

Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan, vol. 4 by Salim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley. OUP, £6.25

A Guide to the Birds of Ceylon, by G.M. Henry. OUP, £2.75

The first three volumes of this standard work were reviewed in *Oryx* for December 1969 and September 1970, and this one maintains their high standard. It finishes the non-passerines, and gets a toe-hold on the vast canvas of the Passeriformes with the broadbills and pittas. Just how numerous the Passeriformes are compared with the twenty-odd orders of the non-passerines is demonstrated by the fact that six more volumes will be required to finish them and also the work as a whole. The non-passerines of India and Pakistan number 863 species and subspecies; by extrapolation we must expect some 1300 passerines. This volume covers the frogmouths, nightjars, swifts, trogons, kingfishers, bee-eaters, rollers, hoopoes, hornbills, barbets, honeyguides and woodpeckers, a splendidly colourful array beautifully depicted in 54 well produced colour plates by four artists: D. V. Cowen, Paul Barruel, A. M. Hughes and J. P. Irani. Line drawings supply detail, mainly of heads, and a key to nightjar calls is a particularly useful feature.

The second edition of the standard work on the birds of Ceylon (a country which is also included in the great Salim Ali/Ripley enterprise) has three new features: eleven pages of additions and amendments to the original text, which is otherwise more or less unchanged, twelve pages of pictures of nests and nest-holes of Ceylon birds (an aspect which is strangely neglected in most bird books), and a table comparing the very out-of-date order in which the families are arranged in the book to that (more up-to-date but still controversial) used in Phillips's *Revised Check-List of the Birds of Ceylon* published in 1952. The author, being primarily an artist (he has done all the splendid colour and black and white illustrations) clearly cannot understand all the fuss that systematists make about the order in which birds are arranged. For him the order used by Whistler in his pre-war *Popular Handbook of Indian Birds* is quite good enough, and who shall say, *sub specie aeternitatis*, that he is not right?

RICHARD FITTER

A Field Guide to the Birds of Southern Africa, by O. P. M. Prozesky. Collins, £2.50.

A Field Guide to the Snakes of Southern Africa, by V. F. M. FitzSimons. Collins, £2.10.

Two more African volumes in a popular series, both by well-known authorities, will be of value to students as well as to visitors and bird watchers. Both are well illustrated, the bird guide by Dick Findlay, the snake one by A. H. Barrett; 327 of the 411 birds are depicted, and 56 of 103 snakes are in colour. Occasionally the colour reproduction suffers and a couple of vipers especially and some other snakes are made to appear somewhat bizarre. Prozesky's text fulfils the objects of a field guide, and the colour plates are adequate for identification purposes, although the subjects are sometimes ill-assorted, with postures unnatural, necks exaggerated and eyes strangely enlarged. Popular names, though of some value, have no scientific basis and it is unfortunate that scientific designations are omitted from the explanatory page facing each plate, as in all this series.