

Seals, monkeys, apes and rabbit



A COMPREHENSIVE work on British seals is long overdue and one by an authority as eminent as the late Emeritus Professor H. R. Hewer is particularly welcome*. Although seals are among the largest of British mammals, before the last war comparatively little was known about them. Since 1947, however, an increasing amount of research has been undertaken and the published results form the backbone of this book. Hewer started his own research in 1951 and during the following years he visited all the major British colonies, with the result that this is no 'scissors and paste pot' work; it is something that not only bears the stamp of genuine knowledge, but also includes many personal observations.

The first chapter is devoted to a brief account of the Pinnipedia and their evolution into three dissimilar families; it also describes their anatomical features and shows how these have become adapted to a marine environment. The main part of the book concentrates on the life history of the two seals that breed in Britain, namely the grey seal *Halichoerus grypus* and the common (or harbor) seal *Phoca vitulina*, and it is a measure of the present state of knowledge of these animals that, whereas the grey seal warrants nine chapters, information about the common seal can be contained in two.

The remaining seals on the British list are also discussed and short accounts are given of the walrus and the four species of phocids that appear

**British Seals*. By H. R. Hewer. Pp. 256+24 plates. (Collins: London, November 1974.) £3.50.

as vagrants. Mention is made, too, of the occasional 'escaped' Californian sea lion.

A final chapter which deals with the vexed question of seal conservation and management, should be compulsory reading for all those who think of seals only as appealing white-coated babies. Five appendices and a comprehensive bibliography complete the book.

There are numerous illustrations and maps, some of the most useful being Hewer's own line drawings. The photographs vary in quality and, although some of the 'chalk and soot' can be excused on the ground of enlargement from colour film, at least two have already been reproduced much more successfully elsewhere.

My most serious criticism is levelled at Appendix D and, as the source of the basic data, I think it unfortunate that Hewer did not consider other possibilities before publishing his theories. There are other minor errors which someone with an intimate knowledge of a particular colony is bound to discover, but, these apart, *British Seals* is a book that can be recommended to anyone, whether amateur or professional, who is interested in these controversial mammals.

Grace Hickling

ONE of our most pressing problems, so we are continually told, is our aggressiveness. Let it rip and you may end up with a lifer, bottle it in and you get ulcers. The answer, they say, may lie with the monkeys. Although competition for food or attractive females is common in most natural groups and the majority of species possess the

equipment for easy murder, killing and serious wounding are rare. Holloway's book† provides no panaceas and includes little material of direct relevance to human aggression. It does, however, draw together current knowledge of several aspects of aggression in primates.

Seven chapters describe the patterns, distributions and contexts of aggressive interactions in different primate taxa: tree shrews, nocturnal prosimians, diurnal prosimians, ceboids, colobines, cercopithecoids and pongids. A further two describe the reactions of rhesus monkey groups to the introduction of additional animals. Two important, if obvious, themes recur throughout these chapters. First, aggression is the means by which individuals maintain access to food, females and territories. Second, the frequency, context and distribution of aggressive interactions differ between species, between populations of the same species and (though it is hardly emphasised here) between individuals; in most natural populations of primates, aggression is both flexible and adaptive. Both points need to be borne in mind when we consider our own predicament.

A general weakness of this group of chapters is that too much space is devoted to the description of trivial interspecific differences in aggressive behaviour and too little to the generalisations and theoretical implications arising from the surveys. The excellent chapter by Nagel and Kummer on cercopithecoids (Old World monkeys) is a marked exception and emphasises how much more is known about the behaviour of this group compared with the others.

Research on the effects of androgens, brain stimulation and neural lesions on aggressive behaviour is reviewed, and interspecific differences are related to variation in neuroanatomy. These reviews show that behavioural aspects of research in this field lag some way behind naturalistic studies in sophistication (though the automatic recording systems described by Maurus offer the possibility of a speedy reversal of the situation). The effects of physiological manipulations on aggressive responses given in different contexts or to different classes of individuals are rarely distinguished, and the numbers of animals tested are usually extremely small. This is an important weakness as there is evidence that the physiological controls of aggression are both complex and variable; that is demonstrated by the useful review of the effects of androgens by Rose *et al.*

†*Primate Aggression, Territoriality and Xenophobia*. Edited by Ralph L. Holloway. Pp. xiv+513. (Academic: New York and London, 1974.) \$29.50.