

rife, and still coming in.

The most telling lesson in the book is the story of the unique ocean hole fish *Lucifuga apeliacotes*. This fish can only live in the lenses of fresh water perched on tidal upwellings of salt water in sink holes connected to the sea through eroded limestone. The ecological balance is so delicate that the very discovery of the fish sealed its death warrant. The action of scuba divers exploring the sink holes stirred up the water to such an extent that by 1977 the fish was extinct in all but one hole (with 70 fish), only nine years after it was first found.

A.S. CHEKE

Truelove Lowland, Devon Island, Canada: A High Arctic Ecosystem, edited by L.C. Bliss. University of Alberta Press, \$21 (incl. p&p).

This is a remarkable publication, for which its editor deserves unstinted praise. Under the banner of the International Biological Programme he planned and directed a set of 33 integrated research projects, to analyse the dynamics of a high arctic ecosystem. Dr Bliss is professor of botany at the University of Alberta and a lifelong arctic ecologist. He collected a team of young enthusiasts, largely graduate students and post-doctoral fellows, together with the enormous sum of \$1.4m. (from government, oil companies and other donors) that was needed to support them in the field from 1970 to 1974. Aided by a few senior people, he worked with every group, keeping them in mutual touch, helping them to achieve targets and finally get their work written up. The 37 papers and 8 appendices occupy 714 pages. Many present pioneer results that are too technical for easy reading, but all are lucidly synthesised at the end, especially by Bliss himself, D.W.W. Whitfield, J.K. Ryan and R.R. Riewe.

Truelove Lowland is a lush 44-sq-km oasis in the vast desert and semi-desert of the Canadian polar archipelago. It is on the north coast of Devon Island at 75½°N and is the main feeding ground of a herd of 250 muskoxen. Such enclaves form only one per cent of the country but they support virtually the whole of the terrestrial flora and fauna. In the Arctic today commercial development can happen suddenly almost anywhere, and that enormously increases the timeliness of what is, in effect, a circumpolar guide to conservation management.

V.C. WYNNE-EDWARDS

Seal Cull, by John Lister Kaye. Penguin, 95p.

Let the Seals Live, by Sue Flint. Thule Press, £5.95.

The grey seal controversy which erupted in October 1978 and has become one of the most important conservation issues of the decade deserved a comprehensive and impartial account. *Seal Cull* is neither. It omits entirely the report of the Council for Nature's Grey Seal Group, set up in the wake of the aborted seal kill – the book was compiled before this scientific evidence was available – and relies heavily on the opinions of the 'fisheries lobby' (which the Council for Nature Grey Seals Group found difficult to locate in any organised form despite thorough investigation). What should have been emphasised to counter-balance the often muddled and conflicting official government statements are the fundamental reasons for the decline in fish stocks, i.e. overfishing by man, *not* the effects of grey seals on remaining stocks. The Government could equally blame puffins and gulls for taking fish from the mouths of men. What the author and the bureaucrats fail to realise is that most people would rather pay slightly more for their fish while leaving the grey seals unscathed until more adequate research reveals their real effects, if any, on fisheries.

One of the remarkable aspects of the grey seal controversy was the public's overwhelming reaction against the proposed killing of 900 adult breeding females and their associated pups and 4000 moulted pups in Orkney and North Rona. Nowhere was feeling as high as in the Orkneys, where the local people formed a group called 'Selkie'

to fight the kill with the aid of Greenpeace and their boat *Rainbow Warrior*. Sue Flint provides an insight into the events that led up to the local confrontation and the successful plans which eventually foiled the hunters. The book does not present an emotional stand, but pleads for a more informed basis for decisions involving thousands of animals whose ecology is very little understood. The real reasons for opposing the kill were not well known by the general public, and Sue Flint redresses the balance in her very readable account. It is no mean tribute to Selkie and Greenpeace that there was no further kill in 1979 and that the Government has been forced to examine the so-called management plan and consultation procedures with voluntary wildlife bodies.

SUSAN JOY

The Evolution of the Mammals by **L.B. Halstead**. Peter Lowe, £4.50.

Although essentially an illustrated book and obviously intended for the general reader, this volume is thorough and comprehensive, and the text is concise. The final chapters are of particular interest, dealing with the Pleistocene and post-Pleistocene extinctions, and the last chapter, 'The Future', is an eloquent 'plug' for conservation – an interesting innovation for a book on fossils. The illustrations were specially commissioned from 13 artists; all are pleasing and seem accurate, and a few are outstanding. At £4.50 a first-rate purchase for anyone with even a passing interest in either palaeontology or conservation.

JOHN A. BURTON

My Wilderness Wildcats, by **Mike Tomies**. Macdonald and Janes, £5.95.

The reader's attention is captured in the first paragraph of this attractively written book with the introduction of two wildcat kittens – ready to fight for their immature lives with all the ferocity that characterises their kind. The story of these kittens, Cleo and Patra, reared with sympathy for their untamable natures, is enhanced by the description of the author's wilderness home in the Highlands of Scotland. The introduction of a ten-year-old tom, which had lived most of its life in isolation at London Zoo and was uncompromisingly wild, and the mating with one of the two young females bring out many of the usual aspects of these wild mammals. Gradually all the cats are given the freedom of the forest, their movements checked by the author and his Alsatian dog. There is pathos in the discovery of a dead wildcat which might be one of the family, but satisfaction at the end when each cat is traced. Illustrated by the author's photographs, this book is enjoyable, packed with information and more exciting than *Watership Down* because it is a true story.

VERA N. PAUL

Though not written in a popular style, Professor David Spence's *Shetland's Living Landscape: a study in island plant ecology* (Thule Press, Sandwick, Shetland, £6.50) will be invaluable to any visitors to the Shetlands interested in the flora, vegetation and landscape, and their interrelations. A Shetlander himself, he has devoted a lifetime to careful analysis of the plant communities of the archipelago.



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