

REVIEWS

SILENT SPRING. By RACHEL CARSON. Hamish Hamilton. London. 25s.

The use of organic chemicals to control weeds, fungus and insect pests is now normal practice throughout much of the world. Yet this is a new development and relatively few people realize the full significance of the chemical revolution in agriculture and preventive medicine. The gains in public health and food production which have accompanied the use of pesticides are well known, unfortunately they have been accompanied by losses and these are much less well known. Miss Carson's book is an eloquent appeal which forces us to consider the actual and possible dangers which result from the use of pesticides. She questions the wisdom of those who have allowed unnecessary damage to occur in her own country.

She reminds us that Man is part of Nature, not outside it; he is dependent upon plants and animals. She shows us that the problem of pesticides is primarily an ecological one; yet most of the decisions on whether a chemical should be used are made by people who have not had an ecological training.

Miss Carson describes the man-made disasters which have occurred in the U.S.A. as a result of inefficient control of the use of pesticides. No one with a knowledge of the methods of control in other countries can be sure that avoidable damage is not being done elsewhere. In Britain much has been done to prevent it, but too little is known about the modes or action of the chemicals used, of their chronic effects and their side effects to leave any grounds for complacency. The need for more research is urgent; Miss Carson's book indicates the fields in which it is most urgent.

Many, probably most, pesticides do no more damage to wildlife than do ploughing or weeding by hand, but as Miss Carson shows, there are other chemicals—particularly the chlorinated hydrocarbons—which threaten life on a world scale. These substances are persistent and become spread through food chains. No part of the world is too remote to be safe from contamination. It is not known whether small amounts of these chemicals cause damage. Miss Carson shows the urgent need to find out.

She ranges widely over the subject; she discusses the effects of pesticides on soil animals, on species of aesthetic, scientific and economic value. She covers land, freshwater, and sea. She discusses the problems of resistance and alternative methods of control.

All who are interested in the conservation of wildlife, of natural resources and of Man himself should read this biased, stimulating and beautifully written book.

N. W. M.

THE BIRDS OF SIKKIM. By SÁLIM ALI. London, 1962. Oxford University Press. 52s. 6d.

The author of this book is well known as an ornithologist and conservationist as well as for his previously published ornithological work.

Produced with financial assistance from the Government of Sikkim, this first-class volume provides a great deal of information, not only about the birds themselves, but of the country—and it is an area remarkable for the diversity of habitat, ranging from tropical forest to altitudes of perpetual snow, all within the compass of not many miles.