

Book Reviews

A Struggle for Survival: The Elephant Problem, by John Hanks. Country Life, £6.95.

This well-illustrated yet moderately priced popular book contains a lot of solid information about African elephants. It is a partly autobiographical account of Professor Hanks's work on elephants in Zambia and Rhodesia, and concentrates on the culling operations in the Luangwa Valley that started in 1965. The title is not particularly apropos, although the sub-title reflects the contents adequately enough. After outlining the elephant problem and describing the feeding habits of the elephants and their consequent impact on the vegetation, Professor Hanks goes on to summarise the results of his own work, which has contributed so much to our knowledge of elephant biology. Topics covered include growth, reproduction, disease and poaching, and a chapter on the social life of elephants includes a discussion of their probable home ranges in various parts of Africa. Elephant conservation receives attention, and there is an easily comprehensible account of population dynamics. The book ends with a glossary of technical terms for the layman, although many of the words (e.g. annual, carnivore, habitat, ovary, parasite) should be in the vocabulary of most readers interested enough to read this book.

It is remarkable how much information the author has concentrated into this short book, which, with 74 plates and 23 figures, cannot contain much more than a hundred pages of print. The numerous superb photographs, many in colour, are technically perfect and aesthetically satisfying. Perhaps the essential nature of the elephant, powerful yet relaxed and gentle, is best captured in the beautiful photograph of a family group on plate 57. But this is much more than a picture book and anyone wanting a balanced account of the elephant problem and the controversies it has engendered could not do better than read this authoritative, well-written and entertaining text. My only adverse criticism is that the references are listed by chapters at the end of the book. As one who can never remember which chapter he is reading, I find this irritating.

S.K. ELTRINGHAM

Of Wolves and Men, by Barry Lopez. Dent, £7.95.

Coyotes: Biology, Behaviour and Management, edited by Marc Bekoff. Academic Press, £23.70.

Disciplines in the minds of men divide the universe into manageable compartments. But in the real world any animal, any thing, is much more than can be accommodated within the convenient barriers of a single discipline. It is this that has impressed Barry Lopez and will impress his readers. He has found, after many a fireside yarn with biologist and Eskimo, that there is more to wolf reproduction than can be learnt from placental scars, and more to the evolution of the wolf than the spirits of the ancestors might have realised. His book is a notable attempt to unravel many threads of evidence of what wolves are, of what makes them tick, of what we know and what we can never know. But more than this, having unravelled these things, with considerable success, Lopez also tries to blend them together again, in a mould which creates a more entire essence of wolfness than any conventional textbook of biology or anthropology might aspire to.

The reader with a general interest in wolves, in things natural, in the hazy distinction between fact and folklore, and in man's variously tortured relationships with these things, will find much here to provoke and disconcert. I should add that Lopez's account of wolf biology is good, as far as it goes, and is adorned with unusual snippets (a wolf's jaws can develop a crushing pressure of 1500 lbs/sq in, compared to an Alsatian's puny 750 lbs/sq in). Furthermore, in a book which embraces both Science and Art he clearly appreciates the Art in Science, describing with human warmth the excitement