

Book Reviews

Early Wildlife Photographers, by C.A.W. Guggisberg. David & Charles, £4.95

Every technical advance occurred at least 30 years before I thought it did. In Charles Guggisberg's lovely little book (128 pages in all, but with black and white pictures on practically every page) I have been put right again and again. It was 120 years ago, no less, that a camera was first packed for an African expedition when David Livingstone decided to take one (although John Kirk did most of the work with it). The first attempt to specialise in African wildlife was made in the early 1860s by James Chapman (and what a pity no Kirk or Chapman pictures could be included in the book!)

Natural history photography really got going in the 1890s. Eadweard (!) James Muybridge had published his famous pictures of animal locomotion (selected from 100,000) in 1887, but in the last decade of the century the first book entirely illustrated with authentic wildlife photographs was published (by the Keartons in 1895), the first medal was given by the Royal Photographic Society for natural history work (to R.B. Lodge, also in 1895), the first ordinary and uncamouflaged hide was used (by Francis H. Herrick in 1889) and the first trip-wire flashlight pictures were taken (by George Shiras, during those 1890s).

This book is full of information and gives short biographies of scores of photographers, such as C.G. Schillings who really opened up the thought of photographic safaris, and A.R. Dugmore who used his huge camera, a 'weighty piece of furniture hanging around his neck', to take (in 1909) the famous picture of a charging rhino in focus and at 15 yards distance when the shutter was opened; the animal then had to be deflected by a nimble bullet from Dugmore's companion. The book will not only give great pleasure, but will humble all of us who dare to congratulate ourselves on taking good pictures from a Land-Rover with a lightweight camera, a long lens and very speedy film.

ANTHONY SMITH

Fenland: its ancient past and uncertain future, by Sir Harry Godwin FRS. Cambridge U.P., £7.95.

Upper Teesdale: the area and its natural history, edited by A.R. Clapham, for the Teesdale Trust. Collins, £7.50.

I found these two books totally fascinating, and compulsive reading in a way that no work of fiction ever seems to grip me nowadays. The areas they cover are as contrasting as one could wish for within the Four Seas. They represent the fruition of a discipline which began no more than seventy or eighty years ago with the early vegetation studies that led to the formation of the British Vegetation Committee in 1904 and later to the British Ecological Society in 1913. Both books in fact represent rock-bottom ecology, treated historically to give a factual basis for the origin of the English countryside, to replace the speculations that have held the field hitherto.

In both areas we start with the retreat of the ice some 10,000 years ago. The Fenland, which has been Sir Harry Godwin's lifetime study, has changed enormously almost within historic times. It began to take its present form only with an invasion of the sea some 2500 years ago. The fact that every schoolboy knows, how King John lost his luggage crossing it, shows how much it has changed even since the Middle Ages. The whole story is carefully built up by Godwin from detailed analysis of the peat and silt deposits, using the technique of pollen analysis that he himself pioneered in Britain. Indeed one of the most valuable features of the book is his story of those early days when ecology was almost as dirty a word among scientific conservatives as it is today among political ones.

Upper Teesdale, contrasting in every way with Fenland, has apparently had its present grassy and treeless aspect for something like 3000 years, and actually, on