

THE RABBIT. By H. V. THOMPSON and A. N. WORDEN.  
Collins. 240 pp. 16s.

Years ago, in a remote deer-forest, I recall studying green-shanks all day and, after dark, reading, with profit and delight, their monograph in the *New Naturalist* series. Having for thirty years lived surrounded by wild rabbits, I turned to this book eagerly, to make up the gaps in my knowledge of them, and undeterred by the Vorticist rabbit on the dustcover. To be frank, it was rather heavy going. Much of the book is written in the turgid, pseudo-classical diction of the modern animal behaviourists. Its glossary contains 116 of these terms but I kept on finding new ones, ranging from enurination to biozootic zonation. A typical sentence runs: "although fertilization took place in some cases, development failed at the time of segmentation and blastulation, before implantation." One need say no more on this point.

The editors claim that "the rabbit has been a major problem almost since its probable introduction by the Romans". No historical evidence of this is traceable in the book, and it is twice indirectly contradicted, if only by the statement (p. 12) that "the first undoubted records of rabbits in Britain are in the thirteenth century". Going back 200 years, or less, when rabbits did not exist north of the Great Glen, when Peter Hawker only killed 315 rabbits in fifty years in England, and when some of our finest woodlands grew to their present nobility without rabbit-wire or other modern aids to pest control, one may well agree with the Chairman of the Royal Forestry Society that we ourselves have "allowed" the rabbit to become a pest only *in the last 100 years*.

Yet despite many pronouncements with which few countrymen will agree, e.g. that rabbits are "mainly crepuscular", and the absence of detail on other points, e.g. on rabbits swimming, climbing, "signalling" with their hindlegs, protecting their young, migrating to new areas, etc. (most unscientific rabbit catchers insist that rabbits never drink because they have very rudimentary bladders), this book does contain a lot of information, recorded sometimes in meticulous detail. I was amazed to learn that such a fecund animal has a pre-natal mortality of 64 per cent and that, as in the case of wild partridges, coition has been very rarely observed. There is also a startling account of the phenomenon of "reingestion", in which the rabbit apparently eats its own dung, a habit enabling it to remain in its burrow, after being shot at or threatened by traps, for many days. The chapter on myxomatosis is well done though it was

obviously concluded before the disease had covered the country, and there is an excellent bibliography. It is interesting to note that Australian scientists think 5–10 years will see the end of myxomatosis as an effective means of biological control.

J. K. STANFORD.

NATURECRAFT IN AUSTRALIA. Edited by THISTLE Y. HARRIS.  
Angus and Robertson. £A.1 5s.

This is a very elementary account of the Australian landscape and its wildlife and it is edited by a person with a very real sympathy for her subject. The book begins with a brief consideration of geology, followed by chapters on “ animals without backbones ”, land vertebrates, animals of the sea-shore, bush plants and how plants are distributed. The three final chapters are concerned with constellations (easily seen throughout the year in the clear Australian atmosphere), camping techniques and nature conservation. The book is illustrated by excellent sketches and numerous small photographs.

The many who have admired Miss Harris's *Wild Flowers of Australia* may be disappointed in the present book. The subject that she has been set to cover is so vast that there is an inevitable failure really to get to grips with any single aspect in the 240-odd pages at her disposal.

A. J. M.

## SHORTER NOTICES

THE KENYA WILD LIFE SOCIETY. P.O. Box 20110, Nairobi.  
1st Annual Report, 2s. 6d. (3s. postage paid).

The Kenya Wild Life Society has existed only a year but has already gained more than 1,300 supporters. At its birth three main problems called for its immediate attention and the society very wisely restricted its efforts to them: Poaching, Amboseli, the Serengeti National Park.

The report tells how these problems, particularly poaching, have been tackled. It includes the Governor's exemplary directive to all Administrative Officers, on their duty to enforce the animal protection and national park ordinances. A vivid description of the cruelty and waste of poaching for gain is given; it will enlighten any reader who fears that “ game preservation ” may be unjustly depriving the African of meat. And, as the report says, it is paradoxical to realize that land