

NATURE LOVER AND FISHERMAN

Travelling Naturalist

By Anthony Buxton. Pp. 224 + 31 plates. (London and Glasgow: Wm. Collins, Sons and Co., Ltd., 1948.) 10s. 6d. net.

A NEW book by Anthony Buxton is something very special for those who love Nature. He is a shrewd and careful observer, and he writes in charming, simple English prose. In this, his latest book, there is literally not one dull sentence from the beginning to the end. He permits himself a sly dig at naturalists who use long and learned words: he certainly steers clear of them himself.

The book takes us from Norfolk and Essex, Hampshire and Yorkshire, to Scotland, where he fishes the Loch of the Shieling of Angus with skill and profit. We are then taken over the sea on his magic carpet to foreign lands, and with him watch the izzard basking in the autumn sun on the high rocky ridges of the Pyrenees and, still farther afield, watch the snow partridge swing over the snowy slopes of the Caucasus at a height of 10,000 ft. above the sea. With him, we fish rivers in Norway and share his skill in hooking giant sea trout on the lightest of light tackle, and are scarce able to keep pace with him as he flies along the rocky bank of some swift-flowing, green-tinted torrent, or hurls himself, waders and all, into the icy water, to float downstream like one of his flies in order to avoid the arch of a bridge toward which a great sea trout at the end of his line is hurrying him. One of the most attractive things in an attractive book is the author's obvious joy in living. His affection and understanding for the wild creatures which he describes so well are obvious, and he deplures the effects of the prolonged Arctic spell of 1947 on wild life. His home county of Norfolk suffered as severely as any district, and the population of bearded tits has been almost wiped out. He mentions the toll taken of redwings, and this reminds me that for the first time I saw not a single redwing last winter or spring in the Isle of Skye, where numbers are usually to be seen during April on their migration to Iceland.

The story (page 62) of izzard jumping over a man's back recalls the story of a small herd of red deer in the Cuillin of Skye which were descending a steep pass when two climbers came in sight of them. The deer came straight on, and the climbers threw themselves flat on the rock, each member of the herd jumping over them on its headlong downhill rush. Anthony Buxton found that the dotterel was a tame bird, and mentions that he might perhaps have stroked it had he so desired (p. 153). It is true that some dotterel are without fear of human beings. I think the most remarkable experience I ever had was when a dotterel on the nest rose from its eggs, ran over to where I was sitting a few feet away, caught a crane fly on my clothes, then looked at me in a knowing way before hurrying back to the precious eggs. His story (p. 187) of marsh harrier chicks killing and eating their younger brothers and sisters reminds me of the prolonged and bitter attacks made by one golden eagle on the other in the eyrie, and of another eyrie which I visited where one eagle lay dead and the other, a particularly truculent bird, although still in the downy stage, attempted to attack the human intruder.

The author (p. 195) writes needed words of protest about the bird photographer who is too much in a

hurry with his hide, or who enters his hide without taking a companion with him, in order to see him in and, at the end of his watch, to see him out. Birds with very few exceptions cannot count, and when two people go to a hide and one leaves it the bird does not realize that the other has been left behind. As he says, the interest of the birds should come first, that of the photographer second. I foresee many editions of this book, which is an oasis of sanity in the desert of a mad world.

SETON GORDON

ORGANIC SUBSTANCES USED IN INORGANIC ANALYSIS

Organic Analytical Reagents

By Prof. Frank J. Welcher. Vol. 1. Pp. xv + 442. 44s. net. Vol. 2. Pp. xi + 530. 40s. net. (New York: D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc.; London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1947.)

THESE two volumes form part of a work which when complete should be a most useful compilation. The author's aim has been to collect information from the literature describing the uses of all organic substances in inorganic analysis. The term "analytical reagent" in the title is thus taken to include all incidental uses of organic compounds, if only, for example, as solvents in an extraction, a precipitation or a colour test. On the other hand, the operations listed are, in fact, all for the detection or determination of inorganic atoms and radicals (with the exception of tests for acetates, cyanides and cyanates) and applications to the detection or determination of organic compounds are not considered, although the title gives no indication of this.

Introductory chapters in the first volume give a useful résumé of the theory of valency with special reference to co-ordination and chelate compounds and a discussion of the effect of structure on solubility. The main part of the work is then arranged according to a rational classification of the organic compounds listed, all the various applications being included under each. Laboratory methods for preparing the reagents are given and the analytical procedures are described with sufficient working details. No attempt is made at a critical selection of the methods given, the author's aim being to include everything so that the reader may be free, either to ignore, or to attempt the improvement of, any imperfect methods described. References to the literature are given in every instance, though these cannot always be exhaustive.

From the point of view of the practical analyst using these volumes to find an analytical method for a particular substance an arrangement under analytical headings might have been more convenient. That actually adopted does, however, permit of a general discussion of the uses of any group of substances or widely used reagent, and the practical usefulness of the book must depend on the indexing. Each volume is provided with two indexes, one of organic reagents and one of analytical uses. In the latter, under each analytical problem the various organic compounds are listed alphabetically with references to the body of the work. It may be presumed that collective indexes of all the volumes will be provided when the work is complete.

These volumes are excellently printed and produced, and analysts will find in them a mine of useful information and of references to the literature.

G. M. BENNETT