

years, off and on), what a project, and what a dogged behaviourist! Who else, these days, would even contemplate studying the snow leopard in its lonely, awesome home?

ANTHONY SMITH

The Common Ground: a Place for Nature Conservation in Britain's Future? by **Richard Mabey**. Hutchinson, Nature Conservancy Council, £8.95.

Richard Mabey has succeeded in a very difficult task, writing a sponsored book without losing his own independence of judgment. Having passed this first test, what are its inevitable drawbacks? The main one is that, just because he had so much help from the NCC, he seems to me not to take sufficient account of the substantial contribution of the voluntary side of the conservation movement. Somehow it always seems to be a bonus, rather than the core of a movement which, after all, began 60 years before the Nature Conservancy was created. The NCC is a professional body and naturally thinks nature conservation is something to be done by professionals, with help, no doubt, from the voluntary side. To those who join and work in, for example, a county trust, it is a task for ordinary naturalists and nature lovers, who work because they feel deeply about the movement and its aims, though they do admit they need some professional help. In practice the two sides usually work excellently together, but only by fusing completely their different points of view shall we be able to give an affirmative answer to Richard Mabey's question.

He starts by setting the movement in its historical perspective, with due obeisance to John Clare, who experienced the last great land-use storm, when the medieval farming system was destroyed to make way for industrial Victorian England, and who is more and more coming into his own as a prophet of nature conservation. Then he examines the inevitable tensions between nature conservation and the demands of agriculture, forestry and recreation. Finally, he makes a valuable analysis of, and asks many pertinent questions about, policies and priorities in the immediate past and the immediate future. The analysis should be read by the many administrators, engineers and businessmen who still have no idea at all what nature conservation is all about, and the questions by conservationists who cling to habitat and species protection as the ultimate good. Despite the splendid pioneer work of publicists such as James Fisher, Peter Scott and David Attenborough, there is still a most massive ignorance about the significance of the natural ecosystems to the health and welfare of human societies. We have a long way to go. Richard Mabey has advanced us another step. But many shoulders will have to be put to the wheel to shift the immobile mass of public opinion significantly towards our common aim: to secure the common ground for the common people.

RICHARD FITTER

The Red Fox, by **H.G. Lloyd**. Batsford, £15.

Two categories of animal catch the conservationist's attention: the species whose relationship with man pushes them towards extinction – and the red fox *Vulpes vulpes* is certainly not among these – and the species which, although not globally threatened by human activities, are nevertheless subject to widespread persecution – and no species could better exemplify this category than the fox. Many a voice, whether it be from farmer, pest officer, gamekeeper or neurotic, is raised against the fox, and may only be quelled or tempered by the good sense that rests on knowledge. Consequently the publication of a semi-popular general account of fox biology is a welcome event.

Lloyd's book is probably not going to be read from cover to cover by anyone other than a fox specialist, but it ranges across topics from the fox's angle of vision to its fleas, from courtship to diet. It will doubtless resolve many discussions of the size, habits, and distances foxes travel, and the breadth of material presented will provide ideal