

All the world's a stage

Manwatching: A Field Guide to Human Behaviour. By Desmond Morris. (Jonathan Cape: London; Abrams: New York, 1977). £7.95; \$16.95.

"ALL animals", says Desmond Morris, "perform actions and most do little else". And all popularisers of ethology, he might have added, utter platitudes—and most do little else. The problem with his *Field Guide to Human Behaviour* is not so much that it's simplistic (which it is) or misleading (which it is) as that it's astonishingly trite.

It is trite and at the same time demeaning. If a zoologist is going to turn his binoculars—or opera glasses—on human beings he must get them the right way round; otherwise the people under study become manikins, the "field" of human behaviour becomes the land of counterpane, the Human Comedy a puppet show. Morris, here as never in his earlier books, comes over as an out-and-out reductionist. Animated little men and women trip across his stage, selfishly pursuing the goal of their own biological survival, pair-bonding and pair-breaking, staking out territory, hunting the Sunday lunch; they wave to each other with one of the three types of wave, they show their friendship with one of the 14 types of tie-sign; they have their exits and their entrances. Most of the time they use clothing signals to cover these exits and entrances from view.

Morris claims that as a "manwatcher" he is simply doing for people what bird-watchers do for birds: he records their behaviour and attempts without bias to provide historical or functional explanations for it. But when men watch birds they are observing a foreign species; they can assume no privileged knowledge of what the birds are doing or why. When men watch men, however, (as perhaps when birds watch birds) such an assumption of initial ignorance is at best tedious and at worst insulting to common sense. If a bird was to read this book, it might well find many of Morris's observations novel and intriguing. A person reading it, however, is certain to be less impressed: he must find much of the material boringly familiar (because he has been a manwatcher as long as Morris has), he must be irritated by the pseudo-scientific classification of behaviour patterns (because he guesses that they are largely Morris's invention), and he must realise that many of the biological explanations are plain silly (because he cannot believe, for example, that "viewed biologically, the modern footballer is revealed as a member of a disguised hunting pack").

That said, there are nonetheless places in the book where the old Morris whom we knew and (some of us) loved takes over. Hidden in the bran, there are a few real prizes. Yet even when Morris does say

something thought-provoking, the effect is lost because he fails to follow through. For reasons best known to himself and his editor, he quotes no authorities and no sources of evidence (the reading list at the back of the book has no immediate bearing on the text). The result is that all his more interesting assertions are left hanging in thin air. An informed reader may of course sometimes recognise where the ideas come from, but when he does so he will not always be reassured. For Morris is indiscriminating in what he is prepared to relay as established scientific fact: he has lifted some good ideas from the scientific literature, but he has lifted a lot of rubbish too.

If people get little from reading the book, they may still find pleasure in looking at it. It is beautifully and informatively illustrated. Indeed, the pictures often succeed where the words fail in giving insight into how human beings behave. Again and again, the evidence of particular photographs belies the stilted text. Here are real people fighting, loving, praying to God... The camera, framing a moment of their lives, calls us to attend to things which we half knew but never waited to consider. Meanwhile, Morris calls us to attention, tells us what to think: "Religious displays are essentially submissive gestures performed towards a super-dominant figure—the deity..." "More intimate than the Hand-in-Hand is the Waist Embrace (top



Female sporting behaviour

Taken from *Manwatching*

right). Because it involves close trunk contact and impedes locomotion, it is usually employed by strolling couples with time to spare..." "The butcher's shop has become the modern hunting ground, but now it is the woman who carries home the 'kill', while her male engages in symbolic hunting called 'work'". In his own words: "Some individuals find the wink difficult to perform even as adults".

Nick Humphrey

Nick Humphrey is Assistant Director of Research in the Sub-Department of Animal Behaviour at the University of Cambridge, UK.

Animal collections in the UK

Animals on View. By Anthony Smith. (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 1977.) £6.50.

A GOOD guide should be concise, accurate and up-to-date, at least at the time of publication. Anthony Smith, in his extremely well illustrated guide to Britain's safari parks, zoos, aquariums and bird gardens, succeeds in achieving these requirements most successfully, and the general user will have little to complain about. The eyebrows of the regular zoo user may be raised a little over one or two caption errors which make parakeets of love birds and American bison from European ones.

It should not be imagined that the guide takes a clinical approach to the subject. Anthony Smith has done too many exciting things elsewhere to allow this to happen. He describes the factual details of the collections without turning it into a checklist of all the flora and fauna, but emphasises those aspects of breeding, exhibition and use for which individual zoos are famous. He also goes on to assess the management of some of the larger collections and in one or two cases he accurately predicts their closure. His assessments, which are of course the impressions gained on his visits to all the major collections in the guide, add another

interesting dimension to the work.

Anthony Smith's introduction to the book covers most aspects of animal collection management and the problems which can arise. I think he is very right to bring out these points, although one gets the feeling that here is the embryo of another book, which hopefully will be forthcoming, as the introduction is bound to leave very large question marks in many readers' minds.

His bias towards safari parks does shine through a little too brightly for the average "zoo man", but this is perhaps inevitable from someone who has been fortunate enough to spend much time in the wild places of the world and who is perhaps more aware of space in an ethereal sense than in terms of practical animal management. There are good zoos and good safari parks in terms of how much regard they give to the welfare of their animals. Sadly there are also bad ones in both categories.

The work is an important addition to any regular zoo user's bookshelf, and I believe that the more casual of zoos' twelve million or so annual visitors would obtain considerable interest and insight into the enormous variety of creatures that may be seen in collections, large and small, throughout the length and breadth of the UK.

R. J. Wheeler

R. J. Wheeler is Director of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, Edinburgh, UK.