

## Book Reviews

### **A Struggle for Survival: The Elephant Problem, by John Hanks. Country Life, £6.95.**

This well-illustrated yet moderately priced popular book contains a lot of solid information about African elephants. It is a partly autobiographical account of Professor Hanks's work on elephants in Zambia and Rhodesia, and concentrates on the culling operations in the Luangwa Valley that started in 1965. The title is not particularly apropos, although the sub-title reflects the contents adequately enough. After outlining the elephant problem and describing the feeding habits of the elephants and their consequent impact on the vegetation, Professor Hanks goes on to summarise the results of his own work, which has contributed so much to our knowledge of elephant biology. Topics covered include growth, reproduction, disease and poaching, and a chapter on the social life of elephants includes a discussion of their probable home ranges in various parts of Africa. Elephant conservation receives attention, and there is an easily comprehensible account of population dynamics. The book ends with a glossary of technical terms for the layman, although many of the words (e.g. annual, carnivore, habitat, ovary, parasite) should be in the vocabulary of most readers interested enough to read this book.

It is remarkable how much information the author has concentrated into this short book, which, with 74 plates and 23 figures, cannot contain much more than a hundred pages of print. The numerous superb photographs, many in colour, are technically perfect and aesthetically satisfying. Perhaps the essential nature of the elephant, powerful yet relaxed and gentle, is best captured in the beautiful photograph of a family group on plate 57. But this is much more than a picture book and anyone wanting a balanced account of the elephant problem and the controversies it has engendered could not do better than read this authoritative, well-written and entertaining text. My only adverse criticism is that the references are listed by chapters at the end of the book. As one who can never remember which chapter he is reading, I find this irritating.

S.K. ELTRINGHAM

### **Of Wolves and Men, by Barry Lopez. Dent, £7.95.**

### **Coyotes: Biology, Behaviour and Management, edited by Marc Bekoff. Academic Press, £23.70.**

Disciplines in the minds of men divide the universe into manageable compartments. But in the real world any animal, any thing, is much more than can be accommodated within the convenient barriers of a single discipline. It is this that has impressed Barry Lopez and will impress his readers. He has found, after many a fireside yarn with biologist and Eskimo, that there is more to wolf reproduction than can be learnt from placental scars, and more to the evolution of the wolf than the spirits of the ancestors might have realised. His book is a notable attempt to unravel many threads of evidence of what wolves are, of what makes them tick, of what we know and what we can never know. But more than this, having unravelled these things, with considerable success, Lopez also tries to blend them together again, in a mould which creates a more entire essence of wolfness than any conventional textbook of biology or anthropology might aspire to.

The reader with a general interest in wolves, in things natural, in the hazy distinction between fact and folklore, and in man's variously tortured relationships with these things, will find much here to provoke and disconcert. I should add that Lopez's account of wolf biology is good, as far as it goes, and is adorned with unusual snippets (a wolf's jaws can develop a crushing pressure of 1500 lbs/sq in, compared to an Alsatian's puny 750 lbs/sq in). Furthermore, in a book which embraces both Science and Art he clearly appreciates the Art in Science, describing with human warmth the excitement

which must have gripped the first students of wolf communication as they began to comprehend a language of hackles, ears and tails. Some readers might be unintentionally misled by passages such as 'It is one of the oddities of our age that much of what Eskimos know about wolves . . . wildlife biologists are still intent on discovering'. Lopez describes the almost magical abilities of Eskimos to find, track and intercept wolves, and finds these same abilities wanting in some biologists concerned with predator control. I am sure that he has not concluded that these are general failings of the science, but his reader might! If biologists have ignored the spirit of the wolf, of its mental experiences, this is not necessarily because they judge these things to be uninteresting or non-existent, but because they have no method for better understanding them. In summary, I enjoyed *Of Wolves and Men*, and I enjoyed it more the more I read it.

The coyote book is quite different (and costs over twice as much per page). A book for the specialist, it will doubtless be thoroughly read by all who study canids. The 15 chapters, each by a different authority, cover such major sections as evolution, pathology, behaviour, ecology, systematics and management. One of these serves well to illustrate just how much detail and insight a perceptive field biologist can gain. In Franz Camenzind's account of the coyotes of the National Elk Refuge one learns much of the subtle flexibility of coyote society, with gripping and theoretically important observations on the relationships within and between coyote groups.

Like the wolf, the coyote has been the subject of considerable persecution in North America. The section on Management reviews published information of the significance of the coyote as pest, the effectiveness of conventional and developing control methods and the general future of the coyotes' relationships with men. All these reviews end on rather pessimistic notes, irrespective of one's stance on predator control, since none foresee any changes in philosophy or methodology in the near future, but the point is made, and this is important, that new thinking in wildlife management rests on gradually accumulating understanding of species' biology, behaviour and ecology.

DAVID W. MACDONALD

**Eric Hosking's Birds.** Pelham Books, £10.50.

**The Scottish Ospreys,** by Philip Brown. Heinemann, £7.50.

When I met Eric Hosking 25 years ago in the Coto Doñana he had already been a professional bird photographer for another 25 years. Thus, as the world's first full-time wildlife photographer, he has devoted his whole adult life to developing what was his boyhood hobby. The text of *Eric Hosking's Birds*, written with the help of Kevin MacDonnell, is a mixture of anecdote, bird-lore and photographic technicalities, but essentially it is a picture book. And what pictures! They are the pick of a half-century's harvest, 200 in black and white and 80 in colour, admirably reproduced. A reluctant traveller, Hosking stuck to British birds until halfway through his career, since when he has roamed across five continents with his cameras, even visiting the remote Galapagos where, to a man of his skills, photographing the 'amazingly unconcerned wildlife' must have seemed rather like shooting sitting ducks. In a foreword, Roger Tory Peterson concludes that, as a bird photographer, Hosking 'has no peer'; and few readers are likely to contest his verdict.

*The Scottish Ospreys* also contains some splendid illustrations, but the book is built around the story of the RSPB's re-establishment of the osprey as a breeding bird at Loch Garten. The opening chapters give a general account of ospreys and a documented history of their extirpation in Scotland in the days when hardly anyone cared. Then Philip Brown gives a round-by-round account of that ornithological cliffhanger, Operation Osprey, with its alternating hopes and frustrations. Under the command of George Waterston, a band of enthusiasts struggled for years until their obstinacy finally overcame repeated disappointments, and the osprey was restored to the British list of breeding birds. Success was followed by the daring decision to invite the public into the