

Book reviews

The Natural History of Antelopes

C.A. Spinage

Croom Helm, London, 203 pp, HB £14.95

This book is the latest of a series on mammals, produced in association with the Mammal Society. It would be more accurately entitled *Natural History of African Antelopes* because it deals only with the 74 species from that continent.

Although some of the chapters, particularly those dealing with physiology, go into considerable detail, the text has really been written for the well-informed general biologist, and it makes easy and interesting reading—almost certainly a volume that can be picked up at bedtime. It deals comprehensively with antelope taxonomy, adaptation to environment, the use they make of different habitats, predation, nutrition, territoriality and systematic physiology. The physiological information is particularly well dealt with, especially that on water requirements.

The book draws extensively on the work of many authors, although this is perhaps not made clear in the text. Like many books written for this type of readership, references are not included. This is understandable in that it makes the book more readable but, on the other hand, it can be frustrating if there is interest in following up a particular point.

The author himself has worked on a number of species in detail, notably on the waterbuck and impala. This is very evident in the text. There are a few rather contentious statements in the sections on physiology and taxonomy, but one has to remember that taxonomy of the antelopes, particularly of the smaller species, has been a highly contentious area for many years and remains so. There is considerable detail on predation and other population-limiting factors, on communications, colour and pattern in different species, and on the various forms of territoriality and its significance. The book ends with a discussion on whether farming antelopes for meat is a tool for conservation. However, little mention is made of the other economic values of maintaining healthy populations of antelopes such as the needs of local people, trophy hunting and tourism, and there is no mention of perhaps the most important thing—the ‘value’ of many

animals in local cultures. At the end of the volume is a series of short notes on the general biology of each of the major species, which forms a very valuable quick reference.

Although there are a number of comprehensive field guides to the antelopes of Africa, no other volume deals as comprehensively with the biology of these species, and the book is recommended reading for all those with an interest in this spectacular group of mammals.

D. M. Jones, Director of the Zoological Society of London.

The First Eden: The Mediterranean World and Man

David Attenborough

Collins, London, 1987, 240 pp, HB £12.95

The human race does not come out well from David Attenborough's latest book. But then it does not come out well from the *Book of Genesis* either, so perhaps the title is not just evocative but accurate. Early workshop, superstition in sixth-century BC Egypt, the butchery of the Romans, the vandalism of the Vandals, the aggression of the Crusades, the greed of the Renaissance, and the callous indifference of today—the saga is always at the expense of plants and animals. Ultimately, of course, it is at the expense of man himself.

Readers of this journal will not be surprised that this is an ecological book. It is also a desperate, last-minute plea for sanity. It is not, however, preaching to the converted—few of us are so knowledgeable that we cannot learn from this incisive chronicle of man's insensitivity to his neighbours. And I defy anyone to resist the seductiveness of the book—first Sir David's wit and lucidity, then the ravishing pictures, which illustrate what we have inherited, or conquered, and lost.

The television series has already, and triumphantly, appeared, but the book must have been conceived first, so little evidence is there of the usual publisher's spin-off. An occasional over-insistence perhaps: the life-cycle of phylloxera will strike dread into the hearts of wine lovers, but may be too complex for ordinary mortals. And a

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