

Book Reviews

Darwin's Islands: A Natural History of the Galapagos, by Ian Thornton. Natural History Press, New York, \$7.95.

The tourist industry has been growing rapidly in the Galapagos: in 1969 there were approximately 200 visitors, in 1973, up to 6,000 are expected. Scientific expeditions, too, have increased notably since the establishment in 1960 of the Charles Darwin Research Station on Santa Cruz Island. Yet Dr Thornton's book is the first attempt to provide the layman, the interested naturalist, and the professional scientist with an overview of and introduction to the natural history of this fascinating archipelago. On the whole, I think he has succeeded, and he has certainly done his homework. Most of the information comes directly from the scientific literature, but the writing is generally straightforward, lucid, and uncomplicated, with an extensive bibliography for each chapter.

After introductory chapters on the historical setting and a general description of the islands, separate chapters are devoted to sea birds, plants and insects, reptiles, giant tortoises, land birds, Darwin's finches, and native mammals. Unfortunately, marine biology is almost totally ignored, but this reflects the lack of studies. Three chapters discuss the special problems of dispersal, establishment and evolution on true oceanic islands as compared to continental islands and continents in general. The final chapter concerns the current threats, posed mainly by a variety of introduced mammals.

Though published in 1971, the book is up to date only until 1968. Also, being based largely on the scientific literature through 1969, it repeats most of the errors contained in that literature, most of which, except for a few groups of organisms (e.g. sea birds, Darwin's finches, some plant genera), is primarily anecdotal and full of misconceptions. This could have been avoided if the manuscript had been reviewed by the Darwin Station staff and/or by a few of the scientists who have recently completed extensive studies in the islands. The final chapter, in particular, suffers from the lack of review: the author is apparently unaware that since August 1968, an Ecuadorian Galapagos National Park Service has been in operation and that the efforts of this Service and the Darwin Station resulted in many positive conservation gains in 1969 and 1970. For example, widespread control programmes were established for many feral mammal populations and the islands' inhabitants have accepted these; most races of the giant tortoises can be and are being preserved by breeding, raising and restocking programmes; and tourism is being rather strictly controlled by the combined efforts of the Park Service, the Darwin Station, and the industry itself.

CRAIG MACFARLAND

Flora of the Galapagos Islands, by Ira L. Wiggins and Duncan M. Porter. Oxford University Press, £17.50.

Hitherto all botanists, and indeed all naturalists, visiting the Galapagos have felt acutely the need for some means of identifying the plants there. Now Dr Wiggins together with Dr Porter, who replaced the late Yale Dawson as co-author, have produced, as a by-product of the 1964 scientific expedition, a magnificent volume which amply supplies the need. Indeed the only criticism that could be made is that its 998 pages and 96 colour illustrations (from photographs) make it so heavy and bulky that it will be hard to pack into one's luggage for the next visit, let alone use it in the field.

After an introduction that covers general matters, such as physiography,