimpins

Avots, Riga, Latvia, USSR, 1986, £17.50

Available from Collets, Denington Estate, Wellingborough, Northants NN8 2QT, UK

I was entertained by the author in December 1985 to a show of his slides at the Institute of Biology of the Latvian Academy of Sciences. Now he has brought together 150 pages worth of his colour photos and put with them 30 pages of text. Text and captions are all in three languages: Latvian, Russian and English. The title is translated as *Birds of Latvia*, but would be better as 'Birds in Latvia—a photographic album'. (The most recent reference work on the birds of Latvia is that edited by Janis Viksne under the title *Birds of Latvia: Territorial Distribution and Numbers* and published in 1983 by Zinatne in Riga. It has a most helpful 18-page systematic list in English.)

Although educated as a biologist, Klimpins is employed as an engineer in the Ornithological Laboratory. Photographing birds is his hobby, and this rich volume brings together the fruit of 198

much labour and love over 25 years: 108 of Latvia's 217 breeding species are represented, many by more than one photograph. As is the custom in eastern countries, there is a good proportion of photographs of eggs and of nests. There is also a number of pleasing habitat photographs. With very few exceptions all the birds are obviously wild and free (the white pelican is no doubt in a zoo, and a few birds, e.g. the blue-throat, appear to be held in the hand). On page 102 there is a pleasing portrait of the rarely photographed middle-spotted woodpecker, and on page 127 there is a long-tailed tit of the white-headed race. Otherwise the birds are mostly very familiar to ornithologists of western Europe.

The quality of the photographs varies somewhat, due no doubt to the differing film stocks over the years, to relative difficulties of different species, and so on. There appears to be inconsistency even in the printing, some pages (e.g. 111) being over-inked, many (e.g. 18) being fine.

All in all a colourful and varied feast for the eyes, a galaxy of grand images from a small but characterful country.

Jeffery Boswall, BBC Natural History Unit, Bristol, UK.

South African Red Data Book—Terrestrial Mammals

(South African National Scientific Programmes Report No. 125)

Reay H. N. Smithers

Foundation for Research Development, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, PO Box 395, Pretoria 0001, South Africa, 1986, 216 pp, SB (no price given).

Of the 243 species of terrestrial mammals known to occur in the wild in South Africa, 42 (17 per cent) are, to a greater or lesser extent, considered to be under some threat of extinction. Three are categorized as Endangered, 14 as Vulnerable, and 25 as Rare. A further two (the quagga *Equus quagga* and blue antelope *Hippotragus leucophaeus*) have become extinct since the arrival in the Cape of the first settlers in 1652, and another, Lichtenstein's hartebeest *Sigmoceros lichtensteinii*, has died out in the Republic, although it still occurs in some countries to the north. Two more, the cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* and African

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