

## Book Reviews

**Mato Grosso** by Anthony Smith. Michael Joseph, £5.00.

Anyone who has flown over the Amazonian wilderness could be forgiven for thinking that its very immensity guaranteed it against destruction. For hour after hour the monotony of the closely woven tapestry of treetops is broken only by the meandering rivers. Or so it was until recently when long, thin gashes appeared in the green as the surrounding countries, aided by modern technology, began to drive roads into this greatest of tropical forests. Along these new arteries the squatters come, fanning out on either side to clear plots with axe and fire, moving on again in a couple of years when the soil has become impoverished or when large enterprises take over, adding bulldozing to the slash-and-burn technique to clear ranches the size of an English county, heedless of the erosion to come.

Invited by the Brazilian Government, the Royal Society and the Royal Geographical Society organised a team of scientists of many disciplines to study a still virgin area alongside the greatest of these penetration roads, eventually to link Brasilia with Manaus. Anthony Smith, the chronicler of this expedition, portrays the twilight of an ancient wilderness before it succumbs to the relentless march of our civilisation – the forest with its birds, beasts, plants and also its primitive tribesmen. The Xingu National Park has been set aside in a desperate effort to protect the last tribes – but can the wild men of the forest survive even in a Whipsnade the size of Wales?

The expedition's work included geography, soil, water, botany, zoology, medicine, anthropology; it required great skill to weld these diverse studies into a compact whole, and good writing to leave me wishing that this long story has been even longer. The lavish colour photographs are, appropriately, 'out of this world'.

G.T. CORLEY SMITH

**Beyond the Frontier** by Arthur Swinson. Hutchinson, £2.50.

This is the life-story of F.M. Bailey, distinguished naturalist and explorer, the man who first collected the Himalayan subspecies of the blue poppy named after him, *Meconopsis baileyi*. But he was many other things besides – soldier, political officer, linguist, secret agent – it all makes good reading. Bailey himself wrote three books about his adventures, but it is good to have their substance retold in a single volume. The glamour of his exploits, some bordering on the fantastic, tends to obscure the solid achievements of a varied life and the potential value of his expert knowledge of Tibet (he became a personal friend of the Dalai Lama). In 1904 he went with Younghusband's military expedition to Lhasa. In 1911 he made a trans-continental journey from Peking to Assam. In 1913 he was in Tibet exploring the course of the Tsangpo (or upper Brahmaputra). In the First World War he was wounded in Flanders and on Gallipoli before being sent on a mission to Tashkent. There he was eventually compelled to go underground to avoid the attention of the revolutionaries; emerging later with an Albanian identity he managed to enrol in the Bolshevik counter-espionage service – being then assigned to the task of finding himself! He was later British Resident in Sikkim and then the first British Minister to Nepal.

A skin collection of more than 2000 birds from Nepal was presented by Bailey to the British Museum (Natural History). Various notes and papers on birds were published in the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. Mammals receiving attention included the kyang, serow and takin. A large collection of butterflies from Tibet and elsewhere is now in New York.

A. LANDBOROUGH THOMSON

**Handbook of the Birds of Cyprus and Migrants of the Middle East, by D.A. Bannerman and W.M. Bannerman. Oliver and Boyd, £3.00.**

Since 1958, when Dr and Mrs Bannerman published their pioneer *Birds of Cyprus*, much new knowledge of the avifauna of this varied and attractive island has been obtained, largely by the observations and ringing activities of the members of the Cyprus Ornithological Society. For this new volume, devised as a handbook rather than a comprehensive history, these distinguished authors have been able to draw on these results as summarised in the recent *Check List of the Birds of Cyprus, 1971* by P.F. Stewart and S.J. Christensen. This handbook concentrates on 285 of the species occurring in Cyprus, and includes brief notes on identification, the present and former status for breeding species, and times of appearance and indications of numbers for passage migrants and winter visitors. Many of these species are attractively illustrated by colour plates from paintings by Chloe Talbot Kelly and D.M. Reid-Henry, and others by line-drawings. They also include an appendix giving details of the occurrence of rarer species with some past records now rejected.

The species accounts make very clear the decline or disappearance of many of the larger breeding species (even though some past records may be doubted) due partly to increased population and development of the island, but mainly to the almost uncontrolled shooting which has to be seen to be believed. In addition, liming in some areas takes a heavy toll of passage migrants. The Cyprus Government has recently strengthened the protective legislation and is extending the reserve areas, the most recent being the Klidhes islands where a small colony of Audouin's gulls nest. This handy work, valuable for the visiting ornithologist, should also stimulate the growing efforts by the Cypriots themselves to improve their laws and to ensure that in future they are better observed.

STANLEY CRAMP

**The Birds of Zambia, by C.W. Benson, R.K. Brooke, R.J. Dowsett and M.P.S. Irwin. Collins, £2.50.**

This latest and most valuable addition to Collins popular Field Guides ranks high among text books on African ornithology. Each of the four experts discharged his special task with infinite care and exemplary diligence, but, writes Benson, 'we remain firm friends'. The simplicity of the style is admirable, and brevity is achieved without detracting in any way from the importance of the essential information. They must all be congratulated for having compressed into a book of handy size so much information, so comprehensive a treatise, while it is impossible to praise too highly the twelve pages of beautiful colour illustrations by Commander A.M. Hughes who makes his subjects really live.

The reviewer has a special personal interest in this book for the original Northern Rhodesia Check List was included in his 1934 Report