

The Fauna Preservation Society

EDITORIAL NOTES

Royal Patronage.—We have great pleasure in announcing that Her Majesty The Queen has been graciously pleased to grant her Patronage to our Society.

Her Majesty has always shown keen interest in wild animals and their protection. Members of our Society well remember that in November, 1946, they were honoured by the presence at a General Meeting, of the Queen, then Princess Elizabeth, and the Princess Margaret. At that meeting Colonel Stevenson-Hamilton showed his film of the Kruger National Park, which Their Royal Highnesses were shortly to visit.

The very night that Her Majesty became Queen she spent with the Duke of Edinburgh, at Treetops, the tree-house built in the branches of a giant fig tree in the Aberdare National Park, Kenya. Describing the Royal visit, Mr. E. Sherbrooke Walker, who built Treetops, reveals that the imprints of the front feet of a large elephant, towards which the Princess walked on her arrival, were only eleven yards from the ladder which she had to climb. "The Princess," he writes, "went forward with the greatest coolness and courage and quietly climbed the ladder, without any suspicion of hurry."

As the Royal visitors were getting into their car on leaving, Mr. Sherbrooke Walker could not help saying "If you have the same courage, Ma'am, in facing whatever the future sends you as you have in facing an elephant at ten yards, we are going to be very fortunate."

During the twenty years' existence of Treetops there has probably never been such a congregation of elephant and rhinoceros as that seen by the Royal visitors.

International Bird Protection.—The Fifth Conference of the European Continental Section of the International Committee for Bird Preservation was held in Bologna from 14th–16th May. Mr. R. S. R. Fitter, member of the Council of our Society and a British delegate at the Conference, sends the following report :—

Delegates from nine countries attended, the largest delegations from outside Italy being the British and the Dutch. A wide range of subjects was discussed, including the effects of oil pollution, the trade in plumage and in wild birds for

zoos, and the protection of migratory birds by the establishment of refuges on migration routes. All dangerous lighthouses in the Netherlands are now floodlit at night, and the first three lighthouses in France have been equipped with perches. A resolution was passed urging a general and absolute prohibition on shooting birds in spring, with special reference to the slaughter of turtle-doves, which was said to be a serious problem in south-west France. Another resolution urged special protection for the Indian ring-dove or *Türkentaube*, which has spread very rapidly across Europe from the Balkans in the past ten years. It now breeds regularly in Germany, Italy and Austria, and has recently reached Holland, where it bred last year, Denmark and Norway. It was announced by the leader of the British delegation that the British Government was not prepared to sign the International Convention for the Protection of Birds, which was initialled in Paris last year, until new bird protection legislation had been brought in for the United Kingdom. A bill embodying the recommendations of the Home Office Committee was being drafted, but owing to the change in Government it had been delayed.

Great Britain.—Acting under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949, the Nature Conservancy has now established seven nature reserves in England and two in Scotland. The largest in England, Moor House Reserve, Westmoreland, is an area of sixteen square miles in typical northern mountain country. Stretching eastwards from the foot of the western escarpment of the northern Pennines, it includes about 2,000 acres of peat vegetation, a large area of degenerating peat, and a stretch of high-altitude limestone grassland.

The remaining English reserves are small, none exceeding one square mile, but each has its peculiar character. Kingley Vale Reserve, in Sussex, provides a magnificent display of yew in all stages of development, from initial juniper scrub to old, pure yew wood. Cavenham Heath Reserve, in Suffolk, preserves from afforestation or cultivation a typical piece of Breckland. Yarner Wood Reserve, Devon, is representative of the sessile oak woodlands occupying the valleys fringing Dartmoor. The buzzard and the raven nest in the area. Ham Street Woods Reserve, Kent, in a district of great entomological interest, is an example of the old "coppice with standards" wood, now disappearing before modern timber crops. Holme Fen Reserve

supports some relict populations of the plants and animals which once characterized the Huntingdonshire fens. Finally, the Piltown skull site, in East Sussex, keeps for future research the spot where, in 1913, was found the skull of a man who probably lived in the second half of the Ice Age, some 100,000 years ago.

The Beinn Eighe Reserve, in Ross-shire, Scotland, consists of sixteen square miles of rough moorland country stretching southwards from Loch Maree. It contains some of the ancient Caledonian pine forest of the kind which originally covered vast areas of Scotland, but most of the land is rough and treeless, often boggy. In this reserve is much interesting vegetation, and here the eagle and the wild cat dwell.

The Morton Lochs Reserve, in Fife, is an area of forty-seven acres containing shallow lochs in a belt of arid ground. It lies on a main migration route of wildfowl and waders and is also an important breeding ground.

Unrestricted public access to all these reserves is not of course possible. Further information regarding the English reserves may be had from The Nature Conservancy, 91 Victoria Street, London, S.W. 1, and from The Nature Conservancy, 12 Hope Terrace, Edinburgh 9, regarding those in Scotland.

Cyprus.—Mr. F. S. Collier, Forestry Adviser to the Colonial Office, who has just returned from Cyprus, informs us that the mouflon in Paphos Forest are doing well. The Forest Guards now frequently see them and parties of a dozen ewes have been seen together. He himself saw a good ram and a ewe on a scree among the golden oak.

India.—On 17th December, 1951, the Government of India set up a National Committee for Bird Preservation, to assist the International Committee for Bird Preservation. Now we learn that a Central Board for Wild Life has been set up and that His Highness The Maharaja of Mysore, whose knowledge of nature and its preservation is universally acknowledged, has been appointed Chairman; the Vice-Chairman is the Inspector-General of Forests. Many interested bodies are represented, among them the Bombay and Bengal Natural History Societies.

The Board has very wide scope, including not only the conservation and control of wild life and the sponsoring of national parks, reserves and zoological gardens, but also the promotion of public interest in these subjects and the prevention of cruelty.

The machinery for wild life conservation in India seems now to be in being. We look forward hopefully to its practical application.

The Gambia.—As was reported in the last issue of *Oryx*, Mr. Peter Freeman, M.P., asked in February a question in the House of Commons about the destruction of monkeys, as a crop-protection measure in The Gambia. Mr. Freeman also wrote on this matter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, enclosing a letter from our Society, and has received a reply from which the following is extracted :—

“ The Society has urged that in order to provide protection to rare animals and to animals which are not destructive of crops, and also to ensure that the destruction of pests is carried out humanely, the Gambia Government should destroy these pests by organized drives. Experience has shown, however, that organized drives are ineffective and that in any event the reasons put forward in support of the adoption of this method have, in fact, little substance.

The notes enclosed with Colonel Boyle's letter said that in the Gambia 'a reward is given for every and any monkey tail' which is produced to the officers concerned with the campaign, but this is inaccurate. Bounties are paid only in respect of baboons, wild pigs and certain common species of monkeys known to be destructive to crops. The Administrative Officers concerned with the campaign have now paid out bounties on nearly 50,000 tails and have no doubt of their ability to recognize those of the destructive animals. Frauds may be perpetrated under the present system, but there is no reason to believe that they are on a large scale. The only one so far detected was the cutting of a baboon's tail in half in the hope that the raw end of the second half would pass as the end of a second tail. This was punished by refusal of a reward on either part of the tail. Even if the Africans attempted to manufacture tails it is unlikely that they would kill the rarer monkeys specially for this purpose. There is, in any case, no evidence that there has been any killing of rare monkeys.

The suggestion that the present methods of destruction are likely to lead to a profitable trade in tails or artificial tails across the border from French territory is not plausible. There is no evidence of it and there seems no reason for people from the Gambia attempting to get tails from French territory when there are still thousands of baboons and other monkey pests abounding in the Gambia. Moreover, the Gambia has a common frontier with French territory something over 600 miles in length, and since animals are no respecters of international boundaries it is in the interests of

the people of the Gambia that the number of pests should be reduced in neighbouring areas.

As I said in reply to your question in the House on the 27th February about inhumanity in the destruction of these pests, I have been assured that destruction is carried out as humanely as possible. Clearly, the Africans can have no object other than to destroy these pests as rapidly as possible, and one of the reasons why the bounties are paid on tails is that this is considered a fair method of ensuring that the animals are killed outright. Baboons, in particular, are strong and ill-tempered, and any attempt to remove the tail of one of these animals except after death would be dangerous for the hunters. In accordance with the provisions of the International Convention for the Protection of Fauna and Flora in Africa, the use of fires, poison, snares, traps, etc., for killing animals is prohibited in the Gambia, under the Wild Animals, Birds and Fish Preservation legislation. It is one of the duties of the officers concerned with this campaign to watch for any violation of this legislation.

There can be no question but that the destruction of these pests is necessary to the economy of the Gambia and that the campaign must continue. It has already had a noticeable effect on the quantities of foodstuffs available for human consumption."

South Africa.—We are very grateful to the Western Province Branch of the Wild Life Protection Society of South Africa for the notice of our Society published in their news sheet for April.

We would like to take this opportunity of suggesting to our readers membership of the Wild Life Protection Society of South Africa. The annual subscription is £1 11s. 6d., junior members 15s. All members receive free the Society's most interesting illustrated quarterly *African Wild Life*. Address: 315 Africa House, Rissik Street, Johannesburg.

The Monte Bello Islands.—On the 21st May the Prime Minister, replying in the House of Commons to a question by Mr. Emrys Hughes, said that one of the reasons why the Monte Bello Islands had been chosen for the atomic bomb tests was that they contained very little bird or animal life.

This statement provoked an immediate protest from Mr. A. H. Chisholm, the Australian naturalist, who in a message to the British Press and in a letter to our Society, has shown that obviously neither the British nor the Australian Governments have made any genuine attempt to assess the wild life of the

group before adopting it as a site for atomic tests. There are twenty species of birds in the islands, of which three are endemic to the area. Barrow Island, some ten miles to the north, is one of the only two islands where the black-and-white fairy wren is found, and is the only home of the Barrow Island bandicoot.

Although the news of the choice of the islands came too late for there to be any hope of a change of the site for the bomb test, certain steps are being taken. In Australia the Defence Ministry is being asked to disperse the strongly-flying species of birds before the bombs are dropped. In England both the British Museum (Natural History) and the Zoological Society of London have taken the matter up with the authorities ; for obviously it is better that the creatures should be collected for museums and zoological gardens than that they should merely be blown to pieces. The Medical Officer of H.M.S. *Campania* is very interested and has gathered a team of helpers. He has been given instructions and provided with apparatus. We are assured that everything which can be done by voluntary effort to preserve the fauna of the Monte Bello Islands is being done.
