Book Reviews

Saving the Tiger, by **Guy Mountfort.** Michael Joseph, £7.95.

This book divides naturally into three parts: the life of the tiger; its near extermination; and the rescue campaign the author inspired and led, which brought this noble animal 'back from the brink'. The first and longest section summarises the available information, including the results of the latest researches, on how tigers live, hunt, mate and rear their young. It discusses the different races, their distribution and their estimated numbers. Next there is an account of how the tiger, from being a numerous species that once dominated Asia, was, within a few decades, reduced to small scattered groups totalling perhaps 5000. Finally Mr Mountfort tells the story of how Operation Tiger was organised under the banner of IUCN and WWF, with the result that well-managed reserves today exist in a number of countries.

This campaign was probably the most important of all those promoted by the author. Not only did it give new hopes for the survival of the tiger, but it necessarily led to the preservation of its habitat and thus of a wide spectrum of fauna and flora. Moreover, its success depended on the wholehearted co-operation of the governments concerned and demonstrated the growing commitment of 'third world' countries to conservation. Not least, the success against all the odds of this daunting crusade gave encouragement to conservationists everywhere and emphasised the key importance of habitat protection – which remains the critical factor in conservation.

The 123 illustrations in colour and black and white match the quality of the writing, which is only what the author's previous books would lead one to expect, but it is a real achievement to have produced such variety in pictures embellishing a text devoted to a single species.

G.T. CORLEY SMITH

Island Populations, by **Mark Williamson.** Oxford UP, £19.00.

Islands have fascinated biologists for so long that it is easy to think that we know all there is to know about them. Since Darwin and Wallace's work over a hundred years ago, their natural history has been studied by generations of biologists, yet the number of books on the subject is small. This is particularly striking to conservationists, who recognise that a very high proportion of threatened species are confined to islands. For the last two decades, island studies have been dominated by the theoreticians, who have sought to apply MacArthur and Wilson's equilibrium theory (*The Theory of Island Biogeography*, Princeton 1967) to oceanic islands and, more recently, to nature reserves, 'islands' of semi-natural habitat in a sea of altered vegetation. Although this theory concerns only the number of species on islands, and says little about the much more interesting problem of the evolution of new species there, it has abosrbed workers in the field, and theoreticians in their laboratories, to the exclusion of more traditional biological and natural history studies.

Mark Williamson's book is a welcome and refreshing appraisal of current work. It begins by setting the physical and biological background to island life, briefly sketching in the origin of islands, their climatic history, and general features of biogeography. The classic features of island life are reviewed briefly, before launching into current theories of species numbers. The section on evolution is followed by the final section on competition, feeding and predator-prey relationships. Throughout the author is balanced and critical, re-analysing many data rather than accepting the original author's own interpretation and making a number of important contributions to theory – notably on density compensation.

This is very much a book for the student and the specialist; naturalists will I think not