

Book Reviews

The Carnivores of West Africa, by D. R. Rosevear. British Museum (Natural History), £18.50.

This comprehensive study of West African carnivores, the first available for students of the mammal fauna of this vast region, is a worthy successor to the author's earlier monographs on the bats and rodents, and an equally valuable tool, for systematists and field naturalists alike, for many years to come.

A useful general introduction covers the classification, structure and way of life of carnivores, and the keys to identification of the various taxa are clear and practical. The systematic section, occupying the bulk of the book, is well set out with a synonymy for each species and sections dealing with distribution (the absence of distribution maps is a matter for regret), description (with a special section for the skull and dentition), habits, and taxonomy. A new genet species, *Genetta bini*, is described and two new subspecies of *Herpestes ichneumon*. Formal treatment of subspecies is rather inconsistent, but the author's taxonomic outlook is refreshingly modern and sensible. A very useful glossary of terms is appended, as well as notes on vegetation in the area covered, and a comprehensive bibliography and index; the use of a different type for scientific names would have made the last easier to use. Rita Parsons's twelve colour plates are exquisite, the line drawings of skulls clear and useful, although the method of shading is not always artistically pleasing. The generally high standard of production and absence of typographical errors is notable and praiseworthy.

In summary this is a most valuable work, a veritable mine of information, for which the author deserves great credit, and an essential addition to the libraries of both institutions and specialists in the field of African mammalogy. It is greatly to be hoped that the series will eventually be completed by treatment of the remaining groups of West African terrestrial mammals.

D. L. HARRISON

Portraits in the Wild, by Cynthia Ross. Hamish Hamilton, £5.95.

The author sets out to provide a synoptic and factually accurate account of what is currently known about the behaviour of fifteen common species of large animals in East Africa. Our knowledge in this field has increased dramatically within the last ten years, thanks to an unprecedented influx of scientists and funds for a wide range of ethological studies, many of which have reached high standards. The large quantity of information now available is scattered, however, and the task of digesting and collating it requires someone who is not only a practising ethologist, with first-hand knowledge of the subject, but also a professional writer able to handle unwieldy masses of facts and opinions with adroitness and assurance. Miss Ross has both these attributes and has produced an uncommonly good book, authoritative and well written, which describes the main behavioural characteristics of each species in some detail, and also in such a way as to deepen and reinforce one's feeling for the animal as a fellow creature whose life, however much it differs, is still shaped by many of the same compulsions as our own. The marvellous variety, complexity and subtlety of the behavioural mechanisms which link animals to one another and to their environment, must strike every reader, and leave him looking forward eagerly to the next opportunity of recognising such behaviour in the field for himself, helped by the excellent photographs selected for this purpose.

For an old-fashioned naturalist, the fact that over 90 per cent of the extensive bibliography is post-1960 is a humbling reminder of how little systematic information had been recorded before the advent of the ethologists with their modern