

South African Mammals: A Short Manual for the Use of Field Naturalists, Sportsmen, and Travellers. By A. Haagner. Pp. xx+248. (London: H. F. and G. Witherby; Capetown: T. Maskew Miller, 1920.) 20s. net.

THERE is no lack of works on the subject of African mammals. Some of them are of a purely sporting character; others appeal more particularly to the naturalist; Mr. Haagner's book on South African mammals claims to be a short manual for the use of field naturalists, sportsmen, and travellers.

No other country of equal size possesses so large and so varied a mammalian fauna as South Africa, and it is quite a feat to describe all the species occurring there in so short a compass, and to illustrate the text with more than 140 photographic reproductions. Some of the latter no doubt might, with advantage, have been omitted, as they give but a poor idea of the animals alluded to, and this would have left a little more room for the text. Many of the illustrations, however, are good, particularly those of the zebras.

The author, as he says in his introduction, has purposely adopted a more or less "note-book" style, and this has resulted sometimes in rather loose and inadequate descriptions. For example, all the information he can give us about the small grey mongoose is that it is a small edition of the grey mongoose, and about the same size as the slender mongoose. All naturalists must disapprove of the actions of what Mr. Haagner justly styles "game-butchers." It is therefore all the more surprising that he should reproduce as a frontispiece to his book a photograph of a heap of skulls, referred to as the hunting trophies of the "good old days."

As we should expect, the book appeals more directly to managers of zoological gardens and to dealers in livestock. The author's unsuccessful experiences in endeavouring to rear the young of Cape hunting-dogs are shared by many others. Only the Dublin Gardens have been more fortunate in their efforts, and have contrived to breed and rear the pups.

Letters to the Editor.

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Communism and Science.

IN view of the article on "The Proletarianisation of Science in Russia" in NATURE of September 1, the following extracts from a letter I have just received from a well-known Russian professor of chemistry may be of interest. I have omitted personal references and a few other matters. J. W. MELLOR.

Pottery Laboratory, Stoke-on-Trent,
September 5.

"You doubtless know the old adage, 'Primo vivere, deinde philosophari.' I do this last, but the first part, 'vivere,' is more than uncertain for us who have the

misfortune to be a little civilised, as one never knows what our wild, wild taskmasters are going to do next. The higher schools of Petrograd are under the control of a former apprentice of the dockyards of Cronstadt, who has learned to talk glibly and to sign his name with an appropriate flourish. He has not the remotest notions as to what is a seat of high learning; but that does not trouble him in the least, he just governs according to his lights, and actually does his best to destroy all culture, all real science, in our institutes. It is just the same everywhere, and the results are glaringly apparent in the utter failure of crops in the east and south of Russia, due not so much to exceptional climatic causes as to the countless requisitions of 'surplus' wheat, 'surplus' bullocks and horses, and other kindred measures of the reigning proletariat. The population of some twenty provinces, which supplied once upon a time almost all Russia with bread and exported thousands of tons of wheat to foreign lands, is now leaving their houses and fleeing to the east, the north, and the west of Russia, where there is still something to eat; they spread desolation wider and wider—also cholera and other diseases; tens of thousands perish daily. Almost nothing is left in the devastated provinces; they must now be colonised anew. We are fortunate for the nonce in being sufficiently far from these places, but the outlook for us is anything but reassuring.

"Up to now we receive a 'ration of scientists,' which during 1920 was comparatively good, but is now reduced to the following items, received, for instance, in June:—14 lb. of bread (made principally out of soya beans); 11 lb. of soya beans (it is not generally known that they contain poisonous constituents, and many were the cases of poisoning); 19 lb. of herrings; 4 lb. of tallow (the first fatty substance received since February); 9 lb. of wheat (we eat it boiled in the form of gruel); 3 lb. of macaroni made out of soya beans; 1 lb. of salt; 1½ lb. of sugar; 3 lb. of lean pork—bones and hide, no lard, and very little meat; ¼ lb. of tea (surrogat); ¾ lb. of tobacco; some matches; and 1 lb. of washing soda (there is no soap). During the same month I received—only a few days ago—as salary for my lectures, etc., the stately sum of 21,000 roubles; but as bread costs about 4000 roubles and butter 30,000 roubles per lb., this sum is the equivalent of 5 lb. of bread, or some 20 kopeks (=5d.) of pre-war days. You will thus appreciate the munificence of my salary; the meanest mechanic or plumber gets from 250,000 to 500,000 roubles and more monthly, and it is nothing unusual to pay 1 lb. of bread or 5000 roubles for one hour of manual work, whereas I, as a full-fledged professor and doctor of chemistry, receive for one hour of lecture 450 roubles. Consequently, to nourish the members of the family (I have, fortunately, neither wife nor children, but live with my old mother), I work in kitchen-gardens, sell the few things that are still left, etc. The prices for a new suit range up to 1,000,000 roubles; a pair of old high boots, which I could not wear and which cost originally some fifteen years ago 14 roubles, fetches now 700,000 roubles, as boots are very scarce; for a shirt you get 2 lb. of butter. During the first six months of 1921 my mother and I have eaten different foods to the value of about 6,000,000 roubles.

"Needless to say that, in spite of these millions, we are now paupers in the strict sense of the word. All my savings, made little by little during more than twenty-five years of professorship, were placed in State loans and annulled in 1917; our small landed estate, not far from Petrograd was taken from us in 1918, and is now completely devastated, all the woods having been cut. It would be now utterly impos-