

Book reviews

These two books are very different. The first consists of 17 specialist papers. Some are of immediate conservation interest: disturbance of polar bears, the implications of damming the Slave River, and energy development, tourism and nature conservation in Iceland. Unfortunately, the book has no overview to place these topics in perspective. The coverage is 'western', whereas the second book is 'eastern'. Only one of 58 references cited comes from outside the USSR. It therefore has the particular interest of being based on scientific research which is almost unknown in the West. *The Living Tundra* is an introduction to tundra ecology, with plenty of fascinating information concerning the adaptations by tundra species and their interactions with one another. The final chapter, *Man and the tundra*, shows how easily the ecosystem is damaged, even when human populations are low, and how vulnerable it is to modern exploitation. It concludes with a plea for careful planning, and points out how tampering with the Arctic could dangerously affect the climate of the rest of the world.

Robert Burton, naturalist and author

Birds of Watery Places

The Puffin

M.P. Harris

T. and A.D. Poyser, 1984, £11.60

The Birds of the Wetlands

James Hancock

Croom Helm, 1984, £13.95

Ocean Birds: Their Breeding, Biology and Behaviour

Lars Löfgren

Croom Helm, 1984, £16.95

British ornithologists have a fine reputation for standard monographs of species, beginning as long ago as 1913 with J.H. Gurney on the gannet. Now Mike Harris has added to their number with a first-class study of the Atlantic puffin *Fratercula arctica*, which is not only one of the most photographed birds in the world, but also one of the most researched. This replaces R.M. Lockley's *Puffins*, now more than 30 years old, and should

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hold its place as the standard work until the end of the century. It is a relief, too, to find that he has been able to deal with his subject succinctly, in fewer than 200 pages. There are some excellent black-and-white photographs (though I could not find the photographers' names) and drawings by Keith Brockie.

James Hancock's book is of a very different genre, but one which British ornithologists also do well, the sumptuously illustrated travelogue. His colour photographs of the birds of nine wetland regions around the world are quite superb, and with his predilection for the Ardeidae, he has naturally ensured that herons, egrets and bitterns are well represented. The areas he has visited in all six continents—there are obviously great advantages in choosing the oil industry for your career—include the Everglades, Bharatpur, the South Alligator River and the Coto Donana. Whether you have been there or hope to go there soon, you will treasure this book.

Lars Löfgren's book is again different, being of the illustrated, popular scientific type. It is well designed and deals competently with a wide range of seabird ecology and behaviour. The abundance of magnificent colour photographs and attractive line drawings makes this another most desirable book to possess, but again I could not find out who the photographers are. Is anonymous photography a modern fashion?

Richard Fitter

The Peccaries

Lyle K. Sowls

University of Arizona Press, 1984, \$22.50

By way of introduction, the author states (if somewhat tautologically) that 'the purpose of this book is to bring together in one place most of the existing information on the family Tayassuidae, scant though that may be'. Sowls, who is a noted authority on these animals, comes reasonably close to achieving this objective, although there are a few irksome gaps. The evolutionary history of the group, for example, is treated rather too cursorily, and he offers no treatment whatsoever of the subspecific taxonomy of the dominant genus *Tayassu* (literally 'the gnawer of roots'), which has long been wanting and could, perhaps should, have been usefully included in this book.

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On the whole, however, these are the merest quibbles rather than serious shortcomings, not least because the publication of this book in itself plugs a conspicuous gap amongst the literature previously available on the larger mammals. Journals apart, most of the recent and, more to the point, easily accessible information on the peccaries is thus scattered in specialised or regional texts, or diluted in generalised accounts, and very few authors (most of whom have also perpetuated the irritating tendency to annexe the peccaries as country cousins of the suids) have accorded the peccaries anything like adequate treatment. Sowls's book accordingly stands alone, not only because there is nothing currently in print with which to compare it, but also because no one has previously attempted a synthesis of the available information on their general biology, behaviour and ecology to the extent contained in this volume. Moreover, the result is duly seasoned with a lavish quantity of text figures and photographs, and a really excellent bibliography.

Even so, as Sowls is the first to point out, there is still a remarkable paucity of information on two of the three extant species, i.e. the white-lipped peccary *T. pecari* and the recently described giant or Chacoan peccary *Catagonus wagneri*. This state-of-the-art knowledge is reflected in the text, with no less than 140 pages (of a total 159 pages devoted to the accounts of each species) dealing exclusively with the collared peccary *T. tajacu*, the only peccary whose range extends into the southern United States, with all that implies in respect of research accessibility by wildlife and game management authorities. Despite this inevitable bias, however, the author manages to salvage his tome from becoming a treatise on the main character, by drawing comparisons between species wherever available data permit, and by concluding his account with an excellent section entitled 'peccaries and people'; the latter comprising a review of the cultural and economic importance of these animals to the Amerindians, and a more depressing scenario of exploitative impact by European peoples, including a burgeoning skin trade and the profligate destruction of habitat—a combination of factors which, Sowls argues, is already imperilling the giant peccary. The once-presumed extinction of this species, which was first described from late

Pleistocene deposits in the 1930s but not discovered as a living form in the Gran Chaco of Paraguay until 1974, may therefore prove as prophetic as it was premature.

William L.R. Oliver, Chairman, IUCN/SSC Pigs and Peccaries Specialist Group

Sydney Parkinson, Artist of Cook's Endeavour Voyage

Edited by D.J. Carr

Croom Helm/British Museum (Natural History), 1984, £29.95

Travel Diaries of a Naturalist

Peter Scott, Edited by Miranda Weston-Smith
Collins, 1983, £12.95

These two books, both remarkable in their own rights, allow interesting comparisons to be made, separated as they are by about 200 years. Sir Peter's book is based on his diaries, which he has been keeping since 1956, and which by 1983 had filled 50 fat notebooks. These diaries are also sketchbooks, and this published edition is fully illustrated with examples from the diaries. Sir Peter's wife is also an accomplished photographer, and a selection of her photographs set the scene for places visited. Being actual diaries, written more as an *aide-memoire* than designed for publication, there is an immediacy about them unlikely to be found in a travel book. The only criticism I could level at them is that of arousing an interest that could only be satisfied by publishing all 50 volumes!

Perhaps the most impressive of Peter Scott's art is its breadth—although mostly known for his waterfowl, this book shows him for what he really is, an all-round, complete naturalist and artist, equally at home sketching bird behaviour, fishes underwater, pages of field guides, African big game. My favourite is the school of hammerhead sharks which cover the page in an almost (but not quite) symmetrical pattern.

The volume on Sydney Parkinson, by contrast, concerns the work of an artist who died at the age of 26. The 11 authors have contributed erudite essays, which range from the readable general introductions to the voyage, and to Parkinson and the other artists by Wilfred Blunt, to the lengthy and rather out of place appendix on 'The

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