

## Book Reviews

**In Search of the Red Ape**, by John MacKinnon. Collins, £3.00

John MacKinnon tells the story of his pioneer study of the orang-utan simply and attractively; his unpretentious narrative belies his remarkable achievement. His work required him to live for three years, and often alone, in the utterly alien milieu of the Bornean and Sumatran forests, and he tells of his adaptation to the forests and to the problems of his project.

The study of wild orang-utans presents special difficulties. These apes live mostly in the forest canopy and cannot be tracked daily from the comfort of a camp. John MacKinnon's solution was appallingly simple: with notebook, polythene sheet and minimum rations, he followed the animals for days at a time, moving as they moved and sleeping in the forest where they stopped. Inevitably, he encountered many other forest-dwellers, and he writes with humour and sympathy of leeches and pythons, of gibbons and over-inquisitive elephants, and even of the semi-mythical ape-man, orang-pendek.

However, the anecdotal style can be frustrating as well as absorbing, because it describes the search without fully discussing the reward. From hundreds of hours of watching 'mawas', he gives only glimpses of the substance of his observations and his conclusions. Much new information is, of course, contained in the narrative. Thus he writes of the effects of timber-felling on the edge of a forest reserve. Subsequent orang behaviour changes indicate overcrowding, and he mentions increased population movement, increased aggression and decreased birth-rate. (Incredibly, he writes of instances of orang 'rape' in the disturbed population and, moreover, justifies his use of the term.)

Perhaps aware of this deficiency he includes an epilogue in which he begins to discuss his findings. However, having shown that he can present specialist information in a most readable way, he still writes surprisingly little about orang ecology, population density and behaviour, particularly ranging behaviour and 'migration' and even individual behaviour such as daily activity, communication and feeding.\* But it would be wrong to detract from a delightful account of an extraordinary study which, for individual endeavour, probably surpasses the pioneer studies on the other great apes.

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\* These aspects of his study were described by John MacKinnon in his paper in *Oryx*, September 1971—*Editor*.

**Let Them Live**, by Kai Curry-Lindahl. Morrow, New York, \$9.95.

Kai Curry-Lindahl has always stressed the practical angle of conservation, and he gives some amazing facts about the productivity of nature and the manner in which this is being needlessly undermined by human action.

For example, one food resource which men have been over-exploiting for centuries, and which consequently may not be available in future, is the meat and eggs of sea turtles. In 1650, along the Amazon river in South America there was such abundance of river turtles *Podocnemis expansa* that people 'never knew what hunger was'. In some seasons, the turtles were so numerous 'that they impeded the passage of canoes and smaller boats'. But for over 300 years a reckless harvest has gone on; no wonder this animal is now a gravely endangered species.

Yet even today there are communities that live perfectly in harmony with nature, and are sustained by its productivity. 'The pygmies of the