

Book reviews

Information on threatened plants follows (including legal protection) together with (decidedly) useful addresses, including those of organizations involved in conservation, and botanic gardens. Herbaria are not included here; the Introduction provides a source reference if you want to know where these are. Any book that relies on such an extensive compilation from a wide variety of sources will inevitably harbour inconsistencies and omissions for any reviewer (this one, for instance, notices the omission of recent work on the Cape Verde flora). However, on the whole it is suprisingly free of errors and standards of production are high. One can only congratulate the authors, encourage them (or those who are left) to produce an updated edition in the not too distant future, and exhort everyone who reads this to buy a copy. A most valuable book.

Charlie Jarvis, Department of Botany, British Museum (Natural History), UK.

Kangaroos: Their Ecology and Management in the Sheep Rangelands of Australia

Graeme Caughley, Neil Shepherd and Jeff Short (Editors)

Cambridge University Press, 1987, 253 pp., HB £30.00 (\$49.50)

This is the first volume of a new series from the Cambridge University Press entitled Cambridge Studies in Applied Ecology and Resource Management. Although it is principally concerned with practical aspects of kangaroo management, the background information includes theoretical details of the population dynamics of the herbivores and of their food plants. The main purpose of the study was to compare plant/herbivore relations in a national park in the arid zone of New South Wales with those in a contiguous sheep station, which was ecologically similar apart from the presence of sheep. The herbivores studied were the red and the western grey kangaroo as well as the sheep. Rabbits and insects were also included in the study, but the work on these groups is not sufficiently advanced for inclusion in this book. This omission is not of great importance as Caughley mentions in his preface that neither rabbits nor insects exerted significant effects on the vegetation during the period of study.

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There is a brief introductory chapter that sets out the goals of the study and provides a short history of the sheep rangelands of Australia. The remaining 10 chapters deal in turn with a description of the rangelands, the effects of weather, plant dynamics, diets of the herbivores, factors affecting food intake, movements of kangaroos, population dynamics of kangaroos, the condition and reproductive success of kangaroos, ecological relationships and, finally, options for the management of kangaroos. Each chapter leads on from the previous one so that the book is well edited and gives the impression of having been written by a single author. The work is authoritative and provides a wealth of information on the biology of kangaroos as well as on their management. The final chapter considers the highly topical subject of the exploitation of kangaroos. It is disturbing to read that the commercial offtake from the population is regulated by market forces or the cost of harvesting, but not by the need to conserve the resource. This should, perhaps, be obvious by now from the history of whaling, but it seems that over-harvesting of wildlife in general makes economic sense even though it is ecologically disastrous.

This is an excellent book that augurs well for future volumes in the series.

S.K. Eltringham, Department of Applied Biology, University of Cambridge, UK.

Studies of Mascarene Island Birds

Edited by A.W. Diamond

Cambridge University Press, 1987, 458 pp., HB £65.00 (US\$125.00)

The catastrophic impact of man and his associates upon the native avifauna of oceanic islands is nowhere more vividly illustrated than in the Mascarenes, the collective name for Mauritius, Réunion and Rodriguez. Hunting, habitat degradation and loss, cats, rats, pigs, monkeys, mongooses, introduced competitors and indeed virtually every force inimical to vulnerable island species has been unleashed here in a combined assault producing devastating results. The dodo has passed into legend and some 29 other endemic species into oblivion, while of the 20 endemics remaining no fewer than 11 are listed in the Red Book and include some of the most

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endangered species in the world. Perhaps the most poignant instance is that of the Mauritius parakeet, now reduced to no more than 11 individuals and they are probably geriatric non-breeders.

Studies of Mascarene Island Birds is destined to be the primary source-book for anyone seeking basic information on this terribly threatened avifauna. Based upon the scientific results of the 1974 BOU Mascarene Island Expedition and updated where necessary, it gives detailed species-by-species accounts for each island along with the background information, given in chapters on ecological history and the fossil record, necessary to embed the present situation in its overall context. While concentrating on the birds, it is also pleasing to see mention of the equally interesting (and endangered) reptile and mammal faunas. Altogether it is an invaluable summary of the state of knowledge of the biology of the Mascarene birds.

Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that although this volume might be the first place to turn to for information (at £65, probably in the library!), it is not the sole place. The book does not cover in any detail the long-term conservation work that has been taking place over the past decade and Stanley Temple's contribution is notable by its absence, being published elsewhere. However, that is what the bibliography is for. In my estimation *Studies of Mascarene Island Birds* is a welcome and extremely useful publication, and I am glad to see it in print.

Roger Wilson, ICBP (British Section).

In the Shadow of Fujisan. Japan and its Wildlife

Jo Stewart-Smith

Viking/Rainbird, London, 208 pp., HB, £14.95

There is a growing genre: the book of the television series, written by one of the production team. It is a useful idea because television is ephemeral. Programmes can be missed and there are those like myself who doze off, dare I say it, even during *Life on Earth*. This example is not a book on Japanese natural history and a more accurate subtitle would be 'Japanese Attitudes to

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Wildlife'. It is especially welcome because we hear so much about the Japanese as the villains of the conservation world. We all know what they are doing to whales, rain forests, turtles and so on, but how do they treat their own wildlife? Japan is said to be the Pacific equivalent of the British Isles, so are the Japanese a nation of oriental animal lovers?

Jo Stewart-Smith uses the image of Fujisan, the sacred mountain, to introduce the attitude to nature in Japan: a beauty disfigured by the unsightly blemishes of civilization. Nothing is truly sacred and the Japanese are paradoxical because the attachment to nature shown in so many facets of their culture is at variance with their commercial assault on so many species world-wide.

The book is mainly about traditional attitudes to wildlife, based on Shinto and Buddhism. The essence of the Japanese culture, we are told, is that they are at one with wildlife and in harmony with nature, compared with the Judaeo-Christian concept of mankind set above nature. But does this attitude help wildlife? Japanese whalers pray for the souls of the whales they have killed. This may make the whalers, and the whales' souls, feel better but it's no use if all the whales are despatched to the spirit world.

In summary, it seems that the Japanese are, in practice, no different from us. Attitudes are two-faced. Wildlife is deeply embedded in national culture and is greatly valued, but only when expedient.

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