

**Desert Wildlife** by **Edmund G. Jaeger**. Stanford UP: OUP 26s. 6d.

Aptly described by its author as a series of intimate and authentic sketches depicting the lives of native animals of the south-western deserts of the New World, this is an expanded revision of his popular *Our Desert Neighbours* (1950) with additional chapters and many new field notes, photographs and sketches. Mammals and birds predominate, with shorter sections devoted to reptiles, amphibians, and some invertebrates, the whole based on the author's many years of carefully documented personal experience and observation, recorded here with an easy and absorbing style, and well illustrated with photo-litho-reproduced plates and charming line sketches.

Not only the local naturalists will enjoy this book; the present reviewer found it a most illuminating study, revealing numerous instances of parallelism with the fauna of the Palaearctic deserts, with which he is more familiar. Indeed the kit fox illustrated on the cover, with its large ears and hairy feet recalls at once similar adaptations in the Rüppell's sand fox and sand cat of the Arabian deserts. Again and again the author appeals for the preservation of vanishing wildlife, pointing out that the balance of nature is extremely complex. Creatures that may seem baneful on superficial consideration all have a part to play; the vulture, which seems hideous to some, is a useful scavenger, a desert 'sanitary inspector'.

All interested in wildlife conservation should read this book; the scientific ecologist will find it as interesting as the amateur naturalist.

DAVID L. HARRISON

**Asia, A Natural History** by **Pierre Pfeffer**. Random House, New York, \$20. Hamish Hamilton, London, 105s.

This sumptuous book, 12 inches by 10 inches is a feast of photographs. One or more in colour or half-tone adorns almost every one of the 300 pages. They have been gathered from many sources and testify to the author's industry in presenting this magnificent view of the scenery and wild life of Asia. A narrative text runs lightly between and, though not always in explanation of the photos, inserts a vast and intriguing amount of information. Seven chapters deal with the more inclement parts of Asia from the Arctic to the Himalayas and Arabia, and seven lead from the busy China plain through Indochina to Ceylon and the Moluccas. Man and his works are omitted save where their effect is transcendent. Most of the large animals figure in their natural surroundings, especially mammals, birds and lizards, and a few of the spectacular insects. The botany starts well but falls off as it gathers in complexity towards south east Asia. There is no good photograph of high tropical forest in any way comparable with the fine scenes of the coniferous. The Indochinese forest is pathetically secondary. The mangroves are re-growth, devoid of the abundant epiphytes that were their glory. The mountains of Celebes offer prominently two American introductions. But, then, I am a botanist, and the author, geographer and zoologist, has made his choice triumphantly. I delight, indeed, to recognise the uniquely heterosporous toadstool *Hygrophorus firmus*. A hundred men could write a hundred books with as many sets of photographs and still the natural history of Asia would not be exhausted. The author excels in Russia, Arabia, China and Cambodia.

This book, the sixth in its series, is for the sitting room, the public library, the school library and, I hope, the university because it is a very fine introduction to some of the grandest geology and biology of the earth. It seems to be the policy to exclude references which is a pity because there are many points in text and illustration that one would like to pursue. For instance, the great Yenisey