

**North American Bison, their Classification and Evolution**, by Jerry N. McDonald. University of California Press, £24.00.

When the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire was founded in 1903 the American bison was on the brink of extinction and some of the earliest reports in the Society's journal which deal with species outside the Empire are concerned with the American bison. Fortunately, there were enough concerned conservationists in North America to save the remnants of the teeming millions of bison which once roamed the prairies, and subsequently the wood bison was discovered in remote Canada. Over the next half century the European bison was to hover on the brink of extinction, and between the two species there has grown up an enormous literature documenting this fluctuating fate. The future of both is now well assured – to the extent that buffalo meat is now marketed from the surplus in the USA.

Although Dr McDonald's book is by no means concerned with conservation, it will be a useful addition to the library of anyone interested in the conservation of large ungulates, if only because it helps fill a lacuna in an otherwise well-documented area. As the author states, he has attempted using Darwinistic interpretations, drawing on the fields of paleobotany, paleoecology, socio-biology, geography and archeology, to develop a dynamic model, recognizing evolutionary species, as opposed to morphological species.

For conservationists trying to understand the evolutionary trends of endangered species, books such as this provide plenty of background material.

**Keys to Vertebrates of Poland: Mammals**, edited by Zdzislaw Pucek. English translation 1981.

Available from: US Dept of Commerce, National Technical Information Service, Springfield, Virginia 22161, U.S.A.

Much more than a key, this useful volume is a basic handbook to Polish mammals. In addition to identification details there are summaries of distribution including maps, based on an atlas about to be published. The original Polish edition was published in 1964, but the text has been extensively revised, and apart from some minor taxonomic changes (in *Mus* for instance) this is a useful work of reference for anyone interested in central European fauna, unlikely to be superseded for many years.

JOHN A. BURTON

**Captive or For Ever Free? the Condor Question**, edited by David Phillips and Hugh Nash. Friends of the Earth, paperback £4.50.

This is a miscellany of objections to the Fish and Wildlife Service/National Audubon programme for saving the California condor. The most distinguished contributions, including interviews with the late Carl Koford and rancher-naturalists Eben and Ian McMillan, argue that the risks involved in captive-breeding and radio-tagging such rare birds outweigh the benefits.

They suggest that conventional conservation methods, vigorous habitat protection and a clampdown on shooting, poisoning and disturbance, could have been more effectively pursued. Official figures showing the collapse of the wild population are challenged on the basis that immatures are still evident. Most convincingly, the invasion of nest-sites – to gather data that are technical rather than vital – is presented as the worst example of research defeating its own purpose. (The death of a chick during handling in 1980 reinforced this argument.)