

raid. His real heroes are Bourne's fellow soldiers: "If a man could not be certain of himself, he could be certain of nothing. The problem which confronted them all equally . . . did not concern death so much as the affirmation of their own will in the face of death; and once the nature of the problem was clearly stated, they realized that its solution was continuous, and could never be final."

Science & Technology

ON HUMAN NATURE

by Edward O. Wilson
Harvard, 1978
272 pp. \$12.50
L of C 78-17675
ISBN 0-674-63441-1

ENDURANCE OF LIFE:

**The Implications of
Genetics for Human Life**

by Macfarlane Burnet
Cambridge, 1978
230 pp. \$16.95
L of C 78-54323
ISBN 0-521-22114-5

Critics—there were many—of Wilson's *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (1975) have been stirred up again by the Harvard biologist's insistence that "the question of interest is no longer whether human social behavior is genetically determined; it is to what extent." At the heart of Wilson's genetic hypotheses is the proposition that the traits of human nature were adaptive when the species was evolving over the 5 million years prior to civilization; consequently, genes that predisposed their carriers to develop these survival traits spread through the earth's population. Examining human aggression, sex, altruism, and religion on the basis of sociobiological theory, he detects a "hard biological substructure" of human nature that gives rise to genetically influenced predispositions (among them, the subordination of women to men). Can cultural evolution completely replace genetic evolution? No, says Wilson. For the time being, "the genes hold culture on a leash." Future generations may choose to tinker with the essence of humanity by molecular engineering, but Wilson seems in no hurry to see it tried.

Nor does Australian geneticist and Nobel Laureate Sir Macfarlane Burnet. A scientist who perhaps even more than Wilson views the genetic forest steadily through its trees, Burnet writes clearly for the nongeneticist: "Birth is the most blatantly mammalian of all human functions. It is painful, messy, and undignified." The infant emerging "greet[s] life with a cry"—and with his genetic lot. He may

be bright or beautiful, aggressive or sickly. But when he reaches his mid-twenties his brain cells stop reproducing (most geniuses have made their major contributions by that time of life). After middle age, his bodily immunity weakens, and cancers, especially sarcomas and leukemia, and cardiovascular disease strike him more frequently. All this appears to be written in his genes; the oddities in people, Burnet argues, stem from errors produced by DNA-handling enzymes.

AUDUBON

by John Chancellor
Viking, 1978
224 pp. \$17.95
L of C 78-8465
ISBN 0-670-14053-8

**VANISHING BIRDS:
Their Natural History
and Conservation**

by Tim Halliday
Holt, 1978
296 pp. \$16.95
L of C 77-19010
ISBN 0-03-043561-7

**GOLDEN BATS &
PINK PIGEONS**

by Gerald Durrell
Simon & Schuster, 1978
190 pp. \$9.95
L of C 78-17446
ISBN 0-671-24372-1

Natural history? Or art? These three books combine both—though Britain's John Chancellor calls his illustrated study of John James Audubon (1785–1851) a biography. Chancellor combines material from the naturalist-painter's collected letters and journals with the findings of earlier biographers and his own shrewd observations. Audubon would kill 25 brown pelicans in order to draw a single male bird, writes Chancellor, partly for the fun of killing them and partly for the sake of giving accurate anatomical descriptions of the species and their individual variations. Many of the famous bird studies are splendidly reproduced.

Oxford ethologist Tim Halliday, also a painter of wildlife, has illustrated his careful, conservationist text with 16 well-rendered color plates and 46 drawings, plus his own maps. Halliday makes a strong plea for more effective worldwide measures to save such vanishing birds as the Eskimo Curlew, Abbott's Booby, and the small falcon called the Mauritius Kestrel.

This kestrel is among the unusual fauna that Gerald Durrell describes in the latest of his chatty little illustrated books about humans and other animals. He reports on an expedition to the Mascarenes to save three rare species of Round Island reptiles, the Golden Fruit Bats of Rodrigues Island, and the Pink Pigeons of Mauritius from the fate of the latter island's long-gone Dodo. All these creatures were rescued and are now safely installed on the Channel Island of Jersey under Durrell's protection.