

The author, the editors and the publishers are entitled to look with satisfaction at this fifty-second volume of the *New Naturalist* which its readers will greatly enjoy.

CYRIL HURCOMB

**The Mammals of Botswana, by Reay H.N.Smithers.** National Museums of Rhodesia, £10.50 including postage.

**Libyan Mammals, by Ernst Hufnagl.** Oleander Press, £4.

Both these volumes are comprehensive but concise reference works on the mammals of a single African country: comprehensive in that all species of mammals are included, and all aspects from identification and distribution to behaviour and ecology mentioned; concise in organizing this information in a systematic and retrievable way in a single, manageable volume. Beyond that they differ considerably.

The mammals of Botswana was almost a virgin field of study when Reay Smithers set out in 1964 on a five-year programme of field work, assisted by teams from the Smithsonian Institution, Washington. The result is a masterly report of a standard that has rarely been achieved even in countries with a long history of study. The introduction includes a valuable account of the habitats throughout the country, ranging from the extremes of the Kalahari Desert to the vast swamps of the Okavango Delta; the description of habitat for each species in the systematic section is particularly informative. There are keys for identification throughout and, for each species, paragraphs on taxonomy, distribution, habitat, habits, food, breeding and measurements. A map for each species showing, by quarter degree squares, the present (or very recent) distribution is a particularly valuable feature, only slightly marred by the difficulty, in the case of some of the larger mammals with diminishing ranges, of determining what period of time the map covers. Many species such as the giraffe and tsessebe have disappeared from the southern half of the country, but the northern part still carries a particularly rich fauna of large mammals. Non-original material is well documented. How often does one read how the ratel follows the honey-guide to the bees' nest – but how seldom is one referred, as here, to a source where the evidence for this remarkable behaviour is detailed?

The Libyan volume is much less ambitious, less detailed and less original. Libya has the most continuous record of fossil mammals of any African country and an introductory chapter on these is provided by Dr R.J.G.Savage. A further chapter, by Olwen Brogan, deals with the remarkable trade in large mammals from Libya to the arenas of ancient Rome – on a scale that must surely have brought some of them close to extinction, although the elephant seems to be the only one that was totally lost to North Africa at that time. The systematic section is somewhat erratic in treatment and quality. The accounts of distribution are useful, although there are no species maps. The identification keys have been designed very much for the lay reader – they will fail to give a critical identification of some of the smaller species and, in the case of the larger ones, are rather superfluous in view of the illustrations. Most species are illustrated by either a monochrome photograph or a line drawing – the latter rather crude but nevertheless helpful. In the absence of any comparable work for other parts of North Africa this volume will serve a useful purpose beyond the immediate boundaries of Libya.

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