

Book Reviews

HILL LAND MANAGEMENT

Ecology and Land Use in Upland Scotland

By D. N. McVean and J. D. Lockie. Pp. x+134+18 plates. (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, September 1969.) 40s.

DECISIONS on land use in upland Britain are usually made on economic grounds, without recognizing the opportunities or restraints afforded by the physical and biological characteristics of the land. This book is important and valuable because it draws attention to this deficiency. While clearly recognizing that social and economic criteria are likely to determine the final choice, it emphasizes that satisfactory land use—that is, one that will provide a sustained yield of a resource—must take full account of the ecology.

After an introduction which is an admirably succinct essay on the principles of resource management, the authors give a brief introduction to the principal features of the climate, geology and soils of upland Scotland and a historical account of its vegetation. In a chapter on geological and accelerated erosion of soil and peat, they emphasize that much of the potential fertility of the parts of the Highlands with the most extreme conditions has been dissipated by destructive deforestation and subsequent unwise management. If the area in its pristine state were to be opened up today using all modern knowledge wisely, a pattern of much more productive use could be established. Land use in the area should aim therefore not only at the conservation of the present resources but towards the restitution of original quality—an accumulation of capital. This situation is familiar in many of the “undeveloped” countries abroad, a term which is so often a misnomer for countries which have been rashly overdeveloped. Because the effects of its development in Scotland have been insidious rather than dramatic, they have been less readily recognized.

The book goes on to deal with the chief uses of land in upland Scotland, hill farming, forestry, sport and game animals, the conservation of habitat and of wildlife, and tourism. Fishing is unaccountably omitted, although it surely forms an integral part of the pattern. These chapters are the heart of the book. For each use there is a balanced and detailed assessment of the effect of various types of management of the various categories of hill land, the possibilities of improvement and the dangers of misuse. The results of much widely scattered research are brought together in a coherent and readable text which should be read by all concerned with upland land management.

The authors then examine the possibilities of patterns of mixed uses and to what extent these can be compatible. This leads them to recommending a Land Capability Survey and they propose categories adapted for the Scottish Highlands along the pattern of those used by the United States Soil Conservation Service.

A proper assessment of the capability of the Highlands for a variety of uses or combinations of uses is long overdue. Only when this ecological framework is firmly established will it be possible to assess how best the land can be managed without further deterioration and what the economic and social consequences would be. Is it a pipedream to believe that we might then examine the cost of restitution of the hill land to the higher degree of fertility that might be sustained under the prevailing climate and design policies directed to this end?

The quality of the text is not matched by the quality of production. The reproduction of the plates, in particular, is poor. The absence of a good map in a book which mentions so many names will be an intolerable handicap to anyone unfamiliar with the country. The book also shows internal evidence of delays in publication.

M. E. D. POORE

LONDON'S BIRDLIFE

Birds in London

By W. H. Hudson. (A Reprint with an Introduction by Richard Fitter.) Pp. xvi+339+17 plates. (David and Charles: Newton Abbot, October 1969. First published 1898.) 50s.

It is pleasant and proper that this minor classic of literature and natural history should again be available. As reading matter it has not lost its charm, and as a source of information it provides opportunity for interesting temporal comparisons. Not only can we contrast Hudson's account with our knowledge of the present birdlife of London, but he himself notes changes from still earlier times. These points are underlined in a new introduction by Richard Fitter, a writer on London's birds in our own day.

The book was originally published after Hudson had spent the summers of 1896 and 1897 in London. At that time the woodpigeon was a novelty, as contrasted with its present abundance and uncharacteristic tameness. The rook still had a foothold, but now no longer nests in the area. The carrion crow was and remains the predominant member of the family; but the jay has meanwhile established itself. In winter, the blackheaded gull had begun to frequent the urban reaches of the Thames, and even to visit the parks in severe weather; it and kindred species are now regular and numerous in the parks and elsewhere. On the waters of the parks the dabchick had lately begun to nest, but it does so no longer; now the coot and the moorhen breed there in large numbers. Most striking of all, the starling had but recently begun to roost numerously in central London, and apparently as yet only in trees; compare this with the vast flocks that now roost nightly on the National Gallery and other buildings. Hudson's assessment was that the losses up to his day exceeded the gains; since then the balance has tipped the other way.

London itself has, of course, changed enormously in the period, even apart from the huge expansion of the built-up area. Londoners too, it seems, have greatly changed in their attitude to the birds, now treated by the public as a cherished possession of the metropolis. There are also increasingly many of them who, without claiming to be ornithologists, can identify even unusual species in the field with skill and certainty. It is a strange thought that Hudson himself, living in an age when “sight records” were always suspect, was no great hand at this.

LANDSBOROUGH THOMSON

LINKS IN THE ENERGY CHAIN

Advances in Marine Biology

Edited by Sir Frederick S. Russell and Sir Maurice Yonge. Vol. 7: The Biology of Euphausiids. By John Mauchline and Leonard R. Fisher. Pp. ix+454. (Academic Press: London and New York, July 1969.) 120s; \$17.50.

THE seventh volume of this now well established series is devoted entirely to a review of the biology of one of the most important groups of Crustacea in the energy web of the oceans. The brief introduction, emphasizing the vital role of the euphausiids, is followed by two chapters on their taxonomy and distribution. A key is given to the identification of the eighty-five known species, with charts illustrating their distributions.