

The Shamba Raiders, by Bruce Kinloch. Collins and Harvill Press, £3.50.

At a time when national parks are getting all the limelight, it does one good to read a book about the game departments which, for so long, bore almost sole responsibility for the conservation and control of African wildlife. It is also salutary to be reminded that wardens still have to protect peasant cultivators from marauding elephants, truculent buffalos and the like, and that this is not always easy; Bruce Kinloch tells a number of good stories which make this abundantly clear. It is a pity, however, that he does not also give a full account of the changing wildlife situation in the two countries about which he writes, Uganda and Tanzania, for he is unusually well equipped to do this. This book is frankly autobiographical with emphasis on his own adventures and attitudes. He does not neglect his colleagues, but he does overwork the technique of the recollected conversation – how can you remember what was said fifteen or twenty years ago? – which results in a somewhat forced presentation at times.

He and I tend to differ about conservation problems – in the most friendly way – so I don't want to emphasise disagreement. I think, however, that he is liable to oversimplify certain issues. Whether or not to cull hippos in the Queen Elizabeth Park in 1958 was a problem of very real complexity involving a decision which would reverse all previous policy in national park management in what was British (and Belgian) Africa. That the decision to cull was correctly made I have no doubt (see *Oryx*, 5, 3), but it was not one that could be taken lightly. Again, whether national parks and game departments should have been administered separately or together cannot now be of more than minor academic interest – it never was much more than that – but in the circumstances of colonial Africa in the 1950s most experienced people (business-men, academics and officials) thought that the two should be separate and that national parks could not be developed properly as a department of government. I need hardly add that co-operation between the two organisations was never in question, though even the most unlikely take-over bids can cause embarrassment.

RENNIE BERE

Crocodiles, their Natural History, Folklore and Conservation, by C.A.W. Guggisberg. David and Charles, £2.75.

The publication of this second important work on crocodiles in the last year or so is a welcome sign of the increased interest in these magnificent reptiles. To some extent it is orientated towards the Nile crocodile, a species of which the author has had many years of first-hand experience in the wild. Nevertheless, he gives a good survey of the twenty or more other living crocodilians, weaving their natural history into a comprehensive pattern of crocodile life. He also describes some of the major features of the crocodilian body, such as the remarkable modifications of the nose and palate which enable the reptile to breathe while holding its prey under water, and reviews the evolutionary history of the group. Incidentally, it seems less certain now that the ancestors of crocodiles were bipedal as most of us were brought up to believe.

This is an excellent account of the subject, covering in a very readable style all those topics of principal interest to the naturalist. The descriptions of daily life, nesting, reproduction and other aspects of life-history are particularly valuable and the author does justice to the

important work of Hugh Cott and other modern authorities. Folklore and crocodile-worship are included, and stories of man-eating crocodiles can be read in proper perspective against the far more numerous crocodile-killing activities of men. Maternal care, however, which must be more highly developed in crocodiles than in any other reptiles, seems to be more prolonged than he suggests; there is recent evidence that the female Nile crocodile guards her babies for several weeks, or even longer, after hatching.

Conservationists will appreciate the final chapter which emphasises the threatened state of crocodiles today, especially in countries of uncertain political stability, and discusses suitable measures for protection and rational exploitation. Guggisberg ends on a sympathetic note of guarded optimism and looks forward to the day when 'man's regard for his fellow creatures may possibly have progressed to a point where crocodile handbags, snakeskin shoes and leopard coats will generally be considered as symbols of barbarity and bad taste'.

A. D'A. BELLAIRS

The Birds of Britain and Europe, by Hermann Heinzel, Richard Fitter and John Parslow. Collins £1.50.

Its title expanded by 'with North Africa and the Middle East', and well described as the 'Complete Pocket Bird Book', the scope of this comprehensive, handy, pocket guide ranges in fact even more extensively, from Russia to the Atlantic Islands and from the Sahara to the North Pole.

Nowadays, in an endeavour to record maximum essential information in the minimum of space, originality and ingenuity are outstanding features of field guides on zoological and botanical subjects. Avoiding unnecessary space-consuming repetition has inevitably led to increasing use of symbols and reference letters – here described as a 'coded guide'. Their use has made possible a remarkable reduction in the text without seriously interfering with what one needs to know, but it would have greatly simplified speedy interpretation if the elaborate system of reference symbols and letters, the explanation of the marginal maps and their coloration, and the diverse shading indicated on the 240 maplets of Great Britain and Ireland, could all have been given for ready reference on a card; unfortunately, on the inside covers there is no space for a slip-in to take such a card. But this guide's lay-out, its wealth of information, and the beautiful illustrations in colour of every species (excepting some obscure vagrants) – named popularly and scientifically – well deserves unqualified praise. Impossible to speak too highly of its presentation and contents; certainly it is the best book of its kind.

Satisfactory identification being the prime object, the margins of the Contents pages show, minutely though clearly, a representative in colour of each bird family; especially useful, also in colour, is the Topography of a Bird. Hermann Heinzel's wonderful illustrations portray, as necessary, seasonal, sex and juvenile plumage variations, together with flight and other conspicuous behavioural patterns; concise and lucid, too, is the dissertation on pertinent characteristics such as size – in inches and centimetres – shape (including bill, wings and feet), colour, voice and behaviour, together with reference to habitat.

Artist Heinzel, author Fitter and map-compiler Parslow are all to be congratulated on a handbook of exceptional excellence.

C.R.S. PITMAN