

The section on snakes is valuable, and illustrated by clear line-drawings. These are lacking in the mammal chapters, where they would have been more useful than many of the photographs. The book is much too expensive at its Australian price.

W. P. C.

MARSUPIALS OF AUSTRALIA. By BASIL MARLOW. Jacaranda Press, Brisbane. 13s. 6d. (Aus.).

This is a well thought-out and valuable pocket guide to the Australian marsupials. So much information is packed into the terse text and numerous line-drawings and maps, that anyone will be able to criticize points of detail. In general, the information is accurate and where it is not, this is because the facts simply are not known.

A second edition could be improved by giving more advice on how to identify Australian rodents, for the amateur naturalist would have difficulty in deciding whether or not he was dealing with a small marsupial. Also, drawing an unbroken line around a suspected distribution is apt to give the impression that the range is exactly known, and deleting this would convey a better idea of just how hazy our knowledge of the range of many species is. This is a book to be carried in the pocket, and the binding should be stronger in order to withstand the rigours of the bush.

Quite apart from its usefulness within Australia, this book is highly recommended to all who would like to have the main facts about marsupials ready to hand.

W. P. C.

THE NATURE OF THE BEAST. By T. MURRAY SMITH. Jarrolds, London. 25s.

Anyone who has spent—as the author has—forty years among the wild creatures of Africa will have many a strange tale to tell, and these first-hand observations of a diversity of aspects of animal behaviour make most interesting and enjoyable reading. Murray Smith would like, as Wordsworth once wrote, to regard his wild animal acquaintances as “unoffending creatures whom he loves”, but in the light of long and sometimes painful experience rather does he infer that there are those which are “brute beasts that have no understanding”. He admits the necessity for the organized control of certain destructive and dangerous species in the interests of the indigenous population, albeit he is reluctant to engage in any type of operation entailing large-scale systematic slaughter, which he finds particularly repugnant even when in the best interests of humanity. It is not everyone who will agree with him, despite its evil reputation, that the buffalo is “wantonly vicious” and a “natural assassin”, for what are popularly and graphically styled “unprovoked” attacks are almost certainly the aftermath of previous provocation. There are delightful anecdotes of the Kenya administrative officer who regularly rode a giraffe and ostrich when on tour, and who kept as another pet a female chimpanzee of more than ordinary intelligence. His testimony to his devoted staff—especially Manda of the Wa’ Kamba—is what one would expect from anyone who knew the African as he did; moreover the wonderful loyalty of this particular henchman typifies a trait so characteristic of the unspoilt African and which commands our admiration and respect.

Murray Smith has witnessed many changes—often not for the better—in

those parts of Africa with which he is familiar, but he feels that for many, and particularly some of the larger, species of wild life, there is still a future. One hopefully echoes such sentiments.

C. R. S. P.

SNAKES. By H. W. PARKER. Robert Hale. 21s.

Several handbooks to the reptiles have appeared in recent years but this is the first to deal exclusively with the snakes and will, therefore, find a useful place on library bookshelves. It certainly contains much more information than any of the handbooks previously reviewed but, even so, a tremendously wide field has been covered and deciding what to include must have been a major headache for the author. Despite the compression, and the amount of information included, this is a very readable handbook as well as a source of facts.

With a handbook of this type it will always be possible to find fault on minor points and there would be no purpose in calling attention to any. Possibly it will be field workers who have most to criticize but, here again, about what is included and what is omitted rather than anything else.

It is the reviewer's personal opinion that advice on the treatment of snake bite is out of place in a biology text book. In view of the amount of controversy that seems to be going on in the medical world, especially about the "cut and suck" method, the reviewer feels that a biologist should not enter the discussion at all. This is purely a medical matter and, if intended for the general public, should find its proper place in first-aid manuals.

Having said all this the reviewer can only add "unreservedly recommended" for both amateur and professional zoologists, his only real criticism being that the book is rather austere produced. If for a few extra shillings a better production could have been made, they would have been well spent. After all, this is the kind of book that has to last through continual reference for a great many years.

J. I. M.

LIFE WITH IONIDES. By MARGARET LANE. Hamish Hamilton. 25s.

What a man! and one might echo "What a woman!" for Margaret Lane who travelled to Tanganyika to observe Ionides at his strange craft—snake-catching—inevitably found herself learning to catch and handle large, deadly species, as well as how to sex them alive. Where he has made his home dangerous snakes abound. For those for whom serpents exert a special fascination the vivid portrayal of the hazardous occupation of this remarkable character provides a wealth of exciting reading. Described as a romantic and singular personality, he is a peculiar combination of "authority and courtesy, ferocity and gentleness". His strikingly handsome profile is that of an aristocrat of a bygone age. A born naturalist and an enthusiastic conservationist, his knowledge of the lesser fauna is extensive. The facile way in which he catches large, deadly snakes—some exceptionally active—and his nonchalant demeanour, have given rise to stories that he is casual in operation, but in fact no one could be more careful. However, having been bitten on a number of occasions by a variety of poisonous species he has evidently developed a high degree of immunity.

In his self-imposed role of recluse Ionides has, apart from snakes, a hobby

H