

The Cheetah: The Biology, Ecology, and Behaviour of an Endangered Species, by **Randall L. Eaton**. Van Nostrand Reinhold, £6.35.

The author has studied cheetahs for many years, both in the field and in captivity. In nine well selected chapters, he gives a survey of his results and those of other researchers; the chapters on Ecology, Social Organization and Courtship and Mating are particularly rewarding because they contain the author's original contributions. On the whole, facts are presented clearly, the gaps in existing knowledge are pointed out properly, and conclusions are drawn accordingly with due caution.

The conservation chapter reveals the usual bleak story of relentless persecution of a carnivore as a 'pest', the hunting and poaching for its spotted fur, the decrease of natural prey species and the outright habitat destruction, all the consequences of short-term land exploitation and unrestrained population growth. Useful and even necessary as captive breeding is for many other purposes, however, there is, to this reviewer's mind, very little hope in attempting it with a view to reintroducing the animal later in its former ranges: ecosystems such as the African savanna and brushland, once destroyed, will never be recreated. So let us put all our effort into trying to save of them what still can be saved in the world.

PAUL LEYHAUSEN

Field Guide to the Birds of the Galapagos, by **Michael Harris**. Illustrator Barry Kent MacKay. Collins, £3.50.

Birds of Seychelles and the Outlying Islands, by **Malcolm Penny**. Illustrator Chlöe Talbot Kelly. Collins, £3.50.

Birds of New Providence and the Bahama Islands, by **P. G. C. Brudenell-Bruce**. Illustrator Hermann Heinzl. Collins, £3.50.

Birds of the Falkland Islands, by **Robin W. Woods**. Anthony Nelson, PO Box 9, Oswestry, Shropshire, £8.50.

'If I could keep only one of my bird books it would be this' . . . A comment from a reviewer of the European Field Guide, then one of the first widely seen books of its kind in Britain, although the Peterson American Guides were already well established bird-watcher's bibles across the Atlantic. Since then the Field Guide collection has grown into a library, not only expanding upon well covered areas of reference but filling many a total vacuum. What could be said of the European bird guide then can now be said of a great many more. Their success lies I think, in their scientific completeness as check lists, their concentration on simple facts that ordinary naturalists want to know, their convenient size and the generally high standard of illustration. They have spread out in both animal and plant forms and in geographical coverage, and now they are reaching an area close to the hearts of many – the avifauna of the remote and romantic oceanic islands.

Three excellent new examples are now available. Michael Harris's work with the Charles Darwin Research Station has given us the *Birds of Galapagos*; Malcolm Penny's experience with the Aldabra expeditions and the ICBP on Cousin Island has led to *Birds of the Seychelles*; and P. G. C. Brudenell-Bruce has used a unique knowledge of the Caribbean to bridge the bird-guide gap between Bond's *Birds of the West Indies* and the original Peterson – the 'Eastern Pete'. When a pattern is reached with which readers are in accord change becomes unwanted and comparisons hard to strike. These three are all born of specialised knowledge, all clearly and competently illustrated but perhaps because of their content alone, have an added ingredient that makes one read them for enjoyment rather than reference.

Oceanic islands have short check-lists – even those close to South America. Most have their *corps élite* of endemics, the regular visitors that pass through or breed, and sometimes an even larger list of vagrants – a fascinating list that will always be found wanting if only through a shortage of observers. This was especially true of Malcolm

Penny's area at the time of the Royal Society's first footing on Aldabra, when almost weekly new records were being established for the vast scatter of islands over the western Indian Ocean. The Bahamas have been more completely documented. For a long time there has been a strong population of both breeding and migrant ornithologists – especially on New Providence. And the Galapagos speak for themselves. As perhaps the world's most sensational laboratory of natural evolution, these islands stand in a class of their own and one is left to wonder, as always happens when a deep need is filled, how it was ever possible to manage so long without the book.

The fourth guide is a little different. It is not a Collins, not in fact a Field Guide at all – just a lovely and much needed book. *Birds of the Falkland Islands*, illustrated by the authors' own photographs, does everything a field guide should do, is valuable and complete. Though I have a possibly self-centred conviction that reference books should be illustrated by artists, and that photographs are the pictorial equivalent of piped music, this is probably as suspect as all generalisations. Behind, beyond, around these photographs of birds lies all the landscape wilderness appeal, the rock and tussac-grass, beaches and cliffs of the windy Falklands – and there are few better places on earth for escape.

KEITH SHACKLETON

Ocean Wanderers, by R. M. Lockley. David & Charles and Stackpole Books, £5.25.

Few are so well qualified to write a popular account of the migratory seabirds of the world as R. M. Lockley. During his years on Skokholm he did much to pioneer field studies of seabirds, working not only on their behaviour and breeding biology but, in the case of the Manx shearwater, initiating some of the first tests on their astonishing navigational abilities. Since then, seabird studies have burgeoned dramatically all over the world, and even so skillful a writer faces a stiff task in attempting to summarise current knowledge in 168 pages.

The book falls into two main sections. The first half consists of a series of general chapters on origins and evolution, adaptations to oceanic life, behaviour, food and feeding grounds, navigation, and relations with man. These are immensely readable, conveying the essence of the topic clearly and vividly, though at times, perhaps, the easy prose obscures the complexity of a problem, and on occasion, as in his discussion of marine pollution, even his skill cannot do justice in the limited space available to the many ramifications of the possible dangers. In the second half there are chapters on each of the seven main groups, with some mention of most species involved, but with space to cover only one or two in each section in any detail. Here again, they are often illuminated by his own field experience in Britain and abroad.

This is an exciting and attractive introduction, well illustrated with maps, colour and black-and-white photographs, and many delightful drawings by Robert Gillmor. It underlines the need now for a more comprehensive work, covering fully the mass of new knowledge acquired since 1954 when the author, with James Fisher, wrote the classic *Sea-birds*, one of the best of the New Naturalist series.

STANLEY CRAMP

The British Oak, edited by M. G. Morris and F. H. Perring. Claxsey, £6.00.

This book is the result of a Conference of the Botanical Society of the British Isles, held at the University of Sussex in 1973. It is therefore a collection of papers, twenty-one of them, plus an introduction by Dr Eustace Jones, on a wide spread of subjects including the history, folklore, silviculture and utility of oak, *Quercus robur* and *Quercus petraea*, as well as all branches of its botany, its teeming inhabitants and their enormously rich ecology.