

Book Reviews

A Field Guide to the Mammals of Britain and Europe by F. H. van den Brink. Collins, 30s.

This book is modelled on Peterson, Mountfort & Hollom's *Field Guide to the Birds of Britain & Europe* and has many of the virtues of that admirable publication. It has maps showing the distribution of each species together with short notes on Identification, Habitat and Habits, the whole for the 177 species described being contained in a small book of 215 pages which fits easily into a (man's) coat pocket. Inevitably a British field naturalist will disagree with some of the opinions of a European one e.g. that stoats live on wetter ground than weasels or that the long-tailed field mouse is rarely found in woods within the range of the yellow-necked mouse, though both these statements may well be true so far as the continent is concerned, and obviously the author must be confined to bold statements within the scope of one or two sentences on the habits of each species. Local patriotism forces me to criticise the map showing the absence of Natterer's bat from East Anglia, where it is in fact not uncommon, and surely he is wrong in saying that all European bats hibernate. Brosset found that, amongst Indian bats, only species of those genera which also contain other species that live in high latitudes and hibernate could resist cold by a fall in their body temperature; other genera, amongst them *Tadarida*, which includes *T. teniotis* the European free-tailed bat, could not. Nevertheless, in spite of a few mistakes, the letterpress of this book is excellent, an admirable feature being a note under each species of similar species with which it could be confused, and describing the diagnostic features that distinguish them.

I cannot, however, say the same of the illustrations. Every species, save for the whales and dolphins, is shown in colours which look very attractive but in most cases are so hopelessly inaccurate as to be useless as an aid to identification and laughable to anybody who has seen the animals in the flesh. The artist has moreover followed Peterson *et al.* in showing each species standing conventionally in profile, a form of portraiture appropriate to a bird which can be watched through field glasses until it puts itself into the desired position but not to many mammals. Save for a few diurnal species like water rats, marmots and some ungulates, all that most people see of mammals is e.g. the outline of a shrew, vole or polecat as it dashes across a road in the headlights of a car, or the backside of a deer as it bounds away through the forest. It is those that a Field Guide should help the relatively uninstructed naturalist to identify from his motor car or as he walks through the countryside at home or abroad, even if it can only enable him to do it down to genus in some cases. This book is not a Field Guide as so defined but it is a useful Handbook which is well worth buying.

CRANBROOK

Of Predation and Life, by Paul L. Errington. Iowa State University Press

Through his many scientific papers, popular writings, books and travels in Europe where he made many friends, Paul Errington became one of the best-known North American vertebrate ecologists. He was an unusual man, starting his career trapping muskrats and mink in the Iowa marshes, paying for his own education, and then accumulating through accurate observation, tenacity and sheer hard work a wealth of field data that is still unrivalled. He rose to a renown among American wildlife biologists equalled by few of his contemporaries. At his death in 1962, he was Professor of Zoology at Iowa State University.