

Book Reviews

Among the Elephants, by Iain and Oria Douglas-Hamilton. Collins, £3.95.

This is largely an autobiographical account of life in Lake Manyara National Park, Tanzania, during a four-year study of elephants. The book is intended for the general reader who will find here one of the few authoritative accounts of elephant behaviour and it should do much to dispel many of the myths surrounding this species. The lighter side of research life is described as well as the problems of housekeeping in the bush. There is an excellent collection of photographs to complement the text, but rather too many show elephants in truculent mood, often as the result of deliberate provocation in order to obtain a dramatic picture.

In some ways the Manyara elephants are an odd choice for a detailed study as they are not typical of other elephant populations, being relatively few in number and living in a small park at a very high density some four or five times above average. However, it is interesting to read that the social structure has not broken down despite the overcrowding, showing that high density *per se* is not deleterious provided the food supply is good, as it is here. The authors consider the perennial 'Elephant Problem' and imply that it has been solved at Manyara by opening up access to the neighbouring Marang Forest, but whether this really is a solution or merely a respite remains to be seen.

One cannot help feeling that the authors exaggerate the aggressiveness of elephants and give a false impression of the dangers of elephant research. Care is certainly necessary with such formidable creatures, but sensible precautions minimise the risks. Attempts to immobilise an elephant with only one dart can be expected to lead to the sort of disturbance of the animals and danger to the operator described here. This is obviously an important contribution to elephant biology, but the conclusions cannot be properly assessed without reference to the primary data, a procedure that at present involves a pilgrimage to the Bodleian in Oxford. It is to be hoped that the scientific results will soon be more readily available in published form.

S. K. ELTRINGHAM

Island Survivors: the Ecology of the Soay Sheep of St Kilda, edited by P. A. Jewell, C. Milner and J. Morton Boyd. Athlone Press, £8.

The St. Kilda archipelago is a place of superlatives: the most isolated islands and, probably, the windiest places in Britain, which provide breeding sites for the largest seabird colonies in the British Isles; the St. Kilda wren *Troglodytes troglodytes hirtensis* is one of only two vertebrates for the United Kingdom included in IUCN's *Red Data Book* and, to cap it all, the islands are inhabited by the most primitive breed of domestic sheep in Europe. *Island Survivors* describes the ecosystem of the largest of the four islands, Hirta (736 ha.), the character of its Soay sheep, and the natural process of regulation of their numbers. A continuous record of the sheep was maintained in 1952–72, and they were subjected to intensive study in 1959–67; the results are contained in the book's fourteen chapters by sixteen authors.

The principal objective was to unravel the natural controls of the sheep population, which is traced via genetics, population dynamics, social organisation, breeding cycles, behaviour, pasture composition, quality and utilisation, pathology and parasites. The island and its sheep provided unusual advantages for an ecological investigation, thanks to the simplicity and restricted size of the study area, the relative ease with which animals could be observed (there are no trees or scrub) and