

Book Reviews

The Natural History of the Gorilla by A.F. Dixson. Weidenfeld & Nicholson, £16.50.

Two major traditions exist in writings about the gorilla, and indeed many animal species: on the one hand the laboratory-based anatomical-physiological tradition, on the other the behavioural-ecological one. In the case of the gorilla, names such as Raven and Schultz come to mind in the first tradition, those of Schaller, Goodall (Alan) and Fossey with the second. In the present work Alan Dixson has succeeded in bringing both traditions together, a notable achievement. Interestingly, the insertion of a chapter 'How close to man?' between the chapter on 'Structure and Function' and that on 'Senses and Intelligence' raises an opportunity to link these three topics, but this has not been attempted, the taxonomic question being largely related to structural features at the chromosomal and biochemical levels. Again, the chapter on 'Senses and Intelligence' comes before that on 'Behaviour and Ecology', and it would have been interesting to see an attempt made to link these two.

In consequence, the work begins each new chapter *ab initio*, and the author eschews sticking his neck out with new speculations. The result is a very readable, wide survey of what is currently known about gorillas, of thoroughly careful scientific accuracy, based on excellent and unbiased source material, some of it the results of the author's own researches. This makes it a book to have on the shelf for reference to almost all aspects of gorillas.

Chapter 8, 'Conservation or Extinction?' will be especially relevant to *Oryx* readers. Dixson points out that in 1979, 467 gorillas were held in 119 collections, and adds, 'If zoos cooperate with each other, then this figure should be adequate for captive breeding programmes and it is unnecessary, as well as undesirable, to obtain further stocks from the wild'. In other words, Noahs of the 1980s, unite! Otherwise, as many have pointed out, the gorilla, together with many other primate species, will become extinct within the lifetime of younger readers of this excellent book.

VERNON REYNOLDS

The Birds of Oman, by Michael Gallagher and Martin W. Woodcock. Quartet Books, £37.50.

Those who watch birds in Oman may legitimately be supposed to be wealthy enough to be able to afford, if not a jeep, then at least an extra camel to enable them to carry this fine new field guide, 28in x 22in, into the field. Since Meinertzhagen's *Birds of Arabia* (1954) soared into the price stratosphere there has been a marked lacuna in the available literature on Arabian birds, for most books on Palaearctic birds do not cover the whole peninsula (although in practice they do cover the great majority of birds likely to be seen in any part). So this excellent book, written by the ornithologist with by far the most experience of the peninsula's birds and with every species illustrated by that sturdy war-horse among bird artists, Martin Woodcock, will be welcomed by all.

The Sultanate of Oman occupies the eastern tip of Arabia and so has a number of birds more properly belonging to the Indian avifauna, just as the opposite Yemeni corner has some interesting African species. More is known about Oman than about many parts of Arabia thanks to the many members of the RAF Ornithological Society who have served for periods on Masirah Island, off the south-east coast. Besides useful general introductory material, the author provides good descriptions of the birds and their distribution as well as indications of birds that may well occur but have not yet been reliably recorded. The paintings are excellent supplements to the text, with superb colour reproduction, and will as usual be the first port of call for any ornithological tyro trying to identify birds from this book. If the price barrier can be