

ORYX

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Notes and News

At its meeting in October the FPS Council approved three grants from the FPS/WWF Revolving Fund: £1200 for a Land Rover for Pakistan, of which £750 was generously presented by an anonymous member of the FPS – this vehicle was urgently needed to enable Major Ian Grimwood, who has recently gone out as adviser on wildlife to the Pakistan Government, for the Ministry of Overseas Development, to get about his large, and often difficult ‘parish’; £500 towards a laboratory for the Azraq Biological Station in Jordan – see page 394; and £500 towards a survey of the dugong in Ceylon – known to be rare and thought to be decreasing – by Dr Colin and Dr Kate Bertram, who have already studied the animal in other parts of the world. Their account of the dugong in northern Australian waters, where it is not endangered, appeared in *ORYX*, April 1966. The £1000 which another anonymous donor gave to the Revolving Fund earlier in the year has gone at his wish to the purchase of a Land Rover to help in the battle against the crocodile (and other) poachers in the Murchison Falls park in Uganda.

Revolving Fund Grants

Another conference, one almost groaned, on first learning of the imminence of Unesco’s Intergovernmental Conference of Experts on the Scientific Basis for Rational Use and Conservation of the Resources of the Biosphere, held in Paris in September. Yet underneath the mountains of verbiage, the endless sound-waves of human speech in several languages, lies a kernel of facts and forecasts of the greatest significance for the future not only of wildlife and its habitat but for the welfare of all mankind. Modern technological trends, and more particularly the waste products generated by technological processes, are steadily destroying the environment of men as well as of animals and plants. That situation has got to be grappled with sooner or later, and the Biosphere Conference is the first concerted attempt to do so on a truly world scale. IUCN has been saying this for years, but to a large extent its message reaches only the converted, its own members. All honour to Unesco for taking the first step to spread the message to the unconverted. One of the

Bettering the Biosphere

score of recommendations from the Biosphere Conference was that the United Nations General Assembly should consider the advisability of a universal declaration on the protection and betterment of the human environment. Such betterment would inevitably include the conservation of much natural or semi-natural habitat and its wildlife, for human well-being depends on the preservation of the largest possible diversity of habitat in the biosphere. The biosphere, incidentally, for those who have not met the term before, is all parts of the planet Earth (including the atmosphere) where there are living organisms.

It is sad news from the USA that the so-called Dingell Bill, which had passed the House of Representatives, has not been passed in the Senate, it is hoped it will go through in the next session. The bill empowers the

**Relieve for
the
Poachers**

Secretary of the Interior to forbid the import of any endangered species, such as leopards, or their skins; it would also have helped endangered species in the USA, such as the Florida alligator, by including reptiles, amphibians and others in the legislation, hitherto restricted to mammals and birds, that makes it an offence to transport species or parts of them across a state boundary if taken contrary to state law. Its failure will certainly gladden the hearts of the alligator poachers in the Everglades, 'the dirtiest business in America since the slaughter of egrets for women's hats', says George Laycock in the *Audubon Magazine* for September. The alligators are protected in Florida, but the poachers work at night, and once they have the skins across the state boundary they are immune from prosecution. The Fish and Wildlife Service officers are working against tremendous odds in this huge area of swamps and waterways, and often the fines imposed when they have caught a poacher are derisory compared with the value of the skins. At \$5.25 a foot, a six-foot alligator is worth \$31.50, and a two-man team can collect between 400 and 500 dollars in one night. As one poacher said to Mr Laycock, 'It's hard to leave 'em alone with prices like that on 'em'. Until, of course, there are none left to hunt.

Birds of prey in Europe were badly hit by pesticides. Now a new and serious threat appears in an increase in so-called 'falconers', who form associations not concerned with the sport at all; their activities have led

**The Traffic
in
Birds of Prey**

to a large traffic in these birds. At the ICBP (International Council for Bird Preservation) meeting in Hungary last summer, the French Section presented details of the raids of German falconers and dealers on peregrines and other birds of prey in France, Italy, Sicily and Spain, sometimes taking adult birds as well as young. The increase in small zoos accounts for much of this trade and similar reports about its increase came from Austria, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain and Yugoslavia. Falconers are equally as concerned as conservationists, and in Britain they have formed an International Association of Falconry and Conservation to try to put a stop to it.

Between one and two hundred sea otters have been translocated by air from Amchitka Island, in the Aleutian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, where the US Atomic Energy Commission intends to hold nuclear underground tests (something conservationists have had to accept). They have been flown to places on the south-east Alaska coast; two loads have been released near Sitka, and another group off the south-western tip of Prince of Wales Island. British Columbia, Washington and Oregon are all hoping to re-establish sea otters in their coastal waters, but so far none have been taken further south than Alaska.

**Sea Otters
go
by Air**

The translocation is made possible because the AEC, with large numbers of men and much equipment on Amchitka, is co-operating with the Alaska Fish and Game Department. Alaska's sea otters have been built up from the 500 or so that were all that survived the hunters' slaughter by 1911, when all hunting was prohibited, to between 25,000 and 30,000 animals today, with the result that this year saw the first legal sale of sea otter pelts since 1911. A thousand skins were sold, and the record price of \$2300 paid for one skin. The average price paid was \$170; the cost to the Fish and Game Department of harvesting each skin, was \$54: so the sea otter certainly proves the economic argument for conservation. The only other sea otters in the world, the southern race, are off the Californian coast, but there are probably not more than 800-900 there. The fur seal of the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea, north of the Aleutians, is another animal with a valuable pelt whose numbers have been built up by careful conservation. Managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service since 1911, an annual harvest is taken, the value of which in the 1964-65 season was over 2½ million dollars.

The latest estimate of giant tortoise numbers on Aldabra is 80,000 plus or minus 20,000, a considerably higher figure than Roger Gaymer's 33,000 arrived at after his 1964-65 visit and quoted in the last issue of *ORYX*. The

**Tortoises and
Frigates
on Aldabra**

new figure comes from the work of P. Grubb, a member of the 1967-68 Royal Society expedition to the island and is quoted by the leader, Dr Stoddart, in *Biological Conservation*. The large variation in the figure is because the dense vegetation, difficult ground and limited sample areas made it difficult to be more precise. Dr Stoddart describes it as 'a remarkable concentration of herbivores feeding on a restricted number of species under climatically marginal conditions.' The frigate bird census (these were the birds that would have been the chief hazard for the planes if Aldabra had been an air base) produced a figure of 30,000. The story of Aldabra so far is a lesson in how little the British government is concerned with scientific conservation issues. Dr Stoddart points out that no scientist was attached to the 1962 military expedition to Aldabra; that the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) was formed in 1965 without such advice; that Cosmoledo and Assumption islands were excluded, which in effect was tantamount to deciding that, if a staging post were to be built in this area of the Indian

Ocean, it would be on Aldabra. Even after the Royal Society had alerted the government to the scientific importance of Aldabra, an agreement was signed with the USA (December 1966; published April 1967) making the islands available to both governments for defence for at least 50 years; both signatories may use the islands if necessary in an emergency; the USA may do so without reference to Britain. The British government's decision in November 1967 not to proceed with the defence plans does not affect this agreement, which remains in force.

If the steady decline in the breeding success of the rare Bermuda petrel, the cahow *Pterodroma cahow*, since 1958 continues at the same rate the bird will be extinct in ten years. This is the conclusion of David B. Wingate and Charles F. Wurster in a paper published in *Science*. David Wingate was the discoverer of a small breeding colony of the cahow in Bermuda in 1951, 300 years after it was believed to have become extinct. Abundant in Bermuda when the first settlers arrived in 1609, within 20 years they (and their animals) had apparently exterminated it, although it comes to land only to breed and always arrives and departs at night, laying a single egg at the end of a long burrow. Today the population is about 100 birds. It feeds far out at sea, mainly on cephalopods. In March 1967 eggs and dead chicks taken from unsuccessful nests were all found to contain DDT residues, averaging 6.55 parts per million. Earlier studies – on ospreys in the USA and peregrines and eagles in Britain – have shown that even smaller concentrations of DDT affect breeding success. As the cahow has been strictly protected since its rediscovery the poison can only be coming from its food in the ocean, including the plankton.

**DDT
Threatens the
Cahow**

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In Argentina the pampas deer *Ozotoceros bezoarticus*, described in the IUCN Red Data Book as 'one of the most endangered deer species in South America', has found one of its last refuges in a swampy region on the coast of the bay of Samborombon, in the province of Buenos Aires, where it is a target for the guns of irresponsible 'sportsmen' and hooligans. Because of the difficult terrain, it was impossible to capture the deer by ordinary methods for removal to a safer place,

**Deer
Rescue in
Argentina**

so the Argentine Asociacion Natura para la Conservacion de la Naturaleza y sus Recursos decided to try drug-darting from the air. With difficulty they got the use of a helicopter, but, as they could not practise using the capture gun from the air and did not know what might be the after-effects of the drug on this rare species, they decided to try lassoing the deer instead of drug-darting. The method worked perfectly and four females and one male were captured and transferred to a provisional site near the city of Mar del Plata. The difficulty in securing the helicopter forced them to act at a time when the females were in an advanced state of pregnancy, and this caused some deaths, but fortunately the calves were delivered without further problems and are thriving. The Association has ascertained that there are still some 50 deer left.

The Queensland Government has given complete protection to all turtles in Queensland waters. By an Order in Council the taking of both turtles and eggs of all five species is completely prohibited along a coastline of

**Protection
for Australia's
Turtles**

2500 miles, which includes the islands in the Torres Straits, extending up to the Papuan coast, and along 1200 miles of the Great Barrier Reef. The five species are the green turtle *Chelonia mydas*, the loggerhead *Caretta caretta*, the hawksbill *Eretmochelys imbricata*, the flatback *Chelonia depressa*, and the leathery turtle *Dermochelys coriacea*. Dr R. H. Bustard, who has been working on the turtles of the Great Barrier Reef and urged this prohibition in the Government, describes Queensland's action as 'by far the most important conservation legislation passed for sea turtles anywhere in the world; the gigantic area covered by the Order guarantees the future of very large turtle populations. There are important rookeries for all these turtles in Queensland, with the possible exception of the leathery turtle, and as much of the northern coastline is unexplored it is quite likely that we will discover nesting aggregations of the leathery turtle.' The FPS has sent letters of congratulation to the Prime Minister of Queensland, the Hon J. Bjelke-Petersen, and to the Director of the Harbours and Marine Department, the Government department responsible for turtles.

A programme for conserving the Cape Barren goose is proposed by the Australian Conservation Foundation, in *Viewpoint* No. 3. This is one of the world's rarest geese, confined to islands between Tasmania and

**Programme
for a
Rare Goose**

southern Australia, and numbers are believed to be down to about 6000, despite protection from hunting since 1960, although they have increased on one group of islands, the Furneaux group. Since the naturalist John Gould in 1848 described the Cape Barren goose as 'almost extirpated', it has been exploited for food, forced to compete for grazing with domestic sheep, shot as a pest and as legal game, had eggs and young destroyed, and been continually subjected to poaching – a resilient species indeed. The Foundation proposes a two-stage protection programme. First, the more important nesting islands should be dedicated as sanctuaries for the geese and managed so as to maintain the best conditions for them. This would mean that the State authorities must have control of all stock-grazing on these islands, and powers to prohibit it. Second, having built up numbers, the population should be managed as a resource from which a regular harvest could be taken. This would mean removing the domestic sheep from some of the other islands and establishing areas of improved pasture for the geese both on islands and on parts of the mainland that the geese visit in summer, where naturalists and other visitors would see them. These managed areas would also be safe from pesticides, an important point, as significant pesticide residues have already been found in a clutch of Cape Barren goose eggs. As everybody knows, the farmers who see increasing numbers of geese

feeding on their pastures are likely to be the most difficult to convince, but if the sheep can be got off the remoter islands, which could become refuges for the geese, a start would have been made.

The announcement last winter that three monkey-eating eagles (a highly endangered species) had been imported into Britain to keep down rabbits on the Earl of Bradford's estate in Shropshire caused considerable concern as to how permits could have been obtained for their export from the Philippines, and Professor Rabor, of Manila University, took the matter up there. Eventually the birds proved to be two immature fish eagles and a Brahminy kite, but the fuss seems to have helped to get a bill presented in the Philippines Congress designed to give greater protection to the eagle, declaring it the National Bird, and allowing for the creation of special reserves for this bird. Professor Rabor is now engaged on a 12-month study of the birds (continuing his earlier work) which will help in the selection of the right areas for the reserves.

Protecting Eagles in the Philippines

Even the Indian wild ass, in the flat, salt-impregnated, 1000-square-mile waste of the Little Rann of Kutch, in north-west India, is seriously affected by the overgrazing of domestic stock which threatens all India's rarer grazing mammals. This is the message of Juan J. Spillett's report on the wild ass, published in the April 1968 issue of the *Bombay Natural History Journal*, just as it was the theme of his reports on the sanctuaries of north-east India, especially Kaziranga, referred to in *ORYX*, May 1968. Because the Rann is flooded by sea water every year, no forage plants can grow except on the 'bets', little hillocks above the level of the salty floods; here and on the fringes of the Rann the asses feed at night, and compete with the excessive numbers of sheep, goats, donkeys and cattle; and the diseases to which the stock is liable are a serious threat to the asses. A local veterinarian estimated that three-quarters of the villagers' cattle were completely worthless. Fortunately, the villagers are quite sympathetic to the asses; there is no poaching, and when the asses raid their crops they retaliate with nothing worse than stone throwing. Spillett estimated numbers to be about the same as in the late E. P. Gee's 1962 estimate, about 870—a sad decline from Salim Ali's estimate of between five and six thousand in 1946. His recommendations include scientific management of the domestic stock in the vicinity of the Little Rann, especially on the lands of the Forest Department (which is responsible for the asses); a regular census—also recommended by Gee but not yet achieved; an ecological study; captive breeding, and the establishment of a large part of the Rann and the adjacent mainland as an inviolate sanctuary, primarily in the interests of the wild asses. Gee regarded the wild ass as a highly intelligent animal, and humorously described how it thwarted his attempts to photograph it. He also quoted the local story of how the police on one occasion chased a herd of asses from

the cultivations they were raiding. The asses galloped off back to the Rann, chased by the police in jeeps. When the police turned round to go home the order was reversed: the police jeeps were in front with the asses coming up behind.

Pakistan has lost for ever a long list of unique animals and is in imminent danger of losing many more, said Guy Mountfort, leader of two recent WWF expeditions to Pakistan, in a lecture quoted in the *Pakistan Journal of Forestry*. In the last 20 years, the cheetah, Asiatic lion, barasingha deer, and both two-horned and one-horned (Sumatran and great Indian) rhinoceros have gone. The tiger has gone from West and will soon have gone from East Pakistan unless protected. The marsh crocodile is virtually extinct in West Pakistan and the gharial fast disappearing. The snow and clouded leopards, the marbled leopard and fishing cats, the smooth otter and the five monitor lizards are all near extinction. Numbers of the nilgai, Marco Polo's sheep, chital and musk deer, Suleman markhor and Punjab urial are all very low; the blackbuck and the chinkara, once among the most numerous Pakistani animals, may be extinct in five years unless breeding reserves are created. Thanks in no small measure to Mr Mountfort's efforts, the government is taking vigorous steps to improve conservation measures, and it is hoped that a national appeal of the World Wildlife Fund will be set up in Pakistan very soon.

**Wildlife
Losses in
Pakistan**

Conservation in Botswana (formerly Bechuanaland) has made encouraging strides since independence in 1966. Only a year later, in September 1967, the Parliament of Botswana passed a National Parks Act which came into force in March 1968, providing for the establishment of new national parks and the preservation of fauna and flora, and delineating the boundaries of the Chobe National Park. There has been legislation dealing with tribal hunting, trophy dealers and animal capture, with a four-month close season imposed for all important game animals throughout the country. The result is that Botswana now has the strictest game laws in all Africa and has expanded the Wildlife National Parks Department to enforce them. We hope to publish an account of Botswana wildlife and conservation in *ORYX* in 1969.

**Botswana
Prepares for
New Parks**

The Mlilwane Game Reserve in Swaziland, which Mr Terence Reilly has developed as a wildlife reserve out of his own farm and which the FPS helped in its early days with the money to get two white rhinos (*ORYX*, April 1965), has been more than trebled in size thanks to the support of the new South African appeal of the WWF, the South African Wildlife Foundation. From 450 hectares the reserve has been enlarged to 1575 with the purchase of the adjoining estate of Nyonyane. The only wildlife reserve in Swaziland, Mlilwane has been visited by 40,000 people since the official opening by

**Swaziland
Reserve
is Trebled**

Mrs Stevenson Hamilton. Mr Reilly, to whose initiative and enthusiasm the whole reserve is a splendid tribute, has built roads and a rest camp and collected many of the game animals which now include, as well as the rhinos, kudu, zebra, waterbuck, blesbok, impala, oribi, serval and genet.

As a result of his discovery of an article by the Venerable J. P. Farler in the 1882 Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, H. A. Fosbrooke has been able to show that there were elephants in the Serengeti region of Tanzania in 1882 and before. This is of interest

**Elephants
in the
Serengeti**

because elephants, which have recently invaded the Serengeti in some numbers, are believed not to have been there since at least 1915, but nothing is known about the situation before that. Mr Fosbrooke tells the story in the 1968 volume of the *East African Wildlife Journal*. The article, quoting a missionary's account of the caravan route from Lake Victoria to the coast, describes the Wandorobo, in a settlement which can be placed with some certainty to the southwest of Seronera, as 'a tribe of elephant hunters . . . who live entirely on the flesh of the animals they kill in hunting. They supply the caravans with a great deal of ivory. Their country is full of elephants and other big game'. If the siting is right then the Serengeti has in fact, as Mr Fosbrooke says, had to withstand the impact of elephants before. What happened to them? Did they in fact do what elephants today seem to be doing, make the habitat unsuitable for themselves by destroying the trees and bushes, and have they now returned because the habitat has recovered and is once again suitable for them?

'It is an unquestionable fact that by far the major proportion of erosion in the Kruger National Park is man-made and, more often than not, associated with some road building activity in the past', writes Dr U. de V.

**The Upset of
Roads
in a Park**

Pienaar in a paper on the ecological significance of roads in a national park in *Koedoe* No. 11. He lists a whole series of other effects of road building: roads act as fire-breaks (whether deliberate or accidental) and make fire control easier, which favours the growth of trees and scrub; in a fire they are a means of escape for animals and insects, and the insects attract birds; elephants like roads and may be attracted to areas otherwise unvisited with a resultant increase in tree destruction on the roadsides, and the elephant droppings attract squirrels and some birds; nocturnal birds of prey and other predators find it easier to see their prey on a road; lions and hyaenas, especially in the wet season, hunt along roads at night, and cheetah and wild dog by day, and lions have even learned to use lines of parked tourist cars as decoys or cover, behind which they stalk such animals as impala returning from drinking places (no doubt with cameras clicking in all the cars). Animals which take to begging are inevitably attracted to roads, and road bridges over rivers enable animals such as baboons to cross a natural barrier, while the steep embankments often found on firebreak roads will prevent some animals such as tortoises getting across (they turn over and die on their

backs), and even baby elephants may fail to get up and so become separated from their mothers. At the same time heavy traffic on tourist-favoured roads frightens off the timid animals which may be forced into other areas less suitable to their needs – this is particularly true of eland and sable which will shun tourist areas even to the extent of leaving the park. Dr Pienaar concludes that whether the effects of road building are beneficial or detrimental they are certainly profound, and park roads should only be built in close co-operation with the conservation staff.

The East African Wild Life Society, according to *Africana*, is becoming increasingly alarmed at the enormous number of leopard skins and articles made from the skin on sale in Nairobi shops. In 1967 more than

Leopard Skins Legal and Illegal

1000 leopard skins are known to have been imported into Kenya; what is not known is where they came from, though it may not be difficult to guess. But on the last page of the same issue of *Africana*, are several advertisements for skin goods including one illustrating a leopard skin handbag. The problem is, of course, to distinguish between the legal and the illegal skins. Uganda at least makes a start by prohibiting all leopard skin imports. In the USA the WWF is running a campaign to persuade women and furriers to help halt the extermination of the spotted cats, urging them to 'change a destructive fashion trend' by renouncing 'the wearing and use of leopard, cheetah, ocelot and jaguar', and by urging department stores and furriers to stop selling the furs. Results so far include a lot of press, radio and television publicity and a decision by two of America's leading fur designers to stop selling leopard and cheetah coats.

Appeal for Linnean Collections

CONSERVATION is ultimately based on the work of naturalists, biologists and systematists in the museum, the laboratory and the field, for only they can provide the essential basis of facts about the life history and ecology of animals and plants needed to implement an effective conservation policy. Taxonomy, the science of the classification and naming of organisms, is the most basic of all disciplines, for until you know exactly what animal or plant you are dealing with, it is fruitless to attempt any conservation measures. The news that the Linnean Society of London is appealing for £55,000 to preserve and develop its collections is therefore of more than academic interest to conservationists.

The unique collections of the great Swedish naturalist Linnaeus, father of modern scientific nomenclature, are still housed in the cabinets in which they were acquired over a hundred years ago. They are therefore subject to considerable risk, and if they are not housed in the special room now planned in the basement of Burlington House, with protection against fire and flood and some control of humidity and temperature, either they may eventually be lost or their utility may be gravely impaired.

Such a loss would not just be a sorrow for antiquarians, but would