

Reviews

ILLUSTRATED HANDBOOK OF SEA MAMMALS

SEA MAMMALS OF THE WORLD. Stonehouse, Bernard. 1985. Harmondsworth, Penguin. 160 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-14-007081-8. £4.95, US\$7.95.

This attractive and inexpensive book aims to provide a condensed guide to the world's marine mammals. It is not a field guide, though it can be used as such for many of the species. Rather it is a miniature handbook for readers seeking concise information about the different animals and it can be thoroughly recommended. It gives for most species their scientific classification and name, size, weight, external appearance, numbers of teeth, and geographical distribution. These details are followed by a short account, ranging from one sentence to half a page in length, of points of interest in their biology, including information on reproduction, food, exploitation and status. One or two accounts are inevitably out of date.

Almost all of the species are illustrated in colour alongside the text. The polar bear, sea otter, most of the pinnipeds and the sirenians, are shown against a background of their habitat. The great whales and many of the dolphins and porpoises are similarly shown swimming in the sea but some are drawn in field guide style without this background. The illustrations are generally good, but in one or two cases, eg the Mediterranean Monk Seal, the colouring does not agree with the description, and in some of the cetaceans, representation of the dappled effect of light through the water on their bodies could be misleading.

There is an introductory chapter on the evolution of marine mammals, their adaptation to life in water, and their conservation. The species accounts are followed by five distribution maps for pinnipeds, sirenians, the sea otter, marine otter and polar bear. Two other maps indicate the distribution of occurrences of cetaceans, except for the great whales which are not included. A short list of books for further reading and an index complete the book. The reading list includes the original but not the revised editions of King's *Seals of the World* (1983) and Slijper's *Whales* (1979). (S. G. Brown, 24 Orchard Way, Oakington, Cambridge CB4 5BQ)

JOHN RAE, ARCTIC EXPLORER

DR JOHN RAE. Richards, R. L. 1985. Whitby, Caedmon. 231 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-905355. £16.50.

Scholars have long awaited a full biography of the 19th-century Arctic explorer Dr John Rae (1813-1893), and publication of the volume under review has given particular satisfaction to the staff of the Scott Polar Research Institute. In 1968 the Institute acquired Dr Rae's manuscript autobiography at public sale, and for a time we seriously considered publishing it. Unfortunately the autobiography, written late in Rae's life, is a long rambling document, difficult to read, and it breaks off abruptly just before a crucial date in Rae's career, April 1854, when he achieved enduring fame by discovering the fate of Sir John Franklin's last North-west Passage expedition. The autobiography, although certainly a valuable record of Rae's early life, proved to be no substitute for an adequate