

## Book Reviews

**Early Wildlife Photographers**, by C.A.W. Guggisberg. David & Charles, £4.95

Every technical advance occurred at least 30 years before I thought it did. In Charles Guggisberg's lovely little book (128 pages in all, but with black and white pictures on practically every page) I have been put right again and again. It was 120 years ago, no less, that a camera was first packed for an African expedition when David Livingstone decided to take one (although John Kirk did most of the work with it). The first attempt to specialise in African wildlife was made in the early 1860s by James Chapman (and what a pity no Kirk or Chapman pictures could be included in the book!)

Natural history photography really got going in the 1890s. Eadweard (!) James Muybridge had published his famous pictures of animal locomotion (selected from 100,000) in 1887, but in the last decade of the century the first book entirely illustrated with authentic wildlife photographs was published (by the Keartons in 1895), the first medal was given by the Royal Photographic Society for natural history work (to R.B. Lodge, also in 1895), the first ordinary and uncamouflaged hide was used (by Francis H. Herrick in 1889) and the first trip-wire flashlight pictures were taken (by George Shiras, during those 1890s).

This book is full of information and gives short biographies of scores of photographers, such as C.G. Schillings who really opened up the thought of photographic safaris, and A.R. Dugmore who used his huge camera, a 'weighty piece of furniture hanging around his neck', to take (in 1909) the famous picture of a charging rhino in focus and at 15 yards distance when the shutter was opened; the animal then had to be deflected by a nimble bullet from Dugmore's companion. The book will not only give great pleasure, but will humble all of us who dare to congratulate ourselves on taking good pictures from a Land-Rover with a lightweight camera, a long lens and very speedy film.

ANTHONY SMITH

**Fenland:** its ancient past and uncertain future, by Sir Harry Godwin FRS. Cambridge U.P., £7.95.

**Upper Teesdale:** the area and its natural history, edited by A.R. Clapham, for the Teesdale Trust. Collins, £7.50.

I found these two books totally fascinating, and compulsive reading in a way that no work of fiction ever seems to grip me nowadays. The areas they cover are as contrasting as one could wish for within the Four Seas. They represent the fruition of a discipline which began no more than seventy or eighty years ago with the early vegetation studies that led to the formation of the British Vegetation Committee in 1904 and later to the British Ecological Society in 1913. Both books in fact represent rock-bottom ecology, treated historically to give a factual basis for the origin of the English countryside, to replace the speculations that have held the field hitherto.

In both areas we start with the retreat of the ice some 10,000 years ago. The Fenland, which has been Sir Harry Godwin's lifetime study, has changed enormously almost within historic times. It began to take its present form only with an invasion of the sea some 2500 years ago. The fact that every schoolboy knows, how King John lost his luggage crossing it, shows how much it has changed even since the Middle Ages. The whole story is carefully built up by Godwin from detailed analysis of the peat and silt deposits, using the technique of pollen analysis that he himself pioneered in Britain. Indeed one of the most valuable features of the book is his story of those early days when ecology was almost as dirty a word among scientific conservatives as it is today among political ones.

Upper Teesdale, contrasting in every way with Fenland, has apparently had its present grassy and treeless aspect for something like 3000 years, and actually, on

Widdybank Fell and one or two other spots, shows us what late glacial Britain must have looked like, for its typical flora is still there in the shape of the Teesdale violet, the Teesdale sandwort and the other rarities of the region. The link between the two books is that it was Godwin, drawing on his vast experience of post-glacial British flora, who put forward this thesis, now amply proven by the extensive research reported in Roy Clapham's book. We might never have had this book at all, and botanists might have been happy to go on theorising about the origin of the Teesdale flora forever, but for the catalytic (perhaps cathartic would be a better word) effect of Cow Green Reservoir. The strenuous efforts by botanists to prevent the submergence of part of the lower slopes of the historic Widdybank Fell site failed, but did lead to the offer by ICI of £100,000 to promote research into the area they were about partly to destroy. Hence the Teesdale Trust, and hence this excellent survey, which is now pretty comprehensive for the flowering plants of the area, though much less so for the lower plants and the admittedly somewhat less interesting invertebrates.

Both books are musts for anybody who wishes to understand how our countryside came to assume its present appearance and how it came to be occupied by the various kinds of wildlife.

RICHARD FITTER

**The Last Great Wild Beast Show**, by Bill Jordan and Stefan Ormerod. Constable, £6.50.

This is largely an anthology of horror stories about British animal collections, with a digression on the abominations of wildlife traffic and a passing rebuke for the far greater ravages of the pet, fur and skin trades. Such exposure is salutary and the authors' zeal for animal welfare is patent, but their tone seems calculated to put all heaven in a rage rather than to promote practical improvements. They denounce not only the commercial zoos, with their fun-fairs and gift shops, and the safari parks, which have 'spread like an insidious cancer that is antagonistic to the whole principle of wildlife preservation', but also the non-profit-making 'mainstream' zoos which, in trying to be comprehensive, have become 'cumbersome dinosaurs'. They are aware of degrees of culpability but their loosely constructed book is in danger of muddling together in a general condemnation both the zoos that are indefensibly bad and the respectable ones that merely fail to conform with the authors' exacting and puritanical philosophy. Mr Jordan and Mr Ormerod want to abolish all these and allow only specialist collections, serviced by highly trained and well paid staffs, dedicated to research, education and conservation on the lines pioneered by 'men like Peter Scott, Philip Wayre and Gerald Durrell'—although, regrettably, even these 'are obliged to provide facilities for the paying visitor'.

They have a case eminently worth arguing but, even if it should be accepted (and the finance made available) in some distant future, the zoos and parks will be with us for many years to come, while their recent proliferation makes it all the more necessary to check the present cruel and wasteful exploitation of wildlife. This implies education of public opinion, persuasion of zoo-men and, finally, legislation. The book may make readers angry but contributes little to any of these approaches. True, at one point the authors confide that 'the solution rests in a change of public attitudes' yet on another page they contradict themselves (or one another?) by contemptuously dismissing 'the ill-advised policy of giving the public what it wants'. Their sweeping accusations of 'ignorance, stupidity and neglect' are unlikely to persuade zoo people to mend their ways, nor is their approving quotation of 'the law is a ass—a idiot' likely to further desirable legislation. Perhaps it would be more constructive if, for instance, the authors used their expert knowledge to fight ignorance in the worst type of zoo by compiling an elementary handbook on animal care—written with the same sympathetic understanding for zoo-men that they show for other primates. Their admirable organisations might well finance this and also a less confusing summary of our present legislation and its inadequacies both in scope and enforcement but without insistence on the 'farcical' nature of Parliament's previous efforts. Indignation is not enough.

G.T. CORLEY SMITH