

SEALS, SEA LIONS, AND WALRUSES. By V. B. SCHEFFER.  
Oxford University Press. 30s.

In the twentieth century man's knowledge of life in the sea, especially in the polar regions, has expanded greatly, and in the post-war years zoologists have been giving increased attention to the pinnipedia, or seals, so aptly described by Linnaeus as "a dirty, curious, quarrelsome tribe, easily tamed, and polygamous; flesh succulent and tender; fat and skin useful".

The main part of Dr. Scheffer's book is a systematic account of all the known species of seal, with an indication of their taxonomic history and geographical range. This is preceded by several chapters dealing with adaptations in body form and function to life in the sea, and the evolution of the order and its subdivisions from its precarnivore ancestors. A synoptic key enables the reader to identify each of the twenty genera on the basis of distinctive features of size and shape, pelage, skeleton, and behaviour.

Many species of pinnipedia are of economic importance for their pelts or their oil or for both, and consequently they have been subjected to heavy destruction by man who has reduced several species to the verge of extinction. When hunting became unprofitable the remnants of some species were left in comparative peace and have made a spectacular recovery in the last half-century, so that they are now fit for economic exploitation again. There is no excuse for a repetition of the process of near-extirmination, for most species are polygamous and gregarious; under proper management therefore a crop of spare bulls can be harvested every year without in any way endangering the existence of the species concerned. A few species are now reduced to such small numbers that their disappearance for ever is probable, but the world population of most of the forty-seven species is considerable—the total population of pinnipedia is estimated at not less than nearly 14,000,000 and not more than about 26,500,000.

Dr. Scheffer illustrates his volume with a section of excellent photographic plates and a number of distribution maps and other text-figures, and concludes with an extensive bibliography of the literature cited.

L. H. M.