BOOK REVIEWS

'The Hedgehog' by Pat Morris

Shire Natural History Series No.32 (1988) 24pp. £1.25

Dr Morris is surely well qualified to write this monograph on one of Britain's best-loved wild mammals - his first research on hedgehogs dates back to 1963. An introduction and descriptive analysis is followed by information on behaviour, biology, disease and relationships with man. As the author so cogently points out, there is still much to be discovered by both professional and amateur zoologists. Some unsolved mysteries include the purpose of self-anointing, the part played in social behaviour by scent marking and whether home-range sizes vary according to habitat.

Field studies on hedgehogs are difficult - they are too large to easily live-trap and too small and secretive to be watched like badgers, so radio-tracking is used to reveal details of their ecology. However, there is also plenty of scope for temporal mark-release research, which is easily done by anyone with the interest and a pot of paint!

The wealth of good (but in the review copy, bluish) colour photographs and Guy Troughton's sensitive line drawings contribute to the extremely good value of this booklet. In about an hour you can become an expert on hedgehogs.

Roma Oxford

'The Common Seal' by Paul Thompson

Shire Natural History Series No.35 24pp £1.95

This really is a concise and informative guide to the biology and ecolgy of the common seal (*Phoca vitulina*). Twenty-four pages packed with extremely readable text, accompanied by some excellent photographs, diagrams and line drawings.

The guide begins by introducing the reader to the two seal families found worldwide and compares the common seal with the other seal to be found in British waters, the grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*). It then goes on to cover distribution, diet, ecloogy and behaviour, showing how the annual cycle is centered around breeding and moulting, both of which involve spending time on land.

In the past, tagging studies have been carried out to estimate seal populations and movements, but, more recently, radiotelemetry has proved more useful in the study of seal dispersal, haul out and feeding site preferences. Radiotracking has proved invaluable in trying to overcome the difficulties of studying an animal which spends the greater part of its life out at sea - a problem which has severely hampered research in the past.

The guide ends with a chapter on the interactions between seals and man, discussing commercial hunting, the conflict with commercial fisheries, and the effects of the Conservation of Seals Act (1970) on British seal populations.

Also highlighted are the possible effects of pollution, especially the build-up of organochlorides in the oceans, on seal reproduction and health.

The only criticism I do have of this otherwise excellent guide is that a couple of the diagrams appear in sections of the text to which they do not refer, which may be a little confusing.

Overall, this guide is very good value at £1.95, and makes an excellent companion to No.26 in the series, "The Grey Seal" by Sheila Anderson.

Ann Hanson