

## Book Reviews

**A New Dictionary of Birds, Edited by Sir A. Landsborough Thompson.** Nelson, £5 5s.

In the original *Dictionary of Birds*, Alfred Newton, writing in 1896 and thinking of the future of Ornithology (which, as he reminded us meant much more than a perfect Taxonomy) said that the "despairing mind may fear the possibility of its favourite study expiring through being smothered by its own literature". The flood has not abated during the fifty or sixty years since, but present-day ornithologists may feel cheered by the publication of this *New Dictionary*. New in every sense, it is able, by its enlarged scope and plan, to take full account of the great expansion of knowledge since Newton's work was published. It brings together and epitomises a vast mass of current conclusions and ascertained new facts about birds and bird life, otherwise only available in the voluminous international literature in which the fruits of scientific research and the observations of field-workers are scattered. Sixteen coloured plates by leading bird artists and thirty-two black and white illustrations by well-known bird photographers enliven its pages.

Articles by some two hundred specialists of international repute cover the main general subjects which concern ornithologists and give authority to the text; they include contributions on the physiology, ecology, ethology and evolution of birds and indeed on every detailed aspect of their study, as well as brief discussions and descriptions of the orders and sub-orders in the classification. One interesting group comprises articles on Conservation and Control (the latter described as the "negative aspect" of conservation and a method too often in the past "ignorantly applied"), on Protection (a most useful historical summary) and on Extinct and Naturalised Birds. But it is to the editor himself that we feel most indebted. In addition to some forty substantial signed articles, Sir Landsborough is responsible for scores of shorter unsigned contributions, which are a triumph of clarity, concision and helpfulness. No important topic is neglected or inadequately treated. In thanking and congratulating him, the Society will wish to extend both thanks and congratulations to the British Ornithologists' Union to which the whole enterprise owes its origin.

HURCOMB

**The Biology of the Living Landscape, by Paul B. Sears.** Allen & Unwin, 21s.

Surprisingly, this unusual biological book contains no photographs of landscapes, illustrations or tables. Without such aids, the author succeeds remarkably well in describing vividly the factors affecting numerous diverse landscapes, both past and present, and interpreting them in terms of modern, dynamic ecology. Landscapes are viewed as living entities, subject, for better or worse, to growing human intervention, and particular stress is placed on the need for water to maintain life. Professor Sears emphasises that there is still time for man to choose the kind of environment he wishes to live in, and that ecologists have the great responsibility of assessing the many complex biological relationships at work in moulding landscapes. The ecologist is likened to the general practitioner in medicine, obliged to consult specialists in various fields in order to understand better the living organisms and the non-living world of earth, air and water.