

required, in order to obtain some of the more interesting pictures. It may be his hobby, but he is indeed dedicated to the wild life and its conservation. The book aims to be a natural history of some of the mammals of East Africa, but it is much more for it includes many other vertebrates, and some invertebrates. Divided conveniently into five parts, it deals with "The Plains", "Predators and Scavengers", "The Forest", "The Rivers and Lakes", and "Some Smaller Fry". One could easily invite attention to the special merits of many of the pictures, but when so many are so good, perhaps the nicest of all is that of the ostriches with their brood of striped downy chicks moving along a road. One hopes to see more of Mr. Spinage's writings and attractive illustrations.

C. R. S. P.

SYSTEMATIC DICTIONARY OF MAMMALS OF THE WORLD. By MAURICE BURTON. Museum Press, London. 35s.

This is an invaluable book for anybody dealing with mammals of the world, especially if he is the sort of semi-professional which so many of the people concerned with the preservation of fauna are; but it is also a good general reference book. It deals with every order and family of mammals with details under the headings—general characters, habits, habitat, food, breeding, present status, range, longevity, special comments and other statistics. It is illustrated with beautiful woodcuts by David Pratt. There is a good index, so essential in this sort of book. A useful addition would have been a diagrammatic representation of the Class Mammalia working downwards from orders through families to genera so that one could see relationships at a glance.

C. L. B.

SNAKES OF SOUTHERN AFRICA. By VIVIAN F. M. FITZSIMONS. Illustrated by P. J. SMIT. Macdonald, London. £7 10s.

This magnificent volume—a veritable encyclopedia—is far and away the best snake book yet to be published on any one region of Africa. Covering an impressive wealth of information, it is nevertheless written in commendably concise style. Though seemingly expensive, it is cheap at the price and neither scientific institution nor individual concerned with the study of snakes—particularly in Africa—can afford to be without it. The author—the Director of the Transvaal Museum in Pretoria—has made a life study of his subject and is now able to share with others his vast accumulation of technical and highly skilled knowledge. The greater part of the book is devoted to a detailed description of each of the 137 species discussed, their characteristics, habits and distribution. But a most important section is the "Introduction" (thirty-two pages) which also deals generally with a variety of items such as anatomy, osteology, biology, venoms, anti-venoms, superstition and folk-lore. The diagrams of the skulls, jaws and dentition of certain widely divergent species are especially instructive. It is profusely illustrated with forty-three black-and-white photographs, 243 line drawings (by the author) to show mainly head scalation, and seventy-six colour plates. The last-named are on the whole excellent representations and there should be little difficulty in identifying the living originals; but it is not easy when depicting in free-style the whole snake to maintain true perspective, and the colours too are sometimes at fault and insufficiently vivid. For instance, neither the painting nor posture do justice to the Bird or Vine Snake *Thelotornis kirtlandii*. Simple keys are given for the families and for the species. The numerous distribution maps,

supplemented with a key map of Southern Africa, indicate clearly the localities in which individual species occur. In conclusion, there are twenty pages of place-names, together with their latitude and longitude; twenty-four pages of Bibliography, and a scientific index and a vernacular index of popular names.

One is frankly amazed at the prodigious amount of research that has been undertaken, as well as at the astonishing scope of the author's technical knowledge. But it is realized that no matter how comprehensive and how informative this great work may be, there is still much to learn about snake behaviour, habits, reproduction and so forth. Finally, one offers to Dr. Fitzsimons hearty congratulations on an achievement which deserves the unstinted admiration of anyone who is interested in herpetology.

C. R. S. P.