

## Book Reviews

IN SEARCH OF MERMAIDS. By G. C. L. BERTRAM. Peter Davis. 30s.

It is well known that after the discovery of the largest sirenian, Steller's sea cow, in the Bering Sea in 1741, the animal was virtually exterminated in about twenty-seven years. The hungry sailors found the meat of this inoffensive aquatic herbivore so good to eat that now all that remains are relatively few bones in museums. Unless we are careful the only other sirenians of the world, the manatees and the dugong, neither plentiful, will join their larger relative and be gone for ever. Dr. Bertram's book, stimulated by the manatees of British Guiana, makes sad reading to those interested in animals in their natural surroundings. The manatee, quietly browsing on aquatic vegetation, does no harm to anyone, but it needs peace to exist and reproduce, and the verbal drum that the author beats in his hatred of the internal combustion engine is nearly as forceful as the engine itself. Certainly the noise and wash of a fast motor boat are not conducive to the peaceful existence of either manatee or man, and man's easy access to firearms, and his not infrequent trigger-happy attitude to large prey do not increase the manatee's chances of survival. There are regulations that seem adequate on paper, but which are difficult to enforce.

Much of the book is devoted to the background of these manatees—the river systems and geography, the insects and plants, the habits and people of British Guiana, with digressions, in the author's decorative style, on all subjects from Antarctic seals to native customs. It is meant to encourage interest in these little known, but interesting mammals before it is too late.

J. E. KING.

THE HANDBOOK OF BRITISH MAMMALS. Edited for the Mammal Society of the British Isles by H. N. SOUTHERN. Blackwell Scientific Publications. 37s. 6d.

Forty-two years ago Barrett-Hamilton's ambitious attempt at a comprehensive account of British mammals limped to a posthumous close with the late Martin Hinton's accounts of the rodents, leaving undescribed all the carnivores, the deer, and the whales. Since then, although there have been a number of excellent short accounts of British mammals, by Michael Blackmore, Harrison Matthews, Maurice Burton, and others, there has been no comprehensive account that could stand beside Witherby's famous *Handbook of British Birds* or Malcolm Smith's New Naturalist book on *British Amphibians and Reptiles*. Now the Mammal Society have filled the gap, and done it so well, that apart from the inevitable process of bringing it up to date as knowledge grows, their work will stand for a generation at least.

The book is in two parts: a general account of the biology of British mammals, which covers some of the same ground as Harrison Matthews's excellent New Naturalist volume, and a systematic account, which is what everybody has been waiting for for the past forty years. The many authors who have contributed to both parts include the leading experts on their species or groups, for instance, Michael Blackmore on the bats; Ernest Neal on the badger; Harry Thompson on the rabbit and edible dormouse; the Crowcrofts on the insectivores; Jim Taylor Page on the ungulates; and F. C. Fraser on the whales. Eighty-eight species are included, of which only fifty-three, including the whales frequent in British seas, are genuine natives still surviving in the British Isles. Two, a shrew and a mouse, are



*Desmond Waring*

### **SHIP FOR GALAPAGOS RESEARCH**

**Plate 13 :** The brigantine *Beagle* shortly before she left last December for the Galapagos Islands, where she is to be used by the scientists at the Charles Darwin research station to get about among the islands. Formerly a Looe lugger, she was named after Charles Darwin's *Beagle* at a commissioning ceremony last October by His Excellency the Ecuadorean Ambassador in London. See Note on page 147.



*George Cansdale*

**Plate I4 : Looking towards the southern Afram Plains in Ghana. An infra-red photograph.**

**Plate I5: The Afram River. See the article on a new lake in Ghana, page 168.**

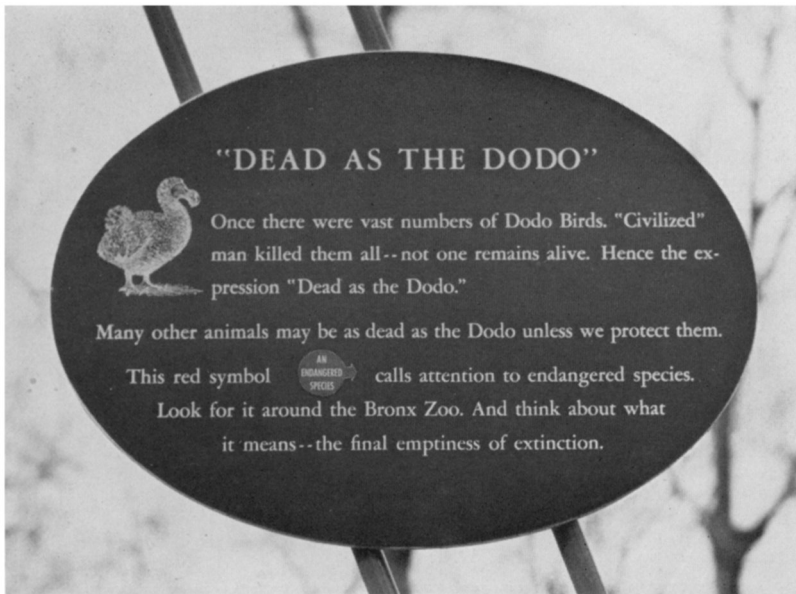




*Askaniya Nova Zoopark*

**Plate 16 :** The herd of Przewalski horses at the Askaniya Nova Zoopark in the Ukraine. The only truly wild horse alive today, it is almost extinct in its native habitat in Mongolia. An account of this Russian herd will be found in the recently published *International Zoo Yearbook*, reviewed on page 185.

**Plate 17 :** An arresting sign displayed in the Bronx Zoo in New York to call attention to endangered species.







## SUNSHINE AND SMOOTH SEAS

Every Thursday at 4 p.m. a Union-Castle liner leaves Southampton for

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confined to the Channel Isles; eleven, mainly whales, are vagrants; thirteen are established introductions, such as the rabbit and the coypu; six, including the introduced muskrat, are extinct; and three are domestic animals, more or less gone wild. There is no section devoted to conservation, perhaps because the Mammal Society has always left this aspect to the Fauna Preservation Society. Another omission is that of the three vagrant seals, ringed, harp, and hooded, and the walrus, although all the vagrant whales are included. The book is illustrated with mostly functional photographs and excellent drawings by the well-known bird artist, Robert Gillmor.

RICHARD FITTER.

WHILE SOME TREES STAND. By GARTH CHRISTIAN. Newnes. 21s.

The title of this book derives from the writings of Sir Thomas Browne, "Generations pass while some trees stand, and old families last not three oaks." The theme is that our landscape, shaped by good husbandry through many centuries, is now being tampered with on such an ever-increasing scale, that our wildlife and its environment is being affected drastically and thrown out of balance. There is little doubt that our wild plants and animals were safer behind the walls with which the great landowners enclosed their land. In a pleasantly discursive style he shows how the breaking up of the big estates, intensive cultivation, the grubbing up of mixed woodlands and the extensive planting of conifers; has caused the decline of such species as the nightingale, peregrine falcon, sparrow hawk, hedgehog, red squirrel, weasel, and stoat, although encouraging the increase of others such as the badger, fox, hare, and some kinds of deer. He makes a plea for a responsible policy of land management to ensure the continuance of a rich variety of vegetation on which all creatures depend ultimately, and points out that stupidity rather than ill-will has driven many species to the verge of extinction.

This is an all too familiar story, but Mr. Christian brings it home to the reader by personal anecdotes and experiences based on his adopted area of Sussex. He concludes that the possibility of the land of Britain continuing to have "peaceful, wild, remote, and altogether beautiful" stretches of countryside depends on more scientific research into the complicated problems of managing our landscape, on the strength of the county naturalists' trust movement, but perhaps most of all on there being more people who *care*. This book should do much to swell their ranks.

JOHN CLEGG.

ATLANTA MY SEAL. By H. G. HURRELL. William Kimber. 25s.

The Hurrells have a reputation for keeping and studying animals; at various times they have had otters, pine martens, polecats, and badgers, and the author is well known for his writings on birds. It is not therefore surprising to read that when a young female grey seal was found, stranded on the nearby Devon coast, he assumed responsibility for her and, with the help of his family, brought off the difficult feat of rearing her. The book's main interest, however, centres on the author's account of how he taught the seal, Atlanta, to respond to hand signals, the spoken word, and finally to printed letters and words. Atlanta can accurately associate with the command—or, as Mr. Hurrell more often seems to put it to her, the polite request—the action that is expected of her. He is well aware of the chance of misinterpreting the results of his tuition and he discusses the kind of

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