

BIRD GARDENING. By MAXWELL KNIGHT. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 10s. 6d.

No book devoted to the subject of supplying birds with their needs in the garden has appeared for a number of years, and the author has rightly perceived this lacuna in the vast torrent of ornithological literature and has endeavoured to fill the gap. Chapters are devoted to the provision of natural cover and nesting sites, nest boxes, bird tables, feeding, water, and pests. Special attention is given to feeding and rearing young birds and this, in my opinion, forms the most interesting and original part of the book. For good measure there are chapters on bird song, ringing and other matters not strictly within the compass of the title.

All this may suggest a completeness of treatment which is, in fact, wanting. The author rather sketches in the broad outlines, stating the problem or the general idea and then leaves it to the reader to work out the details for himself. If the reader is a gardener rather than a student of birds he should have less difficulty in following the author than if the rôles are reversed. There are no more than eight wild species listed under "Trees and shrubs for the bird garden", ranging from thorn and holly to bracken, and six cultivated species which are an uninspiring collection including privet and laurel. The author evades the issue and can hardly shelter behind the remark that nothing would be easier than to give an enormous list, but "in practice this is unnecessary". A list of a dozen or so useful and decorative wild shrubs and plants, and twice as many cultivated ones, with an indication of the sort of soil and site they prefer, obviously is necessary in a book of this sort. If any one is misguided enough to introduce bracken, however large the garden, heaven help him; but surely no gardener would, and that is where the gardener scores. The gardener will be less happy when he has to rely implicitly on the author, who writes in the chapter headed "What birds may you expect?" that "in addition to many species of ducks, grebes, moorhens, kingfishers and dippers may be found where gardens are large and where there is water . . .". The misplaced optimism of this remark is crowned by the inclusion of the firecrest in the same chapter. These species are not mentioned merely because the author aims at including all possibilities, for we look in vain for the curl bunting, for example, which on some parts of the south coast is particularly prone to nesting in gardens to the exclusion of other terrain.

These criticisms do not, however, seriously detract from the

book, if it is read with an appreciation of its discursiveness and the enthusiasm of the author. The pleasing anecdotes he tells carry the reader along at an easy pace.

The book is illustrated by pencil drawings by another "bird-gardener", Jean Armitage.

G. F.

**WILDLIFE IN ALASKA.** By A. STARKER LEOPOLD and F. FRASER DARLING. The Ronald Press, New York, \$2.75.

This is the report of an investigation into the past and present status of those land animals of Alaska which are of economic importance. It tells of the changes in animal populations which have occurred owing to man's ignorant interference and makes suggestions for enlightened wild life management in the future. The investigation was sponsored by the New York Zoological Society and the Conservation Foundation.

The title suggests a more popular appeal than the book can have. Half of it is devoted to the caribou and the introduced reindeer; the whole outlook is that of preservation for human benefit, economic, sporting, and æsthetic. Perhaps the only hope for the preservation of the larger animals now lies in this economic outlook, though I suspect that the preservation of the creatures for their own sakes was uppermost in the authors' minds.

Reindeer were introduced into Alaska from 1891 to 1902 to replace caribou and other wild animals upon which the Eskimo was dependent and which had been ruthlessly exploited.

The book tells of the prodigious growth of the reindeer population to 650,000 in 1932 and its catastrophic fall to 32,000 by 1948. It shows clearly that by far the most important factor in this decline, as well as in the later stages of the decline of the caribou, was destruction of the forests by fire and subsequent over-grazing of the reduced winter feed, the "reindeer lichens". Probably this is the most important result of these investigations, for predation by man and wolf had been blamed almost entirely; consequently conservation resources had been directed to restraint of hunting and wolf destruction. Such attempts to increase animal populations without regard to their food supply must fail, and may fail disastrously.

The authors consider also the moose population, and that of some other animals.

This is a very informative and easily read book. Clearly it has importance beyond Alaska and the particular animals which