Book Notices

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Wilma George describes distributions of animals, and discusses the knowledge and theories which explain them. She does this concisely, clearly, with judgment, and in a way which shows the subject to be exciting. This last is important. Probably everybody, at least as a child, has some interests in the kinds of animals and where they live, but they may well fear that the expositions of a biologist might destroy the romance. George's account should leave enthusiasm undimmed.

The book is in four parts called, "Present," "Past," "Past and Present," and "Islands." The first part, which describes the division of the world into zoogeographic regions, must have been the hardest to write. It succeeds by true simplicity which scorns artificial attempts to simplify. The taxonomic names needed (principally of mammals) are uncompromisingly listed and used, with a resulting sense of participating in mysteries which is worthy of Jules Verne. Consider the following extract: "There are a few agamid and lacertid lizards but no iguanids. Crocodiles and turtles abound, amongst them the Neotropical pelomedusid family of the side necks." One might be reading a description of things seen through the great window of Verne's Nautilus.

The next two parts discuss the historical and geologic causes which have brought about the present distribution of animals. This begins with a description of the fossil record, its limitations, and its history of evolving faunas. The theory of the permanence of continents is put forward as a basis for understanding zoogeography, and the several zoogeographic regions are discussed in terms of history and geology. A consideration of land bridges and continental drift follows. Emphasis is placed on the prime importance of basing all deductions about changing land forms on geological evidence, with the consequent inevitable rejection of most suggested land bridges. Continental drift is considered "non-proven," and its remoteness to most zoogeographic problems explained.

The last section, "Islands," uses the odd faunas of islands to review the principles discussed earlier. It is also a short summary which makes it a useful reference for island faunas. Krakatoa, Galapagos, Wallace's Line, St. Helena; lucid writing on the thrilling names maintains the interest to the end.

An ecologist can make a few complaints. Several times animals are described as moving to avoid ice sheets or other cataclysms, implying an unwarranted sense of purpose in animals populations. The replacement of the English red squirrel by the American grey squirrel is more than once cited as if one species had "driven out" the other, a thesis which is by no means certain. But these are small points.

Design and make of the book are good. There are scores of excellent line drawings of animals of such quality that it is clear they were made for the author's pleasure. I plan to leave my copy lying about so that my offspring may find it at an early age. I shall use it myself for reference. The prose is such that many a biology graduate student should read the book to learn how to write.

PAUL A. COLINVAUX


The purpose of this book is to provide a ready reference of words used in atomic physics. As a dictionary for workers in the field it is not very satisfactory, since it is limited to very brief descriptions of words which are commonly known to the specialist. But if it is too sketchy for the serious worker, it probably does give the interested layman the type of information he should be able to assimilate.

It seems to me that the biographies are rather lost in the text and would have been more effectively presented if they constituted a separate section. I also feel that a bibliography to guide the reader to deeper treatment of the subjects would have been a valuable addition to the book. On the other hand, the introduction might have been omitted since it adds nothing to the work.

In short, I feel that the author has attempted too much: he has tried to compress into one volume both an encyclopedia and a dictionary, and he has not succeeded in doing either very well.

GERALD E. TAUBER