

Scotland after a hard spring than they are after periods of severe weather in northern Europe.

This book takes its rightful place on the shelf alongside the best of the monographs of a single bird species that have been published in Britain in recent years.

RICHARD FITTER

**The Living Air**, by **Jean Delacour**. Country Life, 45s.

This fascinating account of a world which has passed, at least in Europe, will be read with nostalgic interest by those who have had the good fortune to see some of the private collections of animals and plants which existed even up to the last world war.

The author, born in Paris in the last years of the nineteenth century, began collecting birds at the age of ten and by the time he was fifteen had one of the largest collections then in existence as well as orchids and other exotic plants. These were maintained at his family's country estate at Villers-Bretonneux in Picardy. They were completely destroyed in the 1914-18 war, but re-established at Clères, Normandy, in 1918. For the next twenty years Dr. Delacour made expeditions all over the world, but especially to what was then Indo-China, to study the natural history of these countries, and produced a series of authoritative monographs.

During this period Clères became world famous, the collection of waterfowl alone being the most complete ever assembled. But this great zoological collection was almost wiped out in the 1939-45 war, and after the fall of France the author went to the USA, where he was later appointed Director of the Los Angeles County Museum. At the first opportunity he undertook, *for the third time*, to build up his collections, and to restore Clères to its position as the finest private zoo in the world—with what success may be gathered from the description of it by the French author, Colette, *Paradis Terrestre*.

As the greatest living aviculturist and honorary member of innumerable zoological and ornithological societies, his autobiography provides a vivid picture of a master naturalist in the best sense of the word. Last but not least, he is an active campaigner for the conservation of wildlife and is the only surviving member of the group of naturalists who, forty-five years ago, founded the International Council for Bird Preservation, of which he is now President Emeritus.

EDWARD HINDLE

**The Shell Bird Book**, by **James Fisher**. Ebury Press and Michael Joseph, 25s.

*The Shell Bird Book* is crammed with information. No one does this kind of book better than James Fisher, for while it contains little that is new, it covers a great deal of ground that has not been explored in this compendious fashion before. One thinks immediately of the first chapter which begins in pre-history and gives an account of fossil remains found in this country.

Another useful chapter is on "Bird Protection," which is of deep concern to the author as indeed it should be to everyone. The development of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has been tremendous in the last decade and it is instructive to read about its origins (the campaign against the plumage trade) and its first subscription rate (twopence).

Of those who have watched, written about or otherwise interested

themselves in birds the author detects two streams, the artistic and the scientific, giving a chapter to each, and a further one to "The Naming of the Birds." These are equally informative but overbalance the book with people. If they are to have so much space one could have wished that some of the later writers could have been identified with their famous books which are probably unknown to the post-war generations. Does not Warde Fowler, for example, totally languish today although his account of finding the marsh warbler breeding in England is as good today as when he first wrote it? And Abel Chapman in "The Borders and Beyond" conjures up the Northumbrian mudflats as well as anyone has or will. Another, but more important, criticism is the absence of an index other than of birds.

The line illustrations are mostly from Bewick or Yarrell or of some of the author's bird heroes and in addition there are eight maps which are a little small for comfortable inspection of the detail. The coloured plates all seem to have appeared before in Shell advertisements. By modern artists, they are well worth preserving in book-form. At 25 shillings it is remarkably good value.

G. DES FORGES

**Two in the Bush**, by **Gerald Durrell**. Collins, 25s.

This is Gerald Durrell's tenth book, quite apart from four more designed for children. The pattern is now well known—good stuff about animals, a lot of information, excellent thumbnail sketches of people and places, very funny episodes, and a first-class general description of some enviable experiences. "Two in a Bush" describes a filming trip mainly in Australia and New Zealand, partly in Malaya. As before, natural history is to the forefront. To those of us brought up on placental mammals, on birds which fly, on reptiles with just two eyes, on fossils which stay dead, and on the belief that penguins live in Antarctica, the creatures of the Antipodes are doubly strange. They are the exceptions to every rule, and Mr. Durrell makes the most of their antics, their habitats, their very existence. He also makes the most of local humanity, with everyone tending to be a character, with every form of existence being odd.

Every now and then his writing becomes excessive—"an enormous brass bell let out an ear-splitting clanging, like the distraught cries of a fire engine thwarted in love." Or, again on loudness, "our feet were making as much noise in the sphagnum moss as an exceptionally large troupe of hippopotami suffering from in-growing toenails walking through a huge cauldron of extremely thick porridge."

Plainly he relishes excitement, exceptional circumstances and near mishaps; but his customary style is at least to look askance at them, often to moan about them. A particular geyser, geologically timed to fire every ten years, chances to go off when he is strolling past it and the camera is running. He complains—or at least he makes out that he complained. So too with being winched up a cliff face, with wading to the shore from a float-plane, with flying in small aircraft among large mountains. Complaints apart, his books are always full of zest, of fascination, of enthusiasm for the quirks of nature, and this one is no exception. It is abetted in this instance by the fact that the wildlife of Australia and New Zealand is far quirkier than most, and Mr. Durrell misses no trick in saying so.

ANTHONY SMITH