

Book Reviews

The Wild Life of India, by E. P. Gee. Collins, 30s.

This lively account of the existing wild life resources of India, its sanctuaries and the animals in them, as well as of those dedicated individuals who have done most to promote conservation should be read by all who have at heart the welfare of the wild creatures of this earth. But above all it is a timely reminder of how in a few decades a country's once abundant fauna can be reduced well nigh to vanishing point—for instance an estimated 40,000 tigers some fifty years ago now reckoned to be barely 4,000! Well-intentioned regulations should provide an adequate safeguard, but mere lip service is valueless, and only drastic action can check the disastrous slaughter. Degradation of the habitat, too, can effect as much damage as direct killing. The late Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in the 'Foreword,' "But in practice we ignore the animal world."

The author, long resident in India and a member of the Survival Service Commission of IUCN, is also on the Executive Committee of the Indian Board for Wild Life, as well as a member of several State Wild Life Boards. An enthusiastic conservationist of profound experience of many countries, he has visited every part of India where there are rare species—and regrettably the majority are now in this category—or species of special interest. Graphically he stresses the urgency for effective protection and poses the question—what will be left in the year 2000; may it not be only memories? Fifteen of the twenty chapters are devoted primarily to individual species; a small map on an early page enables easy reference to the many localities mentioned. The discovery of the beautiful golden langur in considerable numbers and some botanical specialities are recorded. The illustrations, mainly from the author's own photographs, are remarkable; the colour pictures, exquisite. Let us hope that this vivid portrayal of the sad plight of India's splendid fauna will achieve its object—to ensure the survival of what is left before it is too late.

C. R. S. PITMAN

Journey to the Jade Sea, by John Hillaby. Constable, 30s.

Years ago I remember John Hillaby at press conferences about conservation, invariably needling the platform with awkward and loaded questions. As I was sometimes on the platform myself I used to think, "Blast the man. Instead of criticising our valiant efforts, why doesn't he get out himself and do something?" Well, now he has. And how!

Sadly, there are now quite a number of people in this country who have been to Lake Rudolf. The more people go there, the less one is able to assume one's intrepid Stanley-type air in conversation at home. Mercifully only a handful have still ever been to Central Island, though I have to concede that there was little that was hazardous about my own landing. Nor is there anything momentous about the journey of any traveller up to the far north of the Rift Valley today, by light aircraft or by landrover. All that is momentous is what you see when you get there, a grotesque tortured world that you can hardly call a landscape—it's a fault in the Creator's effort, a slice that went wrong and will never get right. The discoverer of Lake Rudolf described the region only seventy odd years ago as "still glowing hot and looking as though it had recently been flung up from some huge forge."

It was into all this that John Hillaby stepped, with twelve pairs of plimsols and some derelict camels, to disappear for months on an aimless march.