

Audubon to Thorburn with John Gould between is a sort of artistic progression, and I believe one can see this more clearly from today's standpoint where there has never been such variety, richness, freedom or for that matter, skill, in the history of wildlife painting. These three great names formed a bridge between an artist's main function of providing what a camera later gave us to the less fettered purpose of painting what he saw and enjoyed in the way he personally felt it should be interpreted.

Gould had less of Audubon's flamboyant design but more than Thorburn. His was a gentler form of portrayal yet there was still a little of the fantasy which Thorburn never attempted. The shotgun naturalist was looking through a glass and the life he saw was stronger than imagination. There came the sort of emergence of reality one might expect from a student of figure drawing who had just discovered a cosy model after years of anatomical study in the morgue. In terms of art this is no criticism. Inspiration comes in many ways. That such beauty as Gould created should come from so many corpses seems to mitigate the slaughter – especially when one considers the abundance of wildlife in his day and the present-day chances of spreading the enjoyment of his work among so many through books such as these.

The four volumes, each of which covers 80 species, make no pretence to being definitive handbooks; they are folios of Gould's work. The supporting text by Dutch ornithologist Abram Rutgers is brief, up-to-date fact written in a manner that makes them books for reading rather than reference, and its presentation is a reminder that well-set type is the best of all foils to decorative drawing. The combination of the two makes these books lasting tributes to a great master of bird painting.

KEITH SHACKLETON

South America and Central America by Jean Dorst. Random House, New York, \$20. Hamish Hamilton, London, 105s.

To condense an account of the natural history of this immense continent into the covers of one book – even with 290 pages measuring almost 12 inches by 10 inches – and make it meaningful is no mean feat, and it is triumphantly achieved by the author of this sumptuous and very readable book, excellently translated from the French. Not only is this the most diverse continent, ranging from the equatorial tropics to the Antarctic ice, with some of the world's most massive mountain ranges, greatest deserts (high and cold, low and hot), longest rivers, most extensive tropical jungles, vastest plains, and a group of islands, the Galapagos, that are one of the natural wonders of the world, it is also, despite all the destruction man has wreaked on it, a naturalists' paradise compared with other continents. In Colombia alone there are 1556 species of birds – compared with 691 for the whole of North America up to the Arctic.

Jean Dorst achieves his task by relating the wild life to the major habitats, which he treats in turn, from the tropical islands of the West Indies to the 'glaciers, lakes and dismal straits' of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego and the albatrosses and elephant seals of Antarctica; he shows how the wildlife has adapted itself to even the most inhospitable of homes – like the cave-dwelling birds on the treeless, cold, windswept high plateaus of Peru, some of which dig their own burrows, using their beaks as a pickaxe and their claws as a shovel to scoop the earth away, where the plants are stunted and anchored against the winds by powerful root systems, and the vicuña and the llama have an enormously high red corpuscle count in their blood. His text abounds in vivid descriptions, and even with this immense canvas to cover he finds space to describe a hummingbird building its nest and tell the story of the sixteenth-century

bishop who found himself storm-driven on the Galapagos. Implicit in the whole book is the conservation message, though Dr Dorst does not labour the point; indeed sometimes he seems a little optimistic: does the vicuña still 'abound' in the altiplano of Peru, and are lobsters still 'plentiful' in the Galapagos?

The photographs are numerous – one or two to every opening and all good, many of them breathtakingly so, whether in black and white or colour (though the blockmaker let his imagination run riot with a Galapagos land iguana which is the colour of a berobed Father Christmas). Magnificent views of mountain and forest, rivers and deserts and splendid portraits of the wildlife that inhabit them, they are a superb adornment and portrayal of an outstanding text.

MAISIE FITTER

Bwana Game by George Adamson. Collins and Harvill, 35s.

Of the people who get taken on the national park round from Nairobi and, from the comfort and safety of their vehicles, see all those marvellously cared-for animals living in a terrestrial paradise, how many suspect that there may be somewhere some other sort of wilderness Africa? For there certainly is; and if they want to see it they should venture into the less law-abiding parts of Kenya that stretch away into the north and east towards Ethiopia and Somalia. Failing that they should read George Adamson's book (nearly 300 pages and many fine photographs) for a picture of what things are like up there. Or perhaps I should say *were* like up there, for his narrative extends back to his early days when he set out to prospect for gold and trade in skins. When these ventures came to nothing he took up game wardening, a job which gave him everything he wanted – travel, adventure, danger, a rough existence and, above all, close contact with wild life. All safaris were on foot, and his journeys were long tests of endurance. For years his job was largely a matter of rounding up poachers or killing rogue elephants and man-eating lions. The killing of these fine animals which innocently blundered into conflict with over-populous humanity makes especially sad reading because you know that Adamson's deepest sympathies are with the animals. But worse was to come.

It was wartime and the authorities had decided to eliminate large numbers of game animals in a district where they were alleged to be competing for food with domestic stock. It was George Adamson's job to kill as many zebra and oryx as he could, and we get this significant sentence: 'A dreadful aspect of the slaughter was that while engaged in the actual shooting I observed that I unconsciously developed a ruthless blood-lust'. It is a confession that should be noted by all who start killing animals for whatever reason – even for conservation or science.

When he got married George Adamson's way of life hardly altered because Joy was also adventurous and addicted to tough safaris. Then into their lives came Elsa. If you have read Joy Adamson's three Elsa books you may quail a little, but George brings in quite new facets of the remarkable man-woman-lion story. In fact it becomes more a man-lion story with Joy not mentioned overmuch. He tells the story of how the film was made and, more important, of how he then took to the bush with three of the film lions in order to rehabilitate them to life in the wild. Soon he was given four cubs to add to the party and so he settled to a completely lion-addicted but otherwise solitary existence in the centre of the Meru Game Reserve. The book ends with him still there among the lions. 'It is my hope', he says 'that I may be permitted to continue my association with them indefinitely . . .' Good luck to the fellow, he deserves it. So does his very readable book.

WILLIAM CONDRY