

Book reviews

endangered species in the world. Perhaps the most poignant instance is that of the Mauritius parakeet, now reduced to no more than 11 individuals and they are probably geriatric non-breeders.

Studies of Mascarene Island Birds is destined to be the primary source-book for anyone seeking basic information on this terribly threatened avifauna. Based upon the scientific results of the 1974 BOU Mascarene Island Expedition and updated where necessary, it gives detailed species-by-species accounts for each island along with the background information, given in chapters on ecological history and the fossil record, necessary to embed the present situation in its overall context. While concentrating on the birds, it is also pleasing to see mention of the equally interesting (and endangered) reptile and mammal faunas. Altogether it is an invaluable summary of the state of knowledge of the biology of the Mascarene birds.

Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that although this volume might be the first place to turn to for information (at £65, probably in the library!), it is not the sole place. The book does not cover in any detail the long-term conservation work that has been taking place over the past decade and Stanley Temple's contribution is notable by its absence, being published elsewhere. However, that is what the bibliography is for. In my estimation *Studies of Mascarene Island Birds* is a welcome and extremely useful publication, and I am glad to see it in print.

Roger Wilson, ICBP (British Section).

In the Shadow of Fujisan. Japan and its Wildlife

Jo Stewart-Smith

Viking/Rainbird, London, 208 pp., HB, £14.95

There is a growing genre: the book of the television series, written by one of the production team. It is a useful idea because television is ephemeral. Programmes can be missed and there are those like myself who doze off, dare I say it, even during *Life on Earth*. This example is not a book on Japanese natural history and a more accurate subtitle would be 'Japanese Attitudes to

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Wildlife'. It is especially welcome because we hear so much about the Japanese as the villains of the conservation world. We all know what they are doing to whales, rain forests, turtles and so on, but how do they treat their own wildlife? Japan is said to be the Pacific equivalent of the British Isles, so are the Japanese a nation of oriental animal lovers?

Jo Stewart-Smith uses the image of Fujisan, the sacred mountain, to introduce the attitude to nature in Japan: a beauty disfigured by the unsightly blemishes of civilization. Nothing is truly sacred and the Japanese are paradoxical because the attachment to nature shown in so many facets of their culture is at variance with their commercial assault on so many species world-wide.

The book is mainly about traditional attitudes to wildlife, based on Shinto and Buddhism. The essence of the Japanese culture, we are told, is that they are at one with wildlife and in harmony with nature, compared with the Judaeo-Christian concept of mankind set above nature. But does this attitude help wildlife? Japanese whalers pray for the souls of the whales they have killed. This may make the whalers, and the whales' souls, feel better but it's no use if all the whales are despatched to the spirit world.

In summary, it seems that the Japanese are, in practice, no different from us. Attitudes are two-faced. Wildlife is deeply embedded in national culture and is greatly valued, but only when expedient.

Robert Burton, Great Gransden, Bedfordshire, UK.

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