



Lear in his late 20s when, despite deteriorating eyesight, his artistic reputation was thriving.

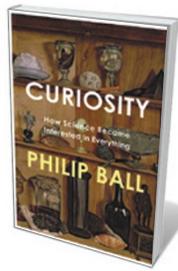
of 21 children, he was born to a prosperous middle-class family in Holloway, now part of north London. But a financial reversal forced the family to disperse when Lear was four years old. He was brought up by his devoted older sister Ann, who gave him lessons that included a rudimentary training in art. As a young boy, Lear earned money “colouring prints, screens, fans” and “making morbid disease drawings for hospitals and certain doctors of physic”, as he noted in the preface to *Nonsense Songs and Stories* (1871).

As a counterweight to this mundane work and to ease his anxiety over the asthma, epilepsy and depression that were to trouble him throughout his life, the youthful Lear created sketchbooks filled with drawings of imaginary birds and animals set in lush, tropical landscapes. A few real-life studies in these hint at the enormous talent he would soon reveal to the scientific world.

Lear's first published illustrations were two vignettes, of lemurs and macaws, in Edward Turner Bennett's *The Gardens and Menagerie of the Zoological Society Delineated* (1830–31). Lear was a natural choice: he had been sketching at London Zoo since it had opened to the public, in 1828.

In June 1830, Lear formally applied for, and received, permission from the Zoological Society's council to draw all the parrots in the society's collection. Over the next two years, he created 42 lithographs for his own folio monograph. Accomplished without institutional, governmental or commercial support, it was an extraordinary achievement, setting new standards for artistic and scientific quality. When renowned ornithologist William Swainson saw the lithograph of a scarlet macaw (*Ara macao*), he wrote to Lear that he considered it equal ▶

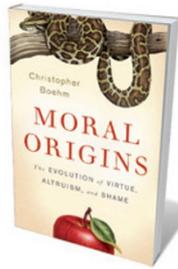
Books in brief



Curiosity: How Science Became Interested in Everything

Philip Ball BODLEY HEAD 480 pp. £25 (2012)

The seventeenth-century shift in Western thought may be labelled the Scientific Revolution but, argues science writer Philip Ball, it was more a sea change in how we view curiosity. That singular trait, which was once condemned, became an engine driving our inexhaustible hunt for knowledge. In this magisterial work, Ball examines the people, events and inventions at the turning point, including “professors of secrets”, cabinets of curiosities, the investigations of Francis Bacon, the plays of William Shakespeare, the rise of polymaths — and the echoes of all this in today's science.



Moral Origins: The Evolution of Virtue, Altruism, and Shame

Christopher Boehm BASIC BOOKS 432 pp. \$28.99 (2012)

Ethologist and anthropologist Christopher Boehm exposes the roots of generosity and peer disapproval. Eschewing evolutionary game theory, he opts instead for natural selection within the social environment. Boehm posits that selection began with a “crime and punishment” scenario: thugs would have been kicked out of early hunting bands as threats to group survival, and alpha-male hogging of sexual favours would not have been tolerated. Altruism would, argues Boehm, be increasingly valued in partners and allies. Ultimately, such social control might have caused biological change.



Fear of Food: A History of Why We Worry About What We Eat

Harvey Levenstein UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS 232 pp. \$25 (2012)

The United States is a nation gripped by gustatory paranoia, says historian Harvey Levenstein. In this punchy, entertaining account, he reveals how US consumers have suffered for decades from anxiety over the provenance of a pork chop or the fat in fromage frais. An army of scientists, he says, stoked fear about everything from germs and a lack of vitamins to additives and industrial processing, inadvertently fostering the eating disorder that affects modern US society. Levenstein calls for moderation in all things — including moderation — to regain the joy of eating.



America's Other Audubon

Joy M. Kiser PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS 144 pp. £30 (2012)

Genevieve Jones should have been a towering figure in natural-history illustration. In the 1870s, she resolved to plug the gaps in Jean James Audubon's *The Birds of America* (1838). She learnt lithography, and with Eliza Schulz began the exquisite colour plates for *Illustrations of the Nests and Eggs of Birds of Ohio*. The pictures — sold by subscription — were bought by the likes of US President Theodore Roosevelt and hugely admired. Then Jones died of typhoid. Researcher Joy Kiser tells how Jones's family battled to finish the 68 plates; reproductions, with updated keys, are included.



The Value of Species

Edward L. McCord YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS 184 pp. £18.99 (2012)

In this meditation on the inherent worth of nature, philosopher and naturalist Edward McCord offers a new twist on the argument for ‘deep conservation’. Each species, he posits, is the astonishing repository of millions of years of natural selection — a volume in Earth's library of life forms. So protecting all creatures is a case of neither need, compassion nor economic value. Instead, their worth is down to their intellectual value, he argues: to the inquisitive mind, each species is incalculably valuable, from bacteria to blue whales.