

Their Land Rover followed trails laid by pioneers such as Hans Kruuk (who studied hyaenas), George Schaller (lions), Wolf Dietrich Kuhme (wild dogs) and photographers Alan Root and Hugo Van Lawick. One cannot forget that their book too has a long line of predecessors.

The contrast in hunting techniques that is implied by the title is a substantial part of the story but the style of the book is impressionistic and retains the fragmentary character of a field notebook. The picture that emerges is life on the African plains viewed through the window of a vehicle and the *dramatis personae* perform within this limited frame.

Set in a matrix that is both human and animal the authors have made a modest but charming contribution to the literature on Serengeti and its wildlife.

JONATHAN KINGDON

Otters in Britain by Liz Laidler. David & Charles, £7.95.

The Otter in Britain by Peter J. Neville Havins. Robert Hale, £7.95.

Although these books have almost identical titles, their contents differ considerably. This is largely because Liz Laidler has taken a more academic approach – citing the results of scientific research on otters, whereas Peter Havins' sources are more anecdotal.

The subject is not an easy one for a book as there are still enormous gaps in our knowledge about otter behaviour in the wild. Havins has got around this to some extent by devoting a chapter to otters world-wide and 50 pages (almost one-third of the text) to the history of otter hunting, a topic that obviously fascinates him – as do English hounds and terriers and the life history of the Atlantic salmon. But his obsession with the 'fight' between otter hunters and conservationists over legal protection for the otter becomes tedious after a while, and throughout the book there is much unnecessary repetition.

Laidler's book is much more thorough and accurate. She makes good use of the latest world-wide research on otter behaviour, and presents a better selection of good black and white photographs as well as some beautiful colour ones.

As both authors have much in common, being obvious otter fanatics and conservationists, it is perhaps not surprising that they come to similar conclusions. Laidler argues the case for the kind of environmental spirituality in western countries which is displayed by the Ashanti villagers in central Ghana, whilst Havins likens the otter to the soul – something which we neglect at our peril.

ANGELA KING

Badgers Without Bias, by Robert W. Howard. Abson Books, £1.50.

Despite all that has been written about tuberculosis in badgers and cattle, it has been very difficult to find basic essential information on the facts and arguments of the problem. This slender booklet sets out not only to redress this deficiency but to present the information objectively, and in simple terms. It succeeds admirably as a primer on the subject.

An introduction describes the nature of tuberculosis, a topic omitted from most accounts, and leads to discussions of TB in cattle, badgers and other species. The action of the Ministry of Agriculture in combating TB in cattle is described and is followed by a summary of the public reaction to the control programme of gassing badger sets.

At all times the author is careful to refrain from influencing the reader's opinion, and this makes for unsatisfactory reading where a topic is left in the air

without any conclusion. However, the result is that the reader is better placed to judge any attempt to press a point of view. Some topics are treated less than adequately but, bearing in mind both the complexity of a subject that encompasses farming practice, badger ecology, bacteriology and immunology, and the gaps in our knowledge of the disease, this booklet is required first reading. Hopefully, the planned second edition will rectify the deficiencies.

ROBERT BURTON

Historical Plant Geography, an introduction, by **Philip Stott**. Allen & Unwin, Hardback £12.00. Paperback £5.95.

There has been a great upsurge in the publication of ecological books in recent years. Interest in ecology largely grew out of the knowledge gained in the nineteenth century about the geographical distribution of plant species and vegetation types over the Earth, but in the last 30 years there have been few books on this subject, and a text, which will serve both for introductory courses at university and for use at school, is long overdue.

Dr Stott has written the book that was needed. After introducing the subject, he discusses the recording of plant distributions, mapping of plants and patterns of distribution and then turns to the interpretation of these patterns, a field in which there has been ample scope for controversy in the past. He finishes with a brief account of genetic resource conservation, which he rightly emphasizes as a central concern of plant geographers among others.

In this well written and well illustrated little book the non-specialist will find much of interest. Though intended for a student readership the intelligent and interested layman can read it with profit, and it may well turn such readers to the wider literature of plant geography.

S.R.J. WOODSELL

Conservation of New World Parrots, edited by **Roger F. Pasquier**. Smithsonian Institution Press for ICBP. Technical Publication no. 1, £8.00.

The word Parrot first appeared in written English about 1525. Its origin is uncertain for there is no comparable word in any other language, and unusually in our linguistic rag-bag it is a word which has remained completely unchanged. Unfortunately the same cannot be said for the status of many of the birds themselves. This volume, the proceedings of the ICBP working group meeting held in April, 1980, clearly shows the serious threats that parrots are having to contend with, particularly in the New World. These threats, direct and indirect, which may well lead to the extinction of some species, are in almost all cases the results of man's greed. As with many animals and plants the accelerating destruction or alteration of natural ecosystems is one of the main causes of changes in numbers and distribution. With this family of birds, it is also man's direct actions which pose threats, either by killing for food or feathers, or by capturing alive for the apparently growing international trade. Until the 1980 meeting, what was not known in detail was what effect these threats were having or are likely to have on individual species.

The majority of the 28 papers give some of the answers by providing the necessary background data on status, distribution, ecology, and in some cases, on captive breeding. The working group, using this data, devised conservation strategies country by country (pp 1-20) for parrots of the Caribbean and neo-