

Book Reviews

The Thames Transformed: London's river and its waterfowl, by **Jeffery Harrison and Peter Grant**, photographs by **Pamela Harrison**. Deutsch, £5.95.

It is all too rarely that we have such a conservation success story as the rescue of the Thames from the totally polluted state it had reached just after the war, nearly two-thirds of it due to domestic and industrial waste from sewage works. The process will only be complete when salmon can ascend once more from the sea to spawn in the Isis above Oxford, but what we have already achieved ranks as our second greatest single conservation achievement – after the creation of our system of national and county trust nature reserves. This excellent book chronicles the ornithological results, which have made the Inner Thames estuary, the 25 miles between London Bridge and Tilbury, once a desert for bird-watchers, into one of the major concentrations of waterfowl in the country, already almost of European stature – as 200 years ago it undoubtedly was. The major species to be seen now are mute swan – 377 were counted in Woolwich Reach in 1973 – mallard, teal, wigeon, pintail – once one of the scarcest London ducks – pochard, tufted duck and even scaup. They have come back because of the great increase in tubifex worms, algae and other foodstuffs, consequent on the abatement of the pollution. The other major achievement, the return of the fish – 86 species so far – to a previously almost fishless stretch of the river, is only briefly dealt with. Angling from Inner London piers and wharves is no longer a medieval memory, but a twentieth century possibility. Even salmon have appeared in the lower reaches, but their provenance has been queried. An ironic by-product is the return of the ship-worm *Teredo* to plague the wooden walls of piers and wharves, until recently protected by the poisonous nature of the river water. This admirably illustrated book also discusses at some length the wildfowl of the Kentish shore from Gravesend to Sheppey, and more briefly the opposite Essex shore.

The Thames estuary has been likened to a trumpet with London as its mouth-piece. This is a trumpet we must go on blowing.

RICHARD FITTER

Birds of Prey: their biology and ecology, by **Leslie Brown**. Hamlyn, £4.50.

Eagles of the World, by **Leslie Brown**. David & Charles, £4.95.

In this synthesis of the state of our knowledge about birds of prey the author discusses their world-wide distribution in the main biotypes; the range of physical and ecological adaptations, particularly the methods of predation they have evolved; and the relationship of predator and prey populations. Inevitably with a group traditionally persecuted in many developed countries, and threatened by pesticides and habitat destruction in the developing world, the concluding chapter is about conservation. Throughout he emphasises how limited our knowledge is; he believes that the greatest opportunities for furthering it lie in the tropics of South America, Australasia and Africa, in that order. But the book shows all too clearly how much we still need to know about much more accessible species. It is a telling statistic that of 287 recognised species, the breeding biology of 62 is still virtually unknown. The breeding habits of fewer than one-quarter of the total are well-known, and the picture is similar for other facets of raptor biology. In some cases the migration routes and wintering areas of relatively well-known species, such as Eleonora's falcon and the eastern red-footed falcon, are obscure.

Eagles of the World follows a similar outline but treats this magnificent group in detail. The chapters on food requirements, predator-prey relationships, population dynamics and conservation are for me the most interesting. The whole book is vitally enhanced by information from the author's own eagle studies in East Africa;