



Book Reviews

The Natural History of Deer by Rory Putman.
Published by Christopher Helm, London at £14.95

This certainly is a comprehensive book on deer, covering 40 species worldwide, and drawing on a wealth of data both from Britain and abroad. Aimed at the more serious biologist, this book is still of great value to the amateur in that it is extremely readable and not unnecessarily complicated.

The book goes from classification to conservation and from general biology to ecology and behaviour, covering any topic you should wish to discuss *en route*. An ecological bias is evident, but all sections are covered more than adequately. The text contains numerous examples to illustrate the points being made, drawn extensively from the author's own work in the New Forest, but also from locations as far afield as India and North America. These examples are complemented by excellent diagrams, tables and pen and ink drawings. Additionally, a selection of photographs introduce the reader to just some of the topics being discussed.

The author makes an interesting ecological point by proceeding to classify Cervidae on the basis of their feeding styles, from comparatively non-selective grazers to highly selective browsers. This shows the great variety within this family, a fact also illustrated by the numerous social and reproductive strategies described.

Personally, I found the last section of this book of particular interest, as it deals with the relationship between deer and man. Man has exploited these beautiful animals for centuries, not only as a food source, but also for sport, medicinal and ornamental purposes. Hence, the distribution of certain species has been heavily influenced by human introductions. In Britain, this is illustrated by the intentional introduction of the fallow deer for food by the Normans, and the quite unintentional introduction of the muntjac, via its escape from private collections.

Finally, the future management of deer is discussed, in an attempt to combine exploitation, control and conservation - a task much more difficult in reality than it may seem on paper, and treated in a extremely practical way by the author.

This book is another in the highly successful Mammal Series, following in the footsteps of such animals as antelopes, badgers, otters and squirrels. It really is excellent value, whether, as Rory Putman would no doubt put it, the reader wishes to graze the whole lot at one sitting, or simply take it down from the bookshelf for an occasional browse!

Ann Hanson

Rabbits and Hares by Anne McBride.
Published by Whittet Books, London. 1988 £5.95

Eat your heart out Richard Adams. Fiction is not nearly as intriguing as the facts and Anne McBride's Rabbits and Hares is crammed with them. It is informative and readable with a broad introduction to all sorts of topics related to our native lagomorphs.

The basic biological facts are succinctly and clearly covered, spiced with snippets drawn from behavioural studies, historical records and mythology which make for very entertaining reading. I was surprised to learn that hares involved in boxing matches were not rival males but that the combatants consist of a female fending off the advances of an amorous male. Did you know that a male rabbit may try and entice a prospective mate by zapping her with a jet of urine? (It makes a change from roses I suppose!)

As well as the lighter anecdotes, Anne McBride tackles issues such as ecology related to the landscape, control and myxomatosis, conservation and hunting - and even the evolutionary strategies behind maternal 'absenteeism' behaviour. Again balanced accounts with illuminating examples.

She introduces the layman to lagomorph classification and general taxonomy, which is very well described. However, she falls into her own trap, when the 'blue hare' *Lepidus timidus* becomes the 'mountain hare' (in the distribution maps on page 25), after she had carefully specified the common name of blue hare for the species at the beginning of the text. It's a shame because I do agree that vernaculars are much easier to deal with.

Guy Troughton has done a smashing job with the illustrations, although some of the cartoons were not to my taste.

To sum up - buy it, its a fascinating read.

Angie Hibbert

Shrews of the British Isles by Sara Churchfield.
Shire Natural History Series No 30 (1988) pp24 £1.25

Sara Churchfield has written a most authoritative and readable monograph. After a general introduction to the Soricidae family we are brought up to date on distribution, feeding habits, activity patterns, breeding population cycles and survival rates winding up with a chapter on 'Shrews and Man'. The important point is made that little is known about such fascinating small mammals. In other words shrews are a subject which require much more field work.

There are good, clear tables. One gives a range of weights with the comparative sizes of four shrew species (something which was omitted from The Handbook of British Mammals). Although a maximum weight of 18g for *Neomys fodiens* would have been more accurate than the somewhat conservative 16g in the table. Another table showing the relative proportions of the different prey types taken by the common, pigmy and water shrews is particularly well presented.

Last, but by no means least, are the colour photographs; the book is worth buying for these alone.

Gordon L. Woodroffe