

ERMINE, the short-tailed weasel in winter garb—one of many superb photographs in *Life of the Far North*



with the northern polar regions. A short final chapter discusses conservation problems, and there is a glossary, a bibliography and an index. The text is most interestingly, and in places most entertainingly, written. Whether the author is discussing the pack-ice as a habitat, the problems of whiteness, the leopard seal as a predator, or the wanderings of the polar bear and penguins. It is, therefore, distressing that the proofs were not more carefully read and obvious errors eliminated. For instance, on the first page it is said that the continent is encompassed by 12 million miles of pack-ice and frigid seas: 12 million *square* miles surely? (Incidentally, might it not have been worth pointing out that in winter the pack-ice effectively doubles the area of the continent from 5 million square miles to rather more than 10 million square miles?). The definition of the Polar Circles is sufficiently vague to leave many people wondering why they cannot see the midnight sun in temperate regions; and one can hardly call the Antarctic Convergence a concrete boundary! However, if one is prepared to overlook such points it is one of the most informative books for the non-specialist yet written.

JOE LUCAS

**The Carnivores**, by R. F. Ewer. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, £7.85.  
**Serengeti, a Kingdom of Predators**, by George Schaller. Collins, £4.00.

*The Carnivores* is a textbook of comparisons summarising most of the scientific literature on them. However, rather than devote a few pages each to lions, tigers, *Osbornictis piscivora* and so forth, the author takes the much more interesting and challenging approach of comparing systems: examining the special senses, such as vision, hearing, smell and taste; looking in detail at reproduction methods, social organisation and food finding; comparing the parts of the anatomy, such as ears, paws, pelage and skeleton; summarising what is known about the fossil relatives. Throughout she searches for explanations as to why similarities and differences occur and how they fit in to the overall picture of adaptation and evolutionary history.

Some of her explanations will come as a surprise. For example, she suggests that cheetah may have small canines because they run so fast; that red foxes choose certain prey over others because they taste better; that sabre-tooths were more successful at killing large slow-moving prey than were Felids because the sabre-tooths specialised in a throat bite, while the Felids bit across the back of the neck, the sabre-tooths losing out as top predators only when prey-catching becomes a contest of speed.

While we may not all agree with some of her interpretations, there is no doubt that she provokes fresh thinking, provides a wealth of factual information useful to students of taxonomy, ecology and behaviour, and makes us poignantly aware that a great many carnivores are in need of further study.

After a chapter devoted to the classification and distribution of carnivores she follows with a plea for their conservation, believing that they are a doomed lot unless man radically changes his ways. The 37 pages of

references in small print are clearly a contribution in their own right.

To anyone wanting a potted version of Schaller's *The Serengeti Lion*, reviewed in the last *Oryx*, coupled with a superbly photographed account, I can recommend this book. In it Schaller captures the mood of the big predators through the lens of the camera, sharing with us the day-to-day moments of rest, play, love-making, conflict and above all the hunt. His often full-page photographs are superb eye-witness accounts. So close up and rich in colour are they that one can almost feel a part of the scene, whether it be a lioness drowsily suckling her young, or crouched half hidden, as an isolated zebra looks and listens in the direction of impending danger. As Schaller says, much of the book is about death, and I cannot help feeling repugnance at photographs of hyenas chewing their way into a wildebeest before it has fallen. But a predator's whole existence revolves around the quest for food, and for the author to avoid the squeamish sides of these innocent killers would be to paint a false picture. The text is informal, blending general impressions with personal details, and highly readable.

PAUL JOSLIN

**From the Roof of Africa, by Clive Nicol.** Hodder & Stoughton, £2.75.

In the wake of Leslie Brown, John Blower and Peter Hay, militant campaigners for the establishment of a national park in Ethiopia's Simien Mountains, Clive Nicol takes up the cudgels in the fight to preserve this unique area and its wildlife. His book is a laconic account of the part he played as a game warden in this fight, a role for which, with his physical and mental toughness, he was well equipped. His assignment is to establish a national park, and ensure the protection of the walia ibex. Gazing at the Simien scenery he reflects that 'the walia and the cliffs, the birds, plants, streams and all living things are part of a pattern that is unique, a pattern that must be kept and nurtured and perhaps eventually understood.'

But it is a pattern which is rapidly breaking down. Local tribes are cutting and burning the walia habitat to clear the land for ploughing. Over the years they have been forced to plough higher and higher, leaving behind massive erosion, destroying both the environment and their livelihood in their ignorance. For good measure they are illegally shooting the walia which could be a means of living for them—as a tourist attraction. The game guards have no true understanding of what a park is, or of the meaning of conservation, and no appreciation of natural beauty. They feel no indignation at the sight of a forest fire. Arrests are made without enthusiasm; offenders are released, and someone is richer by a sheep. And a senior guard, who has much influence with the local tribes, is positively opposed to the park.

For two years, hampered by inefficiency, apathy, ignorance and frank opposition, Nicol strives to impose order in the park. He finally admits defeat when he catches the game guards themselves cutting down trees.

His book is primarily concerned with conservation, greatly enlivened by a strong element of adventure. He is a thorough-going tough guy, and his writing is terse, blunt and unsentimental.

ROSEMARY SMITH

**Catch Me a Colobus, by Gerald Durrell.** Collins, £1.60.

With an overdraft of some £30,000, perhaps most of us would look for a dark corner in which to retire gracefully from the world. Not Gerry Durrell. He knows that his Jersey Zoo is important, because he sees it as a blood-bank for endangered species. And with his powerful charm he sets up the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust and painlessly extracts enough money from his supporters to keep the bankers at bay.