

The Plants, by **Fritz W. Went**; **Eurasia**, by **Francois Bourliere**; **Australasia**, by **David Bergamini**. Life Nature Library, Time-Life International. 32s. 6d. each.

Is a plant a static thing, or is it a humming powerhouse of a billion cells, each a busy chemical workshop? How does growth come about and by what means does the growing tip transmit its orders to the stem below? These questions and a hundred others are answered in *The Plants* with a simplicity, clarity of elucidation and beauty of illustration which could not be surpassed. There is an index and a useful table of the plant kingdom, with drawings, showing botanical divisions, down to Orders in the flowering plants and down to Classes in the other groups.

In *Eurasia* the Nature Library starts a new section, which will consider the major areas of the world, in six parts. This first volume is of special interest to the FPS, for not only is its author president of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, with which our society is so intimately connected; but the foreword is written by Dr. Fairfield Osborn, one of our vice-presidents, who neatly shows the extent of the work involved—"in a volume of limited size, the author has undertaken to synthesize and compress subject matter of virtually unlimited scope." And this refers both to space and time, for Professor Bourliere covers not only the ecology of the vast land mass north of the Mediterranean and the Himalayas, but also its origin and geological development since pre-Cambrian times. Here a table showing geological eras and periods would have been useful. Naturally he draws attention to man's shocking treatment of his Mediterranean environment, quoting even from Plato's comments on soil erosion 2500 years ago. The larger mammals of the Himalayan region cannot survive unless their habitats are preserved, and the hope for the mountain regions of Eurasia lies in their nature reserves, such as the 25 mountain reserves in the Soviet Union. The descriptions of these regions are excellent.

In *Australasia* David Bergamini writes as a journalist, with an emphasis on adjectives which will not be to every reader's taste. More important is the absence of a useful map giving the place names mentioned in the text, although there is a large and simple vegetation map. But the book is beautifully illustrated and packed with information. An interesting point to me was the mention of the derivation of the word bandicoot from an Indian word. No doubt this is true, for rodents haunting bungalows in South India, used to be, and for all I know still are, known as bandicoots.

C. L. BOYLE.

Voles, Mice and Lemmings, by **Charles Elton**. Weinheim: Cramer. Wheldon & Wesley, Codicote, Hitchin, Herts. £7 10s.

This volume is a German reprint of the book originally published in 1942 by the Clarendon Press at Oxford, and those responsible for producing it have done a great service to zoology. The scarcity of the original edition is a real tribute to the value this famous book has been and will continue to be to students of animal ecology. Lest this is taken to imply that the work is suitable only for scientific readership, it should be emphasised that any serious student of natural history will get great enjoyment and benefit from it, for it is written in an extremely lucid and engaging style. The contents include an historical account of vole and mouse plagues from the time of the earliest records to the present century, a detailed study of the dynamics of the populations of these two animals in Great Britain and Scandinavia, and accounts of the cyclical fluctuations in animal populations in northern Labrador and arctic Canada.

P. R. EVANS.