The Birds of the British Isles

By Dr. David Armitage Bannerman. Illustrated by George E. Lodge. Vol. 6: Ciconiidae, Ardeidae, Phoenicopteridae, Anatidae (Part). Pp. x+326+26 plates. (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, Ltd., 1957.) 63*s*. net.

IN this volume Dr. Bannerman maintains the quality and interest of his text, and the pictures by the late George Lodge have their usual excellence. The first part gives an account of the storks and their allies, including only one common British bird, the heron, and one locally breeding species, the bittern. All the rest—herons and bitterns of other species, egrets, storks, glossy ibis and flamingo—have only a vagrant status in our area: a few are found in the nearer Continental countries, but the others are scarce or rare wanderers from southern Europe, or perchance from Africa, with one from America. Nevertheless, each is dealt with in full, the author drawing both on the literature and on his own extensive experience abroad. It may well be from some West African swamp that he has taken his true-to-life description of the squacco heron—inconspicuously buff at rest, but suddenly exploding into white as it opens its wings.

The second part of the volume covers a larger number of familiar species—albeit many of them only winter visitors—in the swans, geese and shelduck. The account of the barnacle goose in its native Arctic quotes at length (by permission) from Salomonsen's book on the birds of Greenland, a work to which many ornithologists in Britain do not have ready access; and the habits of other northern species are likewise fully described from various sources. The section on the shelduck includes an essay, contributed by Mr. R. A. H. Coombes, on the remarkable pre-moult migration which takes the majority of British adult birds to the sandbanks of the Heligoland Bight in late summer. LANDSBOROUGH THOMSON

Times and Places

By the late Harold Peake and Herbert John Fleure. (The Corridors of Time, Vol. 10.) Pp. xv+336. (Oxford: Clarendon Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1956.) 42*s*. net.

THE author of this book has set himself a more than difficult task, and the measure of his success is the measure of his great knowledge and skill. The "Corridors of Time" consisted of a number of slim volumes, each devoted to a particular period of prehistoric development, written by the present author and the late Harold Peake. In the nature of the case, some volumes covered a larger geographical area than others, according to what archæological information was available at the time of printing. Of course, even then all that was known could not be included for lack of space, and the general picture given was what had grown up in the authors' minds. Much has happened since the first "Corridor of Time" was published—indeed, since the last saw the light of day. Not only has information come in apace, but also the general outlook on prehistory is rapidly changing.

In the first part of the present book Prof. Fleure makes a gallant attempt to bring a former volume dealing with the evolution of man and the cultures of the Old Stone Age up to date; the second half consists of a number of chapters devoted to the later prehistory of various geographical areas—South-West Asia, North Africa, the Mediterranean region, India, China and the Pacific. America is intentionally omitted and South African prehistory is barely mentioned. The result is a book which is very readable and, so far as it goes, one which gives an excellent summary of past ages over large areas in the old world. For the specialist, however, it is to be feared that the days of such a general survey are past; too much is now known to make such a work really possible. But for the intelligent amateur "Times and Places" is to be recommended. M. C. BURKITT

Physical Organic Chemistry

By Prof. Jack Hine. Pp. xiv+497. (London: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, Ltd., 1956.) 67*s*. 6*d*.

THIS book gives a clear and detailed account of a field of work which has been attracting attention both from the theoretical and experimental aspects. Much of the work is modern and it is very useful to have such a summary of it. The experimental material is adequately surveyed, and there are many useful tables and curves. More than half the book deals with polar reactions, but free-radical reactions are included, and there is a separate treatment of four-centred reactions. The author has adopted the plan of treating a selected number of reactions in detail, but the concise discussion of others and the abundant references to literature make the book complete in its field. It is addressed to advanced undergraduates, graduate students, and industrial chemists, and it should fulfil its purpose in providing such readers with an intelligible account of an important aspect of modern organic chemistry. It emphasizes the mechanisms of organic reactions and the effect of structure on reactivity. Physical chemists will also find the accounts of the theory of acids and bases and general and specific acid-base catalysis of interest. This book can be recommended both to students and teachers as a very good survey of its field. The elegant style in which the equations and formulæ are set out makes the book pleasant to read.

J. R. PARTINGTON

Seeds of Life

The Story of Sex in Nature from the Amœba to Man. By John Langdon-Davies. Pp. xix+172. (London: C. A. Watts and Co., Ltd., 1957.) 12*s*. 6*d*. net.

HIS many friends will be disappointed by John Langdon-Davies's latest book. This, despite the fact that the theme is well chosen, the text well planned and written with that skill and fluency for which the author is well known. It is over the manner of presentation that the reader will be unenthusiastic. The book contains no diagrams, no photographs and no index. It may well have been the publisher's intention to present the absorbing story of sex in animals and man as a simple narrative; his wisdom in so doing without any visual aids to understanding can fairly be questioned. The purpose of a book of this kind should be to leave the reader with a sense of beauty and of wonder, and a body of knowledge. There is much evidence to show that one clearly labelled diagram conveys more information about the reproductive cycle in man than many pages of text to be found in a book such as this. Presumably, the form of the book has been dictated by economy; one fails to see how the publisher hopes to sell it in competition with the well-known cheap paper-backs which are copiously illustrated.

T. H. HAWKINS