

deals primarily with the natural history of the American sandhill crane, the most abundant crane in the world, and the whooping crane, one of the rarest. There is a good introductory chapter on cranes in mythology, religion and history and on their spectacular ritualized displays and general biology, written with an admirable economy of words, which is a pleasing feature of the whole book. Each spring for the last 30 years the author has witnessed the gathering of half a million sandhill cranes at the River Platte Valley in Nebraska on their way to their northern tundra breeding grounds. This is the starting point of an excellent account encompassing their yearly cycle: migration, territorial behaviour and complex dances, plumage painting, breeding biology and their eventual return home.

The conservation programme and biology of the whooping crane is also well chronicled. The improved status of this species from its 1940s low is heartening, but the dangers of disease, oil spills, hurricanes and other potential disasters mean that its survival is still on a knife's edge.

Bruce Coleman

Birds of the Great Basin by Fred A. Ryser Jr (University of Nevada Press, UCL Press Ltd, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, 1992, ISBN 0 87417 080 X, 624 pp., SB £24.95)

Birds of the Great Basin is one of a series on the natural history of the Great Basin of Idaho, Nevada, Wyoming, Oregon and California. Unfortunately the book suffers from over-indulgence on the part of its author so that much of the 600 pages of ornithological facts have little relevance to learning about

the ecology and status of the birds of the region.

Bruce Coleman

TRAVEL

On Safari in East Africa: A Background Guide by Ernest Neal (Harper Collins, London, 1992, ISBN 0 00 219928 9, 192pp., SB £9.99)

With more than 40 years of safaris behind him, Ernest Neal is well-placed to provide this welcome new edition to the list of East African guidebooks. There are already plenty of good field guides for the identification of East Africa's mammals and its many hundreds of birds. What Ernest Neal offers is a deeper insight into the ways of wild Africa; how species behave and adapt to take their place within the complex and beautiful ecosystems of the East African bush. Thus we learn of the relationship between ants and whistling thorns and giraffes, and how it takes about 2.5 sq km of savannah grassland to sustain 100 gazelles, which in turn are needed to support a single lion. There are excellent chapters on major species such as elephant, buffalo and the big cats; on savannah birds and Africa at night. In short, an ideal safari companion, and just the right size to slip into your bush jacket pocket.

Brian Jackman

Australia's Southwest and our Future by Jan Taylor (Kangaroo Press, Kenthurst NSW, 1990, ISBN 0 86417 350 4, 176 pp., SB \$14.95. Available from Gazelle Book Services, Falcon House, Queen Square, Lancaster LA1 1RN for £8.95 + £0.80 p. & p.)

Biologist Jan Taylor shares with us a naturalist's excursion around southwest Australia. He does do with a pleasant style and an informative mixture of fact and philosophy. The western European assault on Australia has been more systematically covered by many others, but Taylor's personal and anecdotal style will appeal to a wide clientele of armchair travellers and serious naturalists. As with any such account, the success of this book is measured by how much it stimulates one to travel there and see the larger environmental messages it portrays. On both counts the book does well. The author's aim to seek out a viable conservation future by appreciating the evolutionary past and landscape change over time is a bold and mostly useful one. Had he tied it together in a 'summing up' it would have strengthened his case considerably. Bottom line: take this book with you on your next trip southwest.

Jim Thorsell