

Capybaras, reproduced from Brehm's *Thierleben* of 1877 in Lynn Barber's book. In the mid-19th-century domestication of wildlife for food was widely discussed and practised, and capybaras were recommended as 'converting into wholesome nutriment vegetable substances which are turned to no account.' Today, experiments in domesticating these large South American rodents are again being tried



naturalists who were interested in invertebrates still followed Linnaeus in classifying them all as either insects or worms. If Paley had not stimulated so much research and general interest, in the way Lynn Barber so readably describes, the followers of White might have remained a tiny sect until the end of the century, and the heyday might have been postponed until our own day.

RICHARD FITTER

**The Secrets of the Blind Dolphins, by Giorgi Pilleri. Sind Wildlife Management Board, \$25.**

The conclusions drawn at the end of this book are pre-empted in an early chapter in which Professor Pilleri states: 'There can be no doubt that this species is in serious danger of becoming extinct, even if its disappearance will be of little concern to our modern so aptly named throw-away society.' However, by unravelling and exposing hitherto unknown facts about these delightful mammals and writing this book, he clearly indicates why we should be concerned, and leaves the reader feeling that the earth will be a sadder place if the Indus river dolphin *Platanista indi* becomes extinct.

Professor Pilleri points out that man is the dolphin's only enemy. Enormous barrages placed across the Indus have changed the river's environment, and the once large dolphin populations south of the barrage at Sukkur have completely disappeared. Formerly united populations have been split and the isolated dolphins can no longer migrate in search of food and/or mates. The few remaining dolphins are being exploited by the Bhutan fishermen, and to avoid this threat the author wisely proposes on-the-spot education of the fishermen and their conversion from hunters to wardens.

The book is copiously illustrated. In addition to entertaining and at times humorous descriptions of his expedition to capture specimens Professor Pilleri presents with exceptional clarity the scientific findings of his experiments with two dolphins in captivity. I highly recommend this easy-to-read book by one of the world's acknowledged authorities on cetaceans.

HORACE DOBBS

**Whales, by W. Nigel Bonner. Blandford, £10.95.**

How refreshing to find a thoroughly reliable and readable book on whales! Nigel Bonner uses a clear scientific approach to describe the essential mechanisms by which these mammals have become adapted to life in the sea.

Opening with an outline of the environment which they inhabit, and a brief description of each species, he goes on to describe the details of the structures and functions of the whales' bodies. The anatomical and physical requirements for swimming and diving to great depths, the role of sensory perception and the importance of sound production and reception, food preferences and feeding mechanisms are all dealt with in an admirable manner. Bonner writes as someone who knows his subject well and at first hand, and he brings into his descriptions an analytical and physical approach which is stimulating to the enquiring reader.

Chapters on reproduction, the whale brain and intelligence involve subjects which are in some ways more contentious because of the current debate over the status of the whale stocks and the ethics of hunting these animals. Bonner makes his own position