

BOOK REVIEWS

WILD ANIMALS IN NEW ZEALAND. Compiled under the direction of A. L. Poole, Director-General of Forests. Photographs by J. H. Johns, A.R.P.S. A. H. & A. W. Reed, Wellington, 1970

This book, at first glance, could be mistaken for one of those photographic glossies, now so common, apparently aimed at those who like a few books around the house but do not want to read them. On the other hand, from the imposing list of contributors it might appear that the book is intended as a sugar-coated pill to sweeten the unpleasant realities of official noxious animal control; or alternatively, a pleasantly illustrated treatise arising from our well-known propensity to stir the ecological pot more vigorously than most other countries. On the front flap, dispelling these thoughts, the authors present a more modest but worthwhile target — a straight-forward pictorial record of our wild animals "from the wapiti to the mouse". This has not been done before, and the book therefore fills a need.

There are some notable omissions from what is, after all, a pretty short list. The most obvious absentees are the seals, of which one species at least spends its life on our coasts, though it is not a forest dweller. The two European rats are also left out, although the species are quite different, and many people would be interested in comparing them with the Maori rat. And although the dust jacket promises us a mouse we do not get one. And where is the tuatara?

The bat gets rather scant treatment, considering it is our only native mammal. Admittedly there are difficulties with a creature that only comes out in the dark and spends half the year hibernating. Is this why they always look so bad tempered? The outstretched specimen on page 128 seems confused as to whether it is an opera singer or a baby learning to walk!

Technically the book, printed in Japan, could have been better done. Those who know the originals have commented that several of the photographs are poorly reproduced; certainly some are grey and flat. The printing of the text is also light and uneven in places, giving a curiously unfocused look to some pages.

The text does not match up to the photographs. There is a lucid essay at the start, by Mr Holloway, stating the pros and cons of the animal problem in terms that even the most dedicated deer stalker should be able to accept, but the remainder of the writing is less successful. Nearly all the articles on individual species seem to be précis of published Forest Service pamphlets and reports. They have a coldly official tone and a regrettable tendency towards latin names. There are some useful distribution maps.

All in all, this is Mr Johns' book, and I think he can be pleased with it. It is to his credit that nearly all the animal photos, and certainly the most striking of them, are of wild, not captive animals. Mr Johns has succeeded well in depicting animals in natural poses and surroundings, and his pictures

of the various deer species emphasize the critical differences of outline and appearance that are all the casual spotter may have time to notice. Several of the photos give striking examples of the wilder parts of New Zealand, and the colour photos on pages 85 and 103 are outstanding. Nor is there lack of humour; for example, the cavorting goats on page 93 and the misanthropic boar on page 101.

There are many who will want to own this book, and they will certainly get pleasure from it, as well as a good deal of factual information.

J. R. PUREY-CUST

MAN AGAINST NATURE. R. M. Lockley. A. H. & A. W. Reed, Wellington, 1970.

Man against Nature is one of a series of "Survival Books" associated with Anglia Television, and though published by Reed and dealing with New Zealand wildlife, is addressed to a wider public. Its appearance is timely; the Manapouri issue has shown that National Parks are not immune to retrospective legislation; exploitation and pollution have become vogue words; and the ecologist is assuming the role of witch-doctor.

It is only reasonable for those whose livelihood or whose concern makes them aware of the complexity of the inter-relations between plants and animals to approach with suspicion what must inevitably be a simplified presentation. Much of the book necessarily covers what is becoming familiar ground but at the same time there is enough meat in it to supply an overall picture of how our situation looks to someone outside our immediate problems. Not that Mr Lockley can be ranked an outsider, for his family links with both islands ensure that his personal observations are frequently spot on — in particular those glimpses of hill farming in Marlborough and of the stages of bringing in a bush farm in the Bay of Plenty. Outside his personal experience he has gone to authoritative sources of information; and though a list of references may not be considered necessary in a popular work, the list of individuals thanked in "Acknowledgements", many of whom he has accompanied in the field, is a guarantee of the range of his enquiries.

He makes the purpose of the book clear in the first couple of pages. This is how he sees us: "New Zealand is an uncrowded country of heedless people moving all the same with blind headlong eagerness to keep up with the worldly Joneses and cover the land with get-rich-quick settlers, modern concrete and metal clutter". (He could have added here perhaps that even those who clamour for the preservation of the natural beauties of the country can equally demand the full benefits of cheap power and similar amenities which cannot be supplied without the reorganization of the environment on a massive scale.) His final words make his own position clear: "... Another said 'It seems strange, coming from you, a resident of a run-down, worn-out country like Britain. What about your own ugly little black towns, open mines and indus-