

## Ecological stock-taking

*A Nature Conservation Review: The Selection of Biological Sites of National Importance to Nature Conservation in Britain.* Edited by D. A. Ratcliffe. Vol. 1. Pp. xvi+401. £35. Vol. 2. Pp. viii+320. £25. (Cambridge University: London, Cambridge and New York, 1977.)

THE many demands made on land in Britain are causing a widespread and significant reduction in wildlife. The purpose of *A Nature Conservation Review* has been to take stock of the nation's species and habitats and to identify those sites of national importance, so that new measures to safeguard them shall follow. The work was begun by the Nature Conservancy in 1965 and involved appraisal of several thousand sites. The process and its results are now published in two volumes.

Volume 1, which is complete in itself, explains the *Review's* purpose and methods, lists those sites which qualify as being of national importance and assesses how far their protection would ensure the survival of our total variety

of flora and fauna. It also provides a concise and detailed examination of British habitat types and their wildlife; this makes fascinating reading and will be invaluable for general reference.

Careful consideration is given to possible shortcomings in the *Review's* scope and methodology. This is of more than intrinsic value. There is a tendency not only in industry but amongst a few planning authorities and statutory agencies (who should know better) to doubt the Nature Conservancy Council's objectivity. *A Nature Conservation Review* will reassure them.

Volume 2 comprises descriptions of the 735 key sites, outlining the features which justify their selection from a total of some 3,500 scheduled over the years as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Although many of the chosen sites contain rare species, good examples of typical habitats or wildlife communities are also included if the continued survival of the type is uncertain.

Obviously, there is room for discussion on whether the right sites were selected in every case but, accepting that new key sites may yet remain to be found and that others will change in merit, there can be little doubt that

the choice is largely correct. A pity then that, having taken ten years to publish the results of the survey, there has been some failure to amend it in the light of the greatly increased amount of information available in the mid-1970s. This is particularly evident where references occur to some rare birds whose recent status has changed notably.

It is particularly important that *A Nature Conservation Review* is read widely outside the nature conservation movement. Criticisms of details apart, it is a remarkable work which can do the NCC's standing nothing but good. It is also a means to an end: protection of the key sites must be achieved somehow and, as the NCC recognises, there is also a need to pursue more general measures for wildlife conservation throughout the countryside. At least volume one should be seen by all concerned with or by the use of land. It therefore passes comprehension that it has been priced so highly that it may fail to reach much of the readership at which it is aimed.

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## Mammals of Pakistan

*The Mammals of Pakistan.* By T. J. Roberts. Pp. 361. (Ernest Benn: London and Tonbridge, 1977.) £35.

PAKISTAN lies astride the interface between the Palaearctic and Oriental faunal regions and, in addition, its fauna includes a small element from the Ethiopian region. The country is a mosaic of diverse habitats from the high montane snowlands of the Himalaya to the hot deserts east of the Indus. These factors are reflected in the richness of the mammal fauna, which includes over 150 species of recent mammals. Recent advances in agriculture and the increase in population have led to a rapid decline in numbers of the larger species and to an increased awareness of the role of smaller animals as pests and public health problems. An assessment of the current distribution and status of the mammals of Pakistan is therefore timely.

Tom Roberts has produced a comprehensive account of the mammals of the area which will be the standard work for years to come. The volume begins with two chapters on the zoogeography and habitats, and a chapter

on the adaptation of mammals to desert survival. The remainder of the book is devoted to a systematically arranged account of the species with information on description, distribution, status and biology. Keys are provided for the identification of each taxon. Maps, plates and drawings are used extensively to supplement the text. Useful appendices on field methods, a bibliography and a gazetteer are provided, and the book is fully indexed.

There are some weaknesses in the taxonomy which reflect the current lack of knowledge of Pakistan mammals and which cannot be attributed to any failure on the part of the author. The strength of the book lies in the author's painstaking compilation of data on distribution and status and his first-hand knowledge of the biology of the mammals based on his own field experience. The detailed treatment of each species surpasses the level expected in such a comprehensive volume.

The book should be of great value to the increasing number of mammalogists involved in agricultural, medical and conservation research in the area, as well as to the naturalist interested in the fauna of Pakistan and neighbouring regions.

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