

Archives of Natural History



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being widely read by the majority of active taxonomists nor indeed by those interested in the history of science.

The scope of the book is narrow. It draws almost exclusively on the experience of zoological taxonomy; does not question whether many taxonomists use phenetics or cladistics; nor question whether the use of these techniques has led to significant advances in taxonomy or rather funnelled money and effort away from other more urgent problems. The author makes the questionable assumption that people who use a different methodology (in this case pheneticists or cladists) are at the forefront of the subject (in this case taxonomy).

The text, based around the author's doctoral thesis, is of variable clarity and quality. In some cases the language is highly convoluted, annoys the reader and obscures what the author is saying; "Given that pattern recognition is procedurally prior . . ." certainly annoyed me. In other cases the language is straightforward and the arguments follow lucidly one from another. Generally the later chapters are the better.

J. PARNELL

A. DELEGORGUE. *Travels in southern Africa, volume 1*. (Translated by F. Webb, with introduction and index by S. J. Alexander and C. de B. Webb. (Killie Campbell Library Africana Publications no 5.) Killie Campbell Africana Library & University of Natal Press, Durban & Pietermaritzburg: 1990. Pp xxxii, (xii), 359. Price: R49.95. ISBN 0-86980-727-7.

Although these *Travels* are called "famous" on the back cover of the book, Delegorgue is hardly a well-known name to any zoologist or botanist. Adulphe Delegorgue (1815-1850) went to South Africa in 1838, probably mostly in search of adventure and maybe hoping to find a way to earn his living by shooting and selling trophies of animals. He spent six years in the south-eastern part of the continent.

On his return home, he published the journal of his expeditions in his two-volume *Voyage dans l'Afrique Australe* (1847). It is full of what can be called natural history observations, made while hunting the animals, but his lack of formal training make many of his remarks rather difficult to appreciate. *Voyage* was never translated. The present book is a new translation by Fleur Webb and on the whole this is a good achievement. What makes this edition valuable and remarkable is the "natural history index" by Stephanie J. Alexander. Most comparable editions of older travel accounts have good indexes to names mentioned in the text or to places visited, but the animals are rarely accorded much space in the comments. This index lists all the animals mentioned by Delegorgue and although some of the notes seem superfluous, this must be counted an important part of the book. Only one correction may be mentioned. In his use of the name 'Ourigourap', Delegorgue followed François Levaillant's *Histoire Naturelle des Oiseaux d'Afrique* (1796-1813), not to refer to a crow, but to the Egyptian vulture, *Neophron percnopterus*. There is also a second index to persons and places, but unfortunately Delegorgue's expeditions are not further annotated and his routes are not recorded on a modern map, which will make it difficult to determine exactly where and when the observations in the book were made. This is a useful contribution to nineteenth century travel literature and all contributors are congratulated on their efforts.

L. C. ROOKMAAKER

A. FORBES. *Unbeaten tracks in islands of the Far East*. Oxford University Press, Singapore: 1987. Pp 305. Price: £4.95. ISBN 0-19-588857-X.

This is a book to include in your hand-luggage to relieve the tedium of modern travel. You could, of course, simply read it from the safety of your armchair, but you will best savour Anna Forbes's gentle and expressive observations on life in the East Indies, while in transit yourself.

First published as *Insulinde*, in 1887, the book brings to life the peoples of the Indonesian islands she and her naturalist husband visited, their surroundings, food and customs. There is anguish, hardship and danger here. On seeing a cargo of thousands of exotic bird skins in Surabaya, she writes in distress: "Soon we shall have lost off the face of the globe these unique and most gorgeous of the feathered tribes". She relates the drenching stages of the fever which overcame them both and calmly recalls seeing the severed limbs of rival villagers.

There is also laughter and enchantment, and a wonderful pleasure in the beauty about her. For me, the main enjoyment of the book lies in the eloquence and simplicity of her descriptions: "did ever waves display a purer emerald in their graceful curl, or crown themselves with crests so white?"

J. CASSELLS

R. M. PECK. *Land of the eagle. A natural history of north America*. BBC Books, London: 1990. Pp 288; illustrated. Price: £17.95. ISBN 0-563-20858-9.

This is a well-written, beautifully illustrated book that treats the natural wonders of North America and segments of its history and natural history. Each of the eight chapters treats a portion of the continent and each was used in an eight-part BBC television series.

The earliest chapters treat eastern portions of the continent—the Atlantic coast followed by eastern Canada with its North Woods, and lastly Florida with its Everglades as well as other parts of the South-