

much popular writing about the rain forest. The fascination and beauty of the forest and its organisms are allowed to speak for themselves; so is the seriousness of the threats facing them. An excellent combination of photographs, sketches, paintings and diagrams parallels the text and, at the cost of a little repetition, provides an illustrated summary of the book's whole theme. Small faults are captions that are occasionally meagre, or obscure, and a scanty index. Also, birds and invertebrates *are* animals. This is a book to please both professional and layman, a valuable addition to rain forest literature, fully deserving its recommendation from the World Wildlife Fund.

M.E.D. POORE

Orchids of Britain: A field guide, by David Lang. OUP, £9.50.

After informative introductory chapters on orchid structure, life cycles, ecology and classification – the section on habitats being particularly useful – between one and three pages are devoted to each of the forty-nine native species in turn for a rather chatty but accurate specific account; this includes description, distribution, ecology, rarity and other interesting information. Many of the colour photographs that illustrate each species are, unfortunately, of indifferent quality, some being rather murky or pale, and others out of focus. It is also unfortunate that the illustrations do not accompany the text but are grouped together in the middle. Short sections on hybrids and erratics, distribution maps, in which occurrence is indicated on the basis of Watsonian vice-county distribution, a bibliography and a useful glossary conclude the book.

The author neatly summarises the available information on native orchids, many of which are now greatly endangered (14 of the 49 species are listed in the British Red Data Book), and this will prove a useful up-to-date reference work for conservationists. It is also a useful field guide, given the limitations of somewhat inadequate illustrations and larger-than-pocket-sized format. The cost may also be too daunting.

P.J. CRIBB

The Heyday of Natural History, 1820-1870, by Lynn Barber. Cape, £9.50.

It will come as a revelation to most modern naturalists that the reason why natural history was so popular with their great-grandfathers was a religious one. It is to William Paley's writings that we owe the great outburst of activity in the mid-19th century that Lynn Barber chronicles in this fascinating book. It may seem strange that *Flora Europaea* and the *Handbook of the Birds of the Western Palaearctic* should be descendants of Paley's *Natural Theology*, but this, just as much as White's *Selborne*, is one of their progenitors. Having the Church's approval for searching for specimens in woods and on heaths, and especially in rock pools on the shore, greatly facilitated the development of public interest in what might otherwise have seemed to be a somewhat recherché hobby. It was all *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.

As Lynn Barber shows, it was just because everybody believed that God had created wildlife, and that to familiarise oneself with it was to praise Him, that Darwinism came as such an ugly shock. After reading this book one can better understand why it took nearly thirty years from Darwin's epoch-making revelation somewhere in the Galapagos Islands for him to be pushed by the much more hard-boiled Alfred Russel Wallace into actually writing *The Origin of Species*. And who is to say that the Victorians were not right? After all, we seem to be currently turning God into a computer, and the simile employed by the Victorians to buttress their belief that there *must* be some good somewhere in the universe seems preferable to those we employ nowadays to account for our evident non-belief in the existence of ultimate good.

But naturalists are basically more interested in the white and yellow archangels of our countryside than in the archangels of William Paley's world. Most of them will read this book for its sidelights on the foibles of their ancestors and how they set about garnering the knowledge we now take for granted. After all, when Paley first wrote, the few

Capybaras, reproduced from Brehm's *Thierleben* of 1877 in Lynn Barber's book. In the mid-19th-century domestication of wildlife for food was widely discussed and practised, and capybaras were recommended as 'converting into wholesome nutriment vegetable substances which are turned to no account.' Today, experiments in domesticating these large South American rodents are again being tried



naturalists who were interested in invertebrates still followed Linnaeus in classifying them all as either insects or worms. If Paley had not stimulated so much research and general interest, in the way Lynn Barber so readably describes, the followers of White might have remained a tiny sect until the end of the century, and the heyday might have been postponed until our own day.

RICHARD FITTER

The Secrets of the Blind Dolphins, by Giorgi Pilleri. Sind Wildlife Management Board, \$25.

The conclusions drawn at the end of this book are pre-empted in an early chapter in which Professor Pilleri states: 'There can be no doubt that this species is in serious danger of becoming extinct, even if its disappearance will be of little concern to our modern so aptly named throw-away society.' However, by unravelling and exposing hitherto unknown facts about these delightful mammals and writing this book, he clearly indicates why we should be concerned, and leaves the reader feeling that the earth will be a sadder place if the Indus river dolphin *Platanista indi* becomes extinct.

Professor Pilleri points out that man is the dolphin's only enemy. Enormous barrages placed across the Indus have changed the river's environment, and the once large dolphin populations south of the barrage at Sukkur have completely disappeared. Formerly united populations have been split and the isolated dolphins can no longer migrate in search of food and/or mates. The few remaining dolphins are being exploited by the Bhutan fishermen, and to avoid this threat the author wisely proposes on-the-spot education of the fishermen and their conversion from hunters to wardens.

The book is copiously illustrated. In addition to entertaining and at times humorous descriptions of his expedition to capture specimens Professor Pilleri presents with exceptional clarity the scientific findings of his experiments with two dolphins in captivity. I highly recommend this easy-to-read book by one of the world's acknowledged authorities on cetaceans.

HORACE DOBBS

Whales, by W. Nigel Bonner. Blandford, £10.95.

How refreshing to find a thoroughly reliable and readable book on whales! Nigel Bonner uses a clear scientific approach to describe the essential mechanisms by which these mammals have become adapted to life in the sea.

Opening with an outline of the environment which they inhabit, and a brief description of each species, he goes on to describe the details of the structures and functions of the whales' bodies. The anatomical and physical requirements for swimming and diving to great depths, the role of sensory perception and the importance of sound production and reception, food preferences and feeding mechanisms are all dealt with in an admirable manner. Bonner writes as someone who knows his subject well and at first hand, and he brings into his descriptions an analytical and physical approach which is stimulating to the enquiring reader.

Chapters on reproduction, the whale brain and intelligence involve subjects which are in some ways more contentious because of the current debate over the status of the whale stocks and the ethics of hunting these animals. Bonner makes his own position