

# The Survival Service Commission

## September 1963—January 1964

By R. S. R. FITTER

I ATTENDED the meeting of the Survival Service Commission of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, at Nairobi, beginning on 12th September, as an observer. Subsequently I was invited to join the Commission, and attended the first two meetings of the Action Group of the Commission at IUCN's headquarters at Morges, on 29th–30th November and on 9th January.

At the Nairobi meeting, Colonel Boyle, who had been running the Commission as Chairman from the Fauna Preservation Society office, retired, and was warmly thanked by the President of the Union for the many years' work he had put in. The new Chairman of the Commission is Mr. Peter Scott, who is also Chairman of the World Wildlife Fund and of its British National Appeal. Miss A. Daubercies, who was Secretary to the Commission, has been succeeded by Colonel J. Vincent, lately Director of National Parks in Natal and now Liaison Officer for the International Council for Bird Preservation with IUCN at Morges. The Commission's office has been transferred from London to Morges. It was agreed that those members of the Commission within easy range of Morges should form an Action Group meeting three or four times a year, and this Group has already met twice.

### Species in Danger

At Nairobi the Commission discussed a number of general problems, such as the need for controlling the trade in wild animals and especially the importation of endangered species, co-operation with zoological gardens and the translocation of endangered species, as well as the dangers that particularly threaten such individual species and groups as the leopards and other spotted cats, the orang-utan, rhinoceroses, marine turtles, and the blue whale.

Attention was especially drawn to the fact that nearly 50,000 leopards are being poached in East Africa every year, as a result of the current women's fashion for wearing the skins of the spotted cats, and most of them smuggled out through Somalia and Ethiopia. The Commission decided to support the National Audubon Society in its campaign to arrest the leopard-skin fashion in the United States, and a statement was issued to the Press, which received wide publicity, including a news item in *The Times* of London and a mention in the Kenya Broadcasting Company's news bulletins.

The situation of the Asiatic rhinoceroses was reviewed, and Colonel Shah, attaché to the Nepalese Embassy in London, who attended by invitation, was asked to draw the attention of H.M. The King of Nepal, who was then visiting Nairobi, to the report on the status of the great Indian rhino made by Mr. E. P. Gee on the Commission's behalf. Colonel Vincent referred to the serious position of the white rhino in

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Zululand, where there was now a surplus population of 400 animals over and above what the habitat would carry without deterioration, and appealed for suggestions for places to which these animals could be safely moved to be sent to him. The problem of the trade in rhino horn was also discussed, and it was agreed not to entertain suggestions that fake or artificial rhino horn should be manufactured, but to ask IUCN headquarters to obtain scientific proof that there is no medicinal value in the horn and then to ask the World Health Organisation to distribute the information as widely as possible.

Dr. Archie Carr spoke of the extremely serious position of three of the marine turtles: the hawksbill now threatened by a Japanese industry to utilise its shell, and by the use of its plastron as a substitute for green turtle soup; the green turtle now threatened by a discovery that excellent soup could be made from only 5 lb. of the turtle, thus making it much easier to remove large numbers, the rest being left to rot on the beach; and the Atlantic ridley now in danger from a Mexican project to establish a market in Europe drawing on the only known breeding colony, on a remote beach in Mexico. Dr. Carr warmly commended Costa Rica for setting aside sanctuaries on certain beaches used by breeding turtles.

The Commission also discussed the serious position of the blue whale, described in a note on p. 145.

### Inspectors in Natal

On the question of controlling the importation of rare and endangered species, it was noted that Natal was the only country which had fully implemented the resolution passed on this subject by the Warsaw Conference of IUCN in 1960. In Natal inspectors had been appointed to assist customs and other authorities on the difficult question of identification and in other ways. Colonel Boyle presented the draft of a Bill which was being promoted by the Fauna Preservation Society in the U.K. Parliament, to control the importation of rare animals into Britain; this is further referred to in a note on p. 144. The question of co-operating with zoos on the exhibition of rare animals was also discussed; see also p. 144.

Mr. Asibey, Acting Game Warden of Ghana, drew attention to the large imports of arms and ammunition to Ghana and said that this was the chief cause of the destruction of the country's wildlife.

The first meeting of the Action Group of the reconstituted Commission (a list of whose members will be found on p. 156) held at Morges in November was mainly devoted to general matters of organisation, the Red Data Book, and the orang-utan problem in Singapore. Mrs. Barbara Harrison was present and put forward a plan for dealing with the situation created by the presence of more than fifty illegally imported orang-utans in private hands in Singapore, which was approved. Details cannot be divulged until Mrs. Harrison returns to Malaysia and makes the inquiries necessary before it can be put into effect.

The Red Data Book of IUCN is intended eventually to be a complete record of the status and conservation problems of all rare and endangered animal and plant species. At present it is reasonably complete for mammals

only, but sheets for birds are under active preparation and a few reptiles are also included. The entries are constantly being revised as the much needed information comes in from all parts of the world. The mammal and reptile sheets have been compiled by Mr. Noel Simon, Information Officer of IUCN ; the bird ones are being prepared by Colonel Vincent as ICBP Liaison Officer at Morges. At Nairobi a system of symbols was worked out by which rare species can be categorised both by their degree of rarity and by the gravity of the threat to their continued existence. It is hoped, in the next issue of *ORYX*, to start reproducing the lists of rare species from the Red Data Book.

The Red Data Book, even in its present incomplete state, is an invaluable tool for all who are trying to save the world's wildlife. It has been produced with the aid of a large grant from the World Wildlife Fund, and at present is not available for general circulation, being confined to officers and members of the executive organs of IUCN and WWF, to members of the Survival Service Commission, and to a very limited number of private individuals who make substantial donations towards the cost.

The January meeting of the Commission at Morges was concerned mainly with the steps needed to conserve "three-star" forms, this being the highest category of urgency for dealing with rare species. A routine "action treatment" for all threats as soon as they are reported was worked out, and special attention given to the acute problem of Madagascar, in view of the most alarming reports that had been received of the rate at which the forest habitat of the island's rare mammals was disappearing.

## Pesticides and Wild Life

**T**HE Nature Conservancy has issued the following statement on pesticides, defined as substances used to control any animal or plant regarded as a pest ; the term includes herbicides, fungicides, insecticides, and rodenticides used in agriculture, horticulture and food storage.

The Conservancy have always appreciated that chemical control of certain plant and animal species is often desirable in the interests of agriculture. There is evidence to show, however, that certain pesticides can present long-term ecological hazards to wild life. Most herbicides used to-day are relatively non-toxic to birds and mammals. Of the insecticides, the organo-phosphorous substances are relatively non-persistent, although some, which are highly toxic, have on occasion caused severe local mortality. At present, however, certain highly persistent organo-chlorine insecticides appear to provide the main hazard to wild life. Since limitations were agreed on aldrin, dieldrin, and heptachlor used as spring cereal seed dressings, these insecticides probably do not now cause much direct poisoning. On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that if these substances were to be continually absorbed in small amounts in food they could have important effects on reproduction. The sub-lethal effects of the persistent chemicals on reproduction may well prove to be much more serious than their direct effects. Until more is known about these effects produced by ingestion through food chains the Conservancy will continue to press that their use should be greatly curtailed.