

*Times* Publications, under the general title of "Animals of Britain", and edited by Dr. L. Harrison Matthews.

The publishers are to be congratulated on this fine series of monographs, each one of which is written by an acknowledged authority on his subject. Beautifully produced, with fine photographs, a pleasing type-face which makes easy reading, and complete with a skeletal drawing inside the back cover, how the cost is kept so low beats this reviewer. They can be recommended not only for all those interested in the British mammals, but to anyone interested in natural history and wild life.

The first eight books in the series include "Badgers" by E. G. Neal, "Grey Seals" by H. R. Hewer, "Horseshoe Bats" by John Hooper, "Water Voles" by S. R. Ryder, "Hedgehogs" by Maxwell Knight, "Otters" by E. G. Neal, and two by Monica Shorten on the Red and Grey Squirrels. Titles promised include Foxes, Rabbits, Deer, and many others.

A highly recommended series of monographs.

A. G. B.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS OF EUROPE. By WALTER HELLMICH. London: Blandford Press. 16s.

The number of naturalists who take continental holidays is annually increasing but there is no work, in English, on the continental reptiles and amphibians that they can take with them. The appearance of such a book should therefore be welcome but before criticizing this work, it is well to consider what could be produced for 16s. and include 138 different species. Surely chapters on the general biology of these animals and on extra-European species should be cut to a minimum or omitted altogether? But nearly a quarter of the book is devoted to the introductory topics. There are already plenty of good books on reptilian and amphibian biology, if the amateur naturalist is interested in such topics as anatomy he would surely be willing to buy one—such matter is out of place here. But into the first forty pages has been crammed a miscellany of unbalanced facts and inaccuracies. Why, for instance, should the skeletons of amphibians be dealt with in detail and those of reptiles be omitted? If the sketch of a frog's hind limb is intended to show the elongation connected with a jumping locomotion this is not stressed in the text. In any case, the elongation of the hind limb is achieved by extension of the tarsal region, not by insertion of a humerus between girdle and femur!

There is also too much repetition; two indices in a small book seem superfluous and, as there are notes on captivity under each species, a chapter on this subject is not necessary. In any case the amount of useful information that can be included in three pages is negligible. Does the author really mean to suggest that an amateur, foolish enough to keep a poisonous snake and to get bitten by it, should "open the wound and cauterise it" himself? Perhaps some of these mistakes may have crept in in the translation, for instance, *Vipera aspis* has become the "Aspic Viper", chamaeleons are found chiefly in Ethiopia and Madagascar and "as a general rule the male is sexually distinct from the female". The first statement is amusing, the second misleading, and the third meaningless. The reviewer would like to know who are these Lilliputian "experts" who consider the Uropeltidae, Xenopeltidae, and Anilidae as "Giant Snakes" and, although it is a long time since he last rode a horse, he cannot remember ever being told to grasp it with his arms, so the comparison with mating frogs is misleading.

The redeeming features of the book are the illustrations, which are excellent, and the artist is to be congratulated, but even they cannot make up for the inaccuracies. In its present form this a dreadful book and cannot be recommended.

J. M.

SNAKES OF NYASALAND. By R. C. H. SWEENEY. The Government Printer, Zomba, Nyasaland. 25s.

Here is a book of which the pattern might well be copied by other regional "zoologies". It caters for both amateur and professional and the contents are of a particularly high standard. There are introductory chapters on general topics, very necessary in a country where books on reptile biology are not readily available, but these do not take up more than one-seventh of the total and the bulk is properly devoted to the accounts of the snakes themselves. The systematic part is especially good as it contains such a large proportion of ecology and general natural history of the snakes rather than simple descriptions.

There are two keys, one for laboratory use and the other a field guide which may be used by laymen, provided they realize that it is not infallible. The reviewer tested it with some West African examples of Nyasaland snakes and found it worked reasonably well, although the shape of the pupil could not easily be determined unless the snake was in hand. To the best of the reviewer's knowledge this is the first book on tropical African reptiles that has included a field guide at all.

Nevertheless there are a few general points that could be mentioned. The continued reference to species by number only is annoying, as it means constant use of the index and the author's reference to the distribution of snakes outside Nyasaland is not always correct. Many species are referred to as occurring as far west as Ghana—the author apparently does not realize that Ghana is at the extreme eastern end of the Guinea forest block and the many forest snakes occurring there extend right through that forest as far west as Sierra Leone and Guinea. Nor has he heard of the authentic record of a 32 ft. python from the Ivory Coast which makes this species the longest, and not the third longest, snake in the world.

There are a few photographs at the end but these are quite the poorest feature of the book, their quality being far surpassed by the line drawings of a number of the species described. There is also a map but this does not show physical features beyond lakes and rivers. This is a pity, for there is a special section on montane snakes so both contours and an indication of vegetation zones would have been useful.

But let me not detract from the value of the book by listing criticisms. It is excellent value for 25s. and the reviewer wishes that there were a similar one written for his particular corner of Africa.

J. I. M.

SURVIVAL OF THE FREE. Edited by Dr. WOLFGANG ENGELHARDT. Translated from the German by JOHN COOMBES. Hamish Hamilton. 30s.

This is a collection of articles, many by famous naturalists, ruined by literal translation from the German.

Here we meet some really astonishing creatures—the tiger horse (presumably Zebra), fighting snipe (Ruff), the silken heron, the crawl-stork, the roaring ape (Howler monkey), and other extraordinary victims of the translator. But can we blame translation for the five sub-species of rhinoceros,