

seasonal (winter/summer) variations such as occur in the Alps. The daily frost-thaw alternation on equatorial heights results in rapid soil formation; plants and soil are daily subjected to temperature changes comparable to those that occur once a year on temperate mountains. Animals can avoid the nightly cold by burrowing or hiding among the leaf frills of giant groundsel, and even plants adapt to escape the worst effects of the climate. Plants that adopt the lowly rosette habit, also seen in the Arctic and the Alps, are more numerous than the giant (megaphytic) forms of groundsel or lobelia for which these heights are famous, and the rosette habit is shown to be a simple adaptation to cold, abandoned as soon as the plant is taken to a warmer place. But no explanation is advanced for the occurrence of the bizarre and grotesque giant groundsel and lobelias.

The most interesting animal communities are the abundant rock hyrax and rats. Here the author draws some rather far-reaching conclusions about population control on what appears to be tenuous evidence. Birds are among the main predators of these animals and here the book is decidedly weak. It is suggested that the lammergeier *Gypaëtus barbatus* is resident and eats hyrax, but without a shred of real evidence.

The book is a mine of detailed information and a must for anyone interested in East African mountains. It is written by a specialist for specialists and a layman would find it unreadable, yet it is a book which many people may want to buy in the hope that it will reveal to them the natural secrets of Mt Kenya. If scientists wish to interest a wider public they should learn to write clearly and simply about their supremely interesting findings.

LESLIE BROWN

The Past and Present Distribution of Some African Ungulates,
by **Jasmine Sidney.** Transactions of the Zoological Society of
London, Vol. 30, £6.

This fact-finding survey of certain elements of the African fauna – inspired and financed mainly by the Colonial Office and with assistance from the Department of Technical Co-operation – is based on data collected in the 1950s, during which time ‘there has been a pronounced acceleration in the decline in game numbers and game areas’; the situation has deteriorated still more in recent years. Miss Sidney summarises ten points to account for this decline, and stresses that ‘only prompt action can save a valuable national resource from disappearing’; her advocacy of game-farming to provide protein for indigenous populations, as well as for perpetuating species, is both timely and practical. It is unfortunate that it has not been possible to include all African ungulates in this survey, which is, nevertheless, the most comprehensive and authoritative treatise ever to have been compiled on the subject. Many years of meticulous study and research are supplemented by two years’ field experience in East, Central and Southern Africa, in 1958-59. The Continent is dealt with exhaustively, territory by territory; wholly or partially discussed, are six families, of which the extensive family Bovidae is divided into three sub-families, each of these further sub-divided into their relevant generic groups; the frequent distribution maps are particularly useful. The author is to be congratulated on this admirable treatise which constitutes a most valuable and informative work of reference.

C. R. S. PITMAN

Poisonous Snakes of Southern Africa and the Treatment of Snakebite by **John Visser.** Howard Timmins, 45s.

The primary purpose of this authoritative work, sponsored by the Cape of Good Hope Faculty of the College of General Practitioners, is the ready recognition of those Southern African poisonous snakes which endanger human life, combined with expert advice on the effects and treatment of snakebite. It is of such