
The Changing Wild Life of Britain

By H. L. Edlin

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This latest of Mr. Edlin's books deals primarily with an aspect of natural history about which it is most difficult to obtain information, the wild animal life of the country, both native and introduced, and secondarily with some aspects of plant life.

Most authors deal with only some fraction of the subject, birds, amphibians or plants, or perhaps with a single group of mammals such as rodents, but Mr. Edlin has attempted to give a popular and reliable summary of all the larger forms of wild life, both plant and animal, in the very modest space of 180 pages of text. This, of course, has restricted the amount of space he could devote to each, and in the case of plants and the smaller animals he has confined his account of living relationships to the uncommon forms or to representative groups, notably tillage weeds and animals associated with mankind. He is particularly interested in the dependence of these apparently very vigorous populations on man for their survival.

The central purpose of the book appears to be to give an account of man's influence past, present and possible future on the creatures that share the land with him. It is fascinating to read about the effects of ancient settlements, the hunting and pastoring methods of different periods of history, and present day trends.

At this point it may be observed that while ancient and recent Irish relationships have been well written, the present day position is not so clearly dealt with, and this constitutes a challenge which can only be met at home by the people who live and work on the spot.

Mr. Edlin is specially interested to account for the great increase in populations of rare and almost extinct species of birds of prey, sea birds, wild cats, martens and so on during the past 50 years.

It is delightful to find that Mr. Edlin is such a hopeful man, well disposed to all living things, and happy to adopt newcomers to the scene.

The value of his outlook to foresters is perhaps best demonstrated in the chapter headed "New Trees Secure a Foothold."

The question of introduced species is usually argued on a narrow front of economics versus sentiment, and needs the wider treatment given in this book, in which suitability to environment, to changing climate, and appropriateness to more ancient history than that of the enclosing of land within cosy hedges are given just importance.

Finally, the illustrations are excellent.