

given to individual skins and skulls because this was the "only means of emphasizing the extent of the individual variations in colour, shape of skull or teeth to which the species or local races are liable". This is fully justified by the careful analysis of the subspecific characters of each race, and zoologists will heartily agree with the author's statement that "realisation of this [variation] is particularly called for in view of the prevalent tendency to regard as deserving of nominal distinction perhaps single specimens differing from one another in trivial characters if inhabiting different localities".

The catalogue starts with a discussion of the characters and subdivisions of the family Felidae and then deals with each species and subspecies, going fully into the geographical distribution, diagnosis, and skin and skull characters, with numerous tables of measurements and some figures of skulls. The specimens in the collection of the British Museum (Natural History) are listed at the end of each article; but the book is more than a catalogue, for the subspecies not represented in the collections are discussed as fully as the others.

Any species of animal occupying a very extensive range of territory that includes many different kinds of habitat inevitably becomes differentiated into subspecies, and this is well shown by the many races of *Felis lybica* the range of which covers part of southern Europe, the whole of Africa except the thickly forested area, and extends through Arabia and Palestine to northern India and Turkestan. Pocock recognizes twenty-five named subspecies of this cat, and describes three other forms that he regards as separable from the others, though he does not venture to name them. The same phenomenon is illustrated on a smaller scale by *F. chaus* with eight subspecies, and by *F. silvestris* with seven.

A very interesting and unusual section treats of *F. catus*, the domestic cat, a composite form of which the European representatives at least owe their origin to the crossing of two wild species, *F. silvestris* and *F. lybica*. This is a subject to which Pocock had devoted much study and on which he had previously published papers. The tabby pattern of the domestic cat is dimorphic: in the form *torquata*, the 'striped tabby', the pattern consists of comparatively narrow vertical stripes on the sides of the body; in the typical *catus* form, the 'blotched tabby', the broad stripes on the sides show a looped or spiral arrangement and three dorsal stripes run to the root of the tail. The two forms are individually variable; but one or the other can usually be detected in the majority of domestic cats, though the stripes on the body may be entirely suppressed in the *torquata* phase which, Pocock considers, is less stable than the *catus* phase. Pocock does not agree with Schwarz's suggestion that the name *F. catus* should be extended to include the two wild species *F. silvestris* and *F. lybica* as well as all the domestic breeds, because, while admitting the obvious kinship between the last two, he finds no evidence that they intergrade in the wild state. He gives it as his opinion that the *torquata* form of the domestic cat originates from the hybridization of *F. silvestris* and *F. lybica*, and that the *catus* form arose as a mutation from *torquata*. But the whole question of the domestic races is complicated by the widespread occurrence of feral animals that have interbred with the various subspecies of one or the other of the supposed parent species, and perhaps with others; the author discusses these at some length and gives a tolerably full

description of feral specimens from all parts of the world.

It is a matter for regret that Pocock did not live to finish his great work or to receive the congratulations of his friends on this valuable instalment. The book is uniform with the new style of Museum catalogues which in format and typography leave nothing to be desired.

## THE GREENSHANK

### The Greenshank

By Desmond Nethersole-Thompson. (New Naturalist Series.) Pp. xii+244+28 plates. (London and Glasgow: Wm. Collins, Sons and Co., Ltd., 1951.) 15s. net.

THIS is a remarkable book, and could have been written by no other person than Mr. Desmond Nethersole-Thompson, who has studied the greenshank more closely than any other naturalist. The secret of the book's success is revealed on p. 98: "Year after year, from late March onwards, our whole lives [the author here refers to his wife, who is at least as skilled an observer as he is] were dedicated to the greenshanks". The author has the good fortune to live in greenshank country, and, as he shows in his book, he has a great love for this bird of the wonderful courtship flight and glorious song. Mr. Nethersole-Thompson is *par excellence* a field naturalist, and many of his observations are entirely new. He is also a good writer, and some of his passages describing the greenshank in its Highland home will linger in one's memory. The reader follows the fortunes of the greenshank from the arrival of the male (who precedes the female at the nesting grounds) through the courting period, and then watches with the author the hatching of the young, the disposal of the egg-shells, and the broods in the pine forests until they fly south in late summer.

A good deal of the book is naturally devoted to the greenshank's song. This is one of the most remarkable—one might perhaps say the most remarkable—of British bird songs. I can bear out the author when he says that the singing bird sometimes flies so high in song that he enters the cloud canopy. One has to watch the greenshank long and closely to hear the full song, which continues without pause minute after minute, the singer all the time flying high in the air, in wide circles, at his topmost speed. It is one of the songs that a great lover and student of birds, Viscount Grey of Fallodon, had long wished to hear and never heard.

There are so many good things in this book that I find it hard to single out any particular part of it for special praise. I can truly say that, as the greenshank has always been a close friend of mine, I should be critical of any book on this species, and it is therefore my tribute that I have nothing but praise for one of the outstanding volumes in the "New Naturalist" series. No bird lover, or bird student, can afford to be without this book, which is superbly illustrated from the photographs taken by a number of leading Nature photographers, who have often been helped by the author. It was, by the way, through his help that Dr. Ludwig Koch was able to obtain recordings of the greenshank's song, and of the hatching calls at the nest, made by parents and young.

SETON GORDON