

Book reviews

'sporting' gentlemen, skin and egg collectors and gun-toting naturalists; and, above and beyond all, the continuing 'sterilisation' of natural habitat by modern agriculture.

In a sense it is bleak, if fascinating, reading, but it is balanced by the optimism implied by the title. Birds *have* come back—many of them enticed by the comparative peace (for them!) of the Second World War, and increasingly encouraged by a growing national 'conservation conscience': an improvement which Gooders again sets in its sociological context—the coming of television, the growing influence of the RSPB, and the popularisation of bird-watching. John Gooders says of himself: 'No doubt I'm as guilty as anyone of publicising the bird cause' and yes, I suppose he is often looked on as something of a 'populariser'—but why feel guilty!? If popularisation means conservation, then let's have more of it; and may it rapidly spread to the Mediterranean, where millions of 'our' birds are slaughtered each year.

Meanwhile . . . this book is superbly informative and informed, clear, witty and entirely unemotional. I shall be recommending it and quoting from it often. And by the way, compared with much of Gooders' work, I certainly wouldn't call it 'populist' at all—but 'popular' it should be.

Bill Oddie
Writer and broadcaster

Dynamics of Large Mammal Populations

C.W. Fowler and T.D. Smith (Editors)
Wiley (Interscience), 1981, £31.50

It is the mammals that are large, not the populations—in fact, many of the populations are lamentably small. Because of the long generation time of large-bodied animals, population turnovers are protracted, often exceeding the duration of short-term ecological investigations. Studies of large mammals, therefore, tend to provide information on the current status of particular populations rather than on their rate of change or productivity.

This book rectifies this deficiency. It comprises the published proceedings of a conference held at Utah State University in 1978, and includes 23

papers presented by 35 authors. Its main theme is the modelling of animal populations and how such models can be used both to predict changes in status and to manage populations, particularly of species of commercial value. The book contains an excellent mix of theoretical chapters, general overviews, and studies of specific animal species, ranging from seals and whales to lions and elephants, taking in deer, wolves and grizzly bears on the way.

The book is dedicated to Dr Richard Laws in recognition of his outstanding work on the biology of large mammals during the last 30 years. His chapter comprises a stimulating account of the regulatory processes that influence populations of large mammals in terrestrial and marine ecosystems based upon his personal experiences of seals, whales, hippopotamuses and elephants. Presented as the banquet address at the conference, it is also easily the most readable of the contributions.

And herein lies a warning to the lay reader. The book comprises a collection of scientific papers, chock-a-block with graphs, tables and assorted scientific paraphernalia. Mostly it is heavy, turgid, stuff designed for the serious student of wildlife biology, and is not at all the sort of place to look up the average life expectancy of the African elephant. But to the specialist it will be indispensable, forming as it does the only authoritative volume that deals with the population dynamics of this important group of animals. It is a pity we have had to wait so long for the conference proceedings to see the light of day, and then at a price few can afford.

Robin Pellew
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Collins Handguide to the Butterflies of Africa

R.H. Carcasson
Collins, 1981, HB £7.95, PB £4.95
The Butterflies of Northern Europe
Björn Dal (Michael Morris, Editor)
Croom Helm, 1982, £5.95

These two handy guides are a welcome addition to the ever-increasing volume of publications

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