

## Book Reviews

**The Penitent Butchers** by **Richard Fitter** and **Sir Peter Scott**. Collins/FPS, £2.50.

This history of the first 75 years of the Fauna Preservation Society takes us back to a time when expressions such as 'wildlife conservation' or 'ecosystem' had scarcely entered the vocabulary. Apart from a few notorious cranks such as St. Francis, Audubon or Waterton, there was little interest in protecting any animal other than game species until late in the 19th century; so in 1903 it was natural to lampoon this strange new breed of do-gooders as 'penitent butchers'. The founders of the FPS were pioneers, the first to promote conservation on more than a local scale; though they originally confined their efforts to the British Empire (where they had most influence) this covered a quarter of the globe and their early initiatives are still paying dividends. In particular it is difficult to imagine what Africa's fauna would be like today if they had not gone to work when they did.

Richard Fitter compresses the story of the Society's achievements into a dozen chapters: but the book is much more than that. Because of the FPS's interlocking



Nene geese *Peter Scott*

relations with other international and national organizations and with a host of specialists and learned bodies, in many of which its officers and members have been active, its influence has been out of all proportion to its size. In telling his story, the author has drawn on his encyclopaedic knowledge to give a remarkably clear and concise account not only of the FPS but also of the nature conservation movement generally in this century. He records the many successes, which show how far we have come in 75 years, but there is no complacency in his conclusions: unless habitats as well as species can be protected; unless a substantial proportion of the world's still unspoiled ecosystems can be preserved; and unless governments quickly take up the main burden, there will not be much left for the Fauna Preservation Society to do when it reaches its 100th birthday.

The book is decorated with delightful drawings by Sir Peter Scott and all royalties go to the FPS's Oryx 100% Fund.

G.T. CORLEY SMITH

*'The Penitent Butchers' can be obtained from the FPS office, £2.65 including postage.*

**Wilderness**, by **Anthony Smith**. Allen and Unwin, £7.50

This is the story of the BBC's 'Wilderness' television series. We begin with a chilly trip to Antarctica, are then whirled off to the soon-to-be devastated forests of Brazil, only to be snatched away to cope with the cruel Australian desert. On our next safari we foot-slog to above the tree-line of the Himalayas and from Nepal we shoot off to sample life on the Canadian tundra. Our odyssey ends in watery wastes, first the Nile Sudd and then the Okefenokee swamp in Georgia. But the book is much more than just the fun of jetting breathlessly from one wilderness to the next. It is a thoughtful appraisal of the terms which wilderness offers: enormous freedom on the one hand but insuperable