

Lost Beasts of Britain, by Anthony Dent. Harrap. £2.85

The author's main interest is in folklore and the byways of history, and it is with these in view that he has hunted down many fascinating references to the days when the beaver, the wild boar, the wild cat and the wolf were living members of the fauna of England. Despite the title the book deals mainly with England, or rather Roman Britain north to the Antonine Wall, for the wild cat is still, of course, a most vigorous member of the fauna in the Scottish Highlands. The introduction deals also with some other creatures that are not lost beasts here, such as the reindeer and wild cattle, and even the great auk, which is not a beast. The author is also out of touch with modern Britain in not knowing that the pine marten still exists in England and the polecat in Wales – he says it 'may be there still', but did not trouble to check with any modern book on British mammals. But if naturalists may have a few complaints, lovers of folklore and historical byways will have a most excellent read.

RICHARD FITTER

Thorburn's Mammals. Introduced by David Attenborough, notes by Iain Bishop. Ebury Press, £3.95

Animals of the Dark, by Clive Roots. David & Charles, £3.50

Ethology of Mammals, by R. F. Ewer. Elek Science, £2.80 (paper bound)

The publication of Archibald Thorburn's *British Mammals* in 1920–21 marked almost the end of a period of intense interest in the subject, a period that saw such lavish and ambitious publications as Millais's three volumes of *The Mammals of Great Britain and Ireland* in 1904–06 and Barrett-Hamilton and Hinton's unfinished *History of British Mammals* between 1910 and 1921. This interest arose primarily as a byproduct of the fashion for 'wild sports', and its decline can perhaps be correlated with the upsurge of observational ornithology that replaced the earlier collecting mania. The last twenty years have seen a considerable renewal of interest in British mammals but have not yet produced any single set of illustrations to match Thorburn's. It is therefore very pleasing to have the complete set reproduced in a single volume. All fifty colour plates have been included, at half the original size, depicting seventy species (by present classifications). Some of the softness of the originals has been lost but the detail and the unique atmosphere remain.

The inclusion of Thorburn's text, verbatim, is of more dubious value. Many readers will enjoy the many snippets of history and behaviour that are so characteristic of the writings of this period; others may well overlook its antiquity and be misled. polecats, alas, are no longer even 'very scarce' in Scotland, horseshoe bats are unlikely to be seen in London's central parks, and giant house mice no longer find shelter in the cleits of St Kilda. The nomenclature (already rather archaic in 1921) is unaltered in the main text but is brought up to date in the appendix by Iain Bishop, who has also added useful short notes on additional species such as the white-toothed shrews and the introduced mink, grey squirrel, fat dormouse and coypu.

Animals of the Dark is a serious, non-technical, but rather pedestrian account of a selection of nocturnal vertebrates from many parts of the world, with the emphasis on amphibians, reptiles and mammals. Many aspects of the behaviour of the animals concerned remain a closed book because of the difficulties inherent in studying nocturnal animals in the wild. This account, however, does little to penetrate the darkness and contains little that is not to be found amongst the abundance of popular reference books on these groups.

By contrast, in spite of the technical flavour of the title, the general naturalist will find much fascination (and little difficulty) in perusing *Ethology of Mammals*, first published in 1968 and reprinted in paper and hard covers. Ethology is the study of animal behaviour and especially its correlation with the animal's structure and natural environment. Someone approaching this book from the point of view of a