

Life Management Institution of Washington, D.C.) at Fredericton, New Brunswick, it is now known that the eastern panther still survives and is widely but sparingly distributed in parts of its former range—from Florida to Nova Scotia. Not only has it survived, but though a slow breeder—it breeds only every second or third year, with an average litter of two cubs—it is increasing. Moreover, it is believed to have safely passed the low point in numbers from which there can be no recovery. This therefore is an encouraging story which will have special appeal to all who have at heart the interests of the wild creatures. The author has provided a careful analysis of a sample of the many sight and other records, besides describing the creature, its attributes, behaviour and mode of life. That this surely is a case for special protection is indisputable.

C. R. S. P.

TALKING BIRDS. By MAXWELL KNIGHT. G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., London, 1960. 10s. 6d.

An ability to imitate the human voice and other sounds is a curious attribute of certain birds. Two species able to utter the sounds most accurately (the grey parrot of Africa and the hill mynah of parts of South-Eastern Asia) are not known to practice vocal mimicry in the wild state except, presumably, to learn the natural calls from their parents or others of their own kind. The mocking birds, lyre bird, our native starling and others do, in nature, imitate a variety of other sounds, but there is no evidence that such a gift bestows any advantage on the performer and, as the author suggests, it may be that the bird derives a certain pleasure from the practice. The parrot, for example, will often utter its repertoire when it is alone.

Whatever the explanation of this phenomenon, the talking bird is popular and this book will give the pet owner a wealth of excellent advice ranging from the selection and purchase of the bird, whether parrot, macaw, cockatoo, budgerigar, mynah or crow, to its requirements in captivity—living accommodation, diet, taming and training and other important items of management that ensure its welfare.

J. J. Y.

A SEAL FLIES BY. By R. H. PEARSON. Rupert Hart-Davis, 1959. 16s.

This is a highly diverting account of the hand-rearing of two female common or sand-seals (*Phoca vitulina*) taken from the

Wash before they had been weaned. They proved difficult to feed at first and it had to be done by forcing a long rubber tube right into their stomachs, because they had no idea of sucking or swallowing. One of the most interesting things was the great difference in personality between the two seals, one domineering and somewhat aggressive, the other more friendly. The former—given to R. M. Lockley who succeeded in getting it to swallow pieces of herring—survived and finally escaped into the sea; the latter, which was apparently thriving too, died from an unsuspected deficiency in its diet, after an illness of only forty-eight hours. It seems astonishing to the reviewer that, for a month or more, there was apparently no communication between Lockley and the author of the book as to how their charges “Diana” and “Flipper” were progressing. If there had been, “Flipper’s” life might have been saved too.

The book is copiously illustrated with entertaining vignettes of the seals by Ralph Thompson and by excellent photographs.

The final paragraph is a plea for legislation to save *Phoca vitulina* from extermination, of which there is no danger at the present time. It is a common species in suitable localities round the coasts of the northern hemisphere. The author gives no evidence for the need of legislation and in point of fact there is none.

The book is worth buying, especially if one is already interested in these intelligent creatures.

E. C.

SHORTER NOTICE

FLEAS, FLUKES AND CUCKOOS. By MIRIAM ROTHSCHILD and THERESA CLAY. Arrow Books. 6s.

The first edition of this book was published by Collins in the New Naturalists Library, 1952. We welcome this cheap edition in Arrow Books. The book is entirely about bird parasites, a very technical subject from which the layman might turn away without further consideration. But he should not do so, for the authors have succeeded in making a highly scientific study easily understandable, interesting to everybody and often very amusing.