

Wildlife Domesday Book

Very few books have been so long awaited as this monumental modern two-volume Domesday of Britain's wildlife: *A Nature Conservation Review*, edited by Derek Ratcliffe, chief scientist of the Nature Conservancy Council. The subtitle is 'the selection of biological sites of national importance to nature conservation in Britain'. Volume 1 explains how the selection was made, and Volume 2 lists sites that were selected. There are also one colour photograph, a number of fine black and white ones, and a couple of maps. Most prospective purchasers will blench when they see the price: £35 for the 401 pages of Volume 1, and £25 for the 320 pages of Volume 2. (It sheds a curious light on the economics of publishing that each page in Vol. 1 costs 11·5p, but each page in Vol. 2 costs 12·8p.) But it was worth waiting for, even if you have to go to a library to consult it.

The whole process began in 1965, when the then Nature Conservancy, recently demoted from independence to a component part of the Natural Environment Research Council, decided to review the existing series of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and to compile a countrywide list of natural and semi-natural sites whose safeguarding is a matter of priority and urgency. The result is a list of key sites, occupying the top two grades in the four-point quality grading that was adopted in the review. Grade 1 is defined as being of the highest importance, whose safeguarding is essential to the success of nature conservation in Britain; grade 2 are of almost equal importance, but either duplicate the features of related grade 1 sites, are slightly lesser quality, or both.

The criteria for selection are set out in some detail in Vol. 1, and the processes of assessment and selection are explained at gratifying length – the first fruits perhaps of the call for more open government! The bulk of Vol. 1 consists of summaries of the ecological background to site selection, habitat by habitat, with additional sections on the conservation of flora and of fauna. This amounts to an introduction to the ecological aspects of British natural history, which is a fine piece of work in its own right.

Most people, however, will probably turn first to Vol. 2, for it is obviously easier to judge a book by what it says about the areas you know best. Here are set out summaries of the ecological interest of 702 key sites, from Hermaness to the Lizard, totalling 913,400 hectares (no concessions to those who can never remember what a hectare is). Perhaps the major drawback here is that the main field work was completed in 1967, so that, apart from a few alterations, important enough to be mentioned in the appendices, the survey is already ten years out of date. Ten years ago this might not have mattered, but the pace of change in the countryside is now so terrifying that one wonders how many of these sites are still intact. No doubt the NCC and the naturalists' trusts try to keep tabs on all important sites, but why could the trusts not have been given this list years ago?

The selection itself, so far as I have been able to check it, seems exemplary. No doubt, everybody could suggest some small change. The relative assessments of grade 2 and grade 3 sites along the margin of eligibility for inclusion, are inevitably subjective to some extent. We all have favourite sites

we would have liked to see included, and indeed some newly found sites have been recommended for grade 1 status even since the publication of this book – I walked over one only last May. Dr Ratcliffe and the NCC are to be congratulated on a good job. Only the unregenerate bureaucrats who caused the delay in publication should be criticised.

There is one last fly in the ointment. In commending these volumes to the public, the Secretaries of State for Environment and for Education and Science, Peter Shore and Shirley Williams, say that neither the Government nor landowners are committed to any action on particular sites mentioned in the text. This may be a political necessity at present, but it is up to the wildlife conservation movement to make it an equal political necessity for the Government to commit itself, quite soon, to the safeguarding of the great majority of these sites. What would be said if the Government issued an illustrated catalogue of the Crown jewels or the National Gallery, and then said it was not in any way committed to safeguarding them from vandalism or theft?

RICHARD FITTER

Konrad Lorenz, by A. Nisbet. Dent £5.95.

There can be hardly anyone remotely interested in animals who has not heard the name of Konrad Lorenz. Here now is an excellent opportunity to learn more of the 'human substance at the centre'. This is no mere adulation of a latter-day St Francis, but a determined attempt to understand and explain a man and his work, both of which can be penetrating and amorphous, fascinating and irritating, humble and arrogant – but always stimulating. There are those who genuinely cannot understand why Lorenz shared a Nobel Prize with such outstanding experimental biologists as Tinbergen and von Frisch, who were puzzled when eminent scientists like Kramer, von Holst and Koehler worked so hard to create an academic niche for him. This book distils, on the whole successfully, and evaluates the essential Lorenz from the lengthy papers and the philosophical books so long in gestation.

Lay readers will still find the exposition of ethology and Lorenz's seminal contribution somewhat hard going, and will delight more in the many and amusing anecdotes about the ebullient phenomenon that is Lorenz the man. They will also, regrettably, fasten on the chapter dealing with the notorious 'nazi' paper of 1940, and on the more recent acceptance from an extreme right-wing group of the Schiller Prize. These issues are not baulked, but they are convincingly dismissed as being the result of a certain political and social naivety. In the account of the later years there is a running refrain of things left undone that might have been done. No goose book has appeared to complement the jackdaw-oriented *King Solomon's Ring*. The Seewiesen establishment is not thought to have produced scientific results comparable to the time and effort involved. But Lorenz is only human, and it is fitting that the book ends with a sentimental account of the Return of the ageing Prophet to his native land and a report of his determination to live for longer than the 92 years achieved by his father.

G. V. T. MATTHEWS

The Mammals of Pakistan, by T. J. Roberts. Benn, £35.00.

This new and comprehensive book will be welcomed as a modern work of reference by specialists in the field and by all naturalists interested in the fauna of Pakistan. It is liberally illustrated with text figures which are accurate and useful as well as artistically pleasing. The distribution maps for each species in Pakistan are especially welcome, as is the comprehensive bibliography and geographical gazetteer. The text is well written and concise, and includes information on the taxonomy of each species, descriptive notes, distribution, status and biological notes.