

**The Compleat Naturalist by Wilfrid Blunt. Collins, £3.50.**

Carl Linnaeus is a rather unusual figure in the history of science. He did not perhaps contribute very much to our understanding of the processes of the natural world, his system of classification has long since been forgotten, and indeed his most important contribution, the introduction of binomial nomenclature, was achieved almost by accident. And yet by his immense energy in classifying and naming over 7,000 plants alone, he made possible the massive efforts of the 19th century in classification, and thus the scientific study of nature.

Linnaeus must also be one of the best served figures in the history of science for biography. This latest, and beautifully produced book is a most readable account of his life, giving an excellent picture of the society and climate of thought in which he worked. Written with a dry sense of humour most appropriate to the sometimes absurd reactions that Linnaeus' theories sometimes provoked, the book produces a frank, but always tolerant view of a man who was so aware of his own place in history that he left instructions for a plaque to be erected after his death, bearing the words *Princeps Botanicorum*.

Mr Blunt merges narrative and portrait well and many of the anecdotes are delightful. Because the local parson was long-winded, Linnaeus, who always took his dog to church, would leave after an hour. When he was too ill to attend, the dog occupied the family pew alone, but from habit would leave on the hour. The illustrations are sumptuous, many of the plates being of contemporary botanical illustrations, which are quite beautiful and would almost justify the purchase on their own.

However the book does not seriously attempt to encompass Linnaeus's intellectual development, this being covered in an excellent appendix by William Stearn. The botanist may find this disjunction unfortunate, for it fails to set Linnaeus's scientific thought in the otherwise admirable context Mr Blunt has created. Despite this, I would warmly recommend this book as a delightful way to become acquainted with a most remarkable man.

ALASTAIR FITTER

**The Natural History of the African Elephant, by Sylvia K. Sikes. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, £10.**

This expensive book was written, according to the jacket blurb, to meet the need for an up-to-date handbook on a species which is currently at the centre of much conservation controversy in East Africa. The text, illustrated by an interesting and adequate selection of photographs and line drawings, is divided into three. The first part, comprising seven chapters, consists of a comprehensive review of the literature concerning the functional anatomy, histology, physiology and pathology of the African elephant, the last chapter containing a description of the author's own researches into the correlation between vascular disease and environmental conditions. Part Two gives an account of the interaction of the animal with its environment and a description of its behaviour and community structure. In Part Three a useful historical survey is presented of man's past and present exploitation of the species in Africa, together with an account of some of the problems encountered today in those East African national parks which are considered to have an overpopulation of elephants.

The author's style is lucid and easy to read, and her aim, to provide a reference work on the African elephant, has been largely achieved, but