possible as one of its great qualities is that it is close to 'state of the art' in many sections. The price is not stated but I hope that the book will not be too expensive as it deserves to be widely bought.

To answer the questions the reviewer must ask 'yes, this book is excellent, it is stimulating and informative'.

Finally, it is sad to record that of almost 80 contributors only one (Dr R G Long) is working in Britain. But this cloud has a silver lining for a British reader in that it gives access to authors, particularly from Europe, whose work is not so immediately familiar as that from traditional British research centres.

O F W JAMES

The gastric brooding frog Edited by Michael J Tyler. (Pp. 163; illustrated; £14.95.) London & Canberra: Croom Helm, 1983.

At first sight, a book about a frog might seem to offer little to gastroenterologists, but *Rheobatrachus silus* is no ordinary frog. To quote Dr Tyler: 'It is not much to look at, but it is unique in the Animal Kingdom in its habit of swallowing its fertilised eggs, converting its stomach to a uterus, and finally giving birth to fully formed young through its mouth'. It has been studied by a multidisciplinary group of investigators, and the accumulated knowledge has been assembled in one volume. *Rheobatrachus* was discovered in Queensland in 1973, and aroused interest because it appeared to belong to an amphibian family hitherto only reported in Africa and South America. Again, in Dr Tyler's words, 'The first report of gastric brooding was viewed with a sense of incredulity. It just seemed to many zoologists absolutely impossible. . . . *Nature* declined even to referee the manuscript, indicating that it was of insufficient general interest to merit consideration, let alone expose to the normal refereeing process. This was a ludicrous comment as our subsequent experiences demonstrated.'

For gastroenterologists, the relevant part of this story is the work by Shearman, O'Brien, and Fanning on the mechanism of suppression of gastric acid, and motility, which allows the larvae to develop, undigested and undisturbed, in the maternal stomach; the larvae secrete prostaglandin E₂, which differs from other forms of PGE₂ by virtue of its amazing stability in dilute aqueous solution. Apart from this, the book contains everything that is known about *Rheobatrachus*. This ranges from accounts of its behaviour, which seems at times almost human ('Sometimes the frogs remain in the same position for several hours either during the night or day . . . Males have amplexed with

females in an inguinal embrace . . .') to morphological detail which will daunt the non-zoologist ('The vertebral column . . . exhibits the unusual feature of urostyle transverse processes'). *Rheobatrachus* is, however, a challenge to biologists rather than to gastroenterologists, for we can block acid secretion at the drop of a tablet; how can the species have evolved in accordance with accepted theories of evolution? Not one, but two steps must have occurred together, namely the decision by the mother to adopt gastric brooding and the ability of the larvae to secrete PGE₂. The enigma remains.

There is a sad postscript to the book which is not recorded. Three years of drought have brought about the disappearance of *Rheobatrachus* from the streams and rills of the Blackall and Conondale Ranges, and none has been found in that time. One frog remains alone in captivity in Adelaide – and it, alas, is a male.

DAVID WINGATE

News

International Symposium on Obesity Surgery

This first symposium will be held from 3–6 October 1984 in Genoa, Italy. Further details from the Scientific Secretariat, Dr Ezio Gianetta, Istituto di Patologia Chirurgica, Università di Genova, Ospedale S. Martino, 16132 Genova, Italy.

Hepatology 1984: advances in diagnostics, disease mechanisms, and liver transplantation

The annual postgraduate course of the American Association for the Study of Liver Disease will be held at the Chicago Marriott Hotel in Chicago, Illinois, USA, from 8–9 November 1984. Further details from Linda Leiby, c/o Charles B Slack, Inc, 6900 Grove Road, Thorofare, NJ 08086, USA.

Coeliac Trust

The Coeliac Trust is a registered charity existing to promote and fund research into coeliac disease. The Trust is expecting to spend some £50 000 on research in 1985. The Trust receives its funds from donations and legacies – a recent legacy of over £7000 has been most welcome. The Trust makes grants for salaries of research workers for one or two years and for associated costs, and in addition makes grants for single items of equipment or for other purposes. Further details from the Hon Secretary, The Coeliac Trust, PO Box 181, London NW2 2QY.