

## Book Reviews

**So Small a World**, by Guy Mountfort. Hutchinson, £3.95

Wherever my path has crossed Guy Mountfort's, in places as far apart as the Coto Doñana and the Galapagos, he was scheming to protect nature – and the number of places he has visited is prodigious. Many of them have benefited from his passionate concern. In this book he tells about some of the more fascinating wildernesses to which his travels through a hundred countries have taken him. Most of us may think of him primarily as an ornithologist, but here he is rather what used to be called a 'natural philosopher', and the trees, mammals and primitive peoples receive as much attention as the birds.

His earth-girdling journeys, which have made this seem to him so small a world, have also made him exceptionally aware of how much there is to lose and how little time there is to save for posterity the beauties that have given him such joy, whether among the peaks of the Karakoram, the backwaters of the Sunderbans, the deserts of Jordan or the rain forests of Indonesia.

He has witnessed so much destruction that he might well have been driven to believe that there is little hope in the rearguard actions being fought by conservationists. Quite the contrary! While he ruefully accepts that only a fraction of Africa's once fabulous wildlife still remains, he insists that, thanks to the pioneers of fauna preservation in the early years of this century (surely the FPS's greatest contribution to conservation) substantial numbers of most species still remain for our delight. If the worst can be avoided in Africa, then why not elsewhere? For Mountfort, Operation Tiger is simply justification for urgent operations elsewhere. For instance, if the Charles Darwin Foundation can do so much for the Galapagos, why not an Alfred Russel Wallace Foundation for the threatened Aru islands? 'We still have in our hands the power to protect the quality of life on earth', he concludes. 'Though time is running out, I cling to my belief that wisdom will prevail'.

G. T. CORLEY SMITH

**Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins**, by Konrad Lorenz. Translated by Marjorie Latze. Methuen, £1.60

This is a small, profound book, written by one of the prophets of our generation, on a theme that haunts the minds of *Oryx* readers. I was at Seewiesen in 1967 when Lorenz came home from receiving an honorary degree at Yale, pleased and tickled by the orator's epitome of him, 'father of ethology, mother of ducklings'; the same attainments brought him a Nobel prize in 1973. It is in the nature of such men to think deep thoughts and convey them in words that people can understand.

The eight deadly sins themselves, 'infiltrating humanity like malignant growths', spring no surprises. The eighth, incidentally, is the build-up of nuclear weapons, and, being the easiest of all to counteract, it gets only one page. He says the book was written four years ago, and because the drama of man and biosphere moves so fast he is afraid that what he wrote then may seem old hat, and that enlightened public opinion will by now have passed his sermon by. He need not have had such fears. The book gets better as it goes on; when I had finished its 80 pages I read them again, and got even more reward the second time.

To me, the most timely of all his messages is in the long chapter headed Indoctrinability, where he exposes the dangerous false doctrine, started originally by human behaviourists and now broadcast through the mass media: 'the untruth that all men are potentially equal', that 'all men would be equal if they could develop under the same external conditions'. It has mushroomed from a Freudian cult into an article of faith held out to all mankind. Its adherents slander heretics and shut their ears to

biological truth. It undermines social virtues and institutions and 'bears a considerable part of the blame for the moral and cultural collapse that threatens the Western world'. 'The present-day rulers of America, China and the Soviet Union are unanimous in one opinion: that the unlimited conditionability of man is highly desirable. Their belief in the pseudo-democratic doctrine is based on the wish that it were true. . . . It is no exaggeration to call this doctrine inhuman, since everything specifically human is unwelcome to its supporters. . . . "Down with individuality!" is the slogan'.

Recognising the truth and countering falsehood is basic to our survival. This book contains the kind of lead we want, and I recommend you to read and disseminate it yourself.

VERO WYNNE-EDWARDS

**Conservation**, by Archie S. Mossman. Intext, \$4.50

**What is Ecology?** by D. F. Owen. Oxford, £2.75

**La Synthèse Ecologique**, by P. Duvigneaud. Doin, Paris. Frs 128.00

These three books exemplify the different approaches seen in most of the publications dealing with environmental topics which are appearing in such numbers today.

Professor Mossman's is said by the publishers to focus on the principles and philosophy of conservation; the author suggests that it will help the reader to make essential decisions regarding the future of our planet. In fact, although the book is readable and contains a good deal of useful but familiar information about ecology and conservation, its main thesis is the uncritical acceptance of most of the more alarming projections regarding environmental degradation and ecocatastrophe. Thus 'Limits of Growth', whose own authors only claim it to be a demonstration of methods, is treated as though its conclusions were established facts. The use of insecticides is compared to Russian roulette. This is not a major contribution to the literature of conservation.

*What is Ecology?* is more valuable. It defines ecology as the 'scientific study concerned with the complex relationships between plants and animals and their surroundings, how they interact with one another, and how their numbers are limited', and then proceeds to justify and explain this definition. The book, which is illustrated with examples from many parts of the world, is intended rather for the general reader who wishes to find what ecology is about, and who is willing to go beyond the sensational examples publicised by the media, than for the university biology student, but many such students would undoubtedly benefit from its well balanced approach. This is a useful contribution to ecological thinking.

*La Synthèse Ecologique* may be enjoyed at several levels, for it is a delightful yet serious picture book dealing with the principles of ecology. It is a pity it is so expensive (over £12 at the current rate of exchange), for it can be warmly recommended, among other things, as a text book for those, particularly scientists, who wish to learn to use the French language. Anyone with a smattering of ecological knowledge and the most elementary French should be able to understand and benefit from the text, which leads the reader painlessly from an elementary explanation of the ecosystem to a quite advanced discussion of the place of man in the biosphere. In these days when teachers of French wish their books to be more relevant to modern life (in distinction to the old 'la plume de ma tante' approach) this volume, dealing clearly with the major problems of the environment, both urban and rural, and including even *pollutions morales*, should be generally acceptable. The admirable and most decorative colour illustrations are uniquely successful in communicating both basic ecological information and a proper understanding of the use, for this purpose, of the French language.

KENNETH MELLANBY