

ORYX

Vol. XII No. 1

May 1973

Notes and News

The award of a knighthood to our Chairman Peter Scott is no longer news to most of our members, but all will wish to join our Council in congratulating and expressing their pleasure at this

Sir Peter: recognition of his quite outstanding services to
Chairman wildlife conservation. His hats are numerous:
Extraordinary as well as FPS Chairman, he is Chairman of
the Survival Service Commission of IUCN
and of the British Appeal of the World Wild-

life Fund, First Vice-President of the international WWF, and Hon. Director (and creator) of the unique Wildfowl Trust—all display his interest in and considerable knowledge of the wildlife situation worldwide, ranging, as anyone who has been with him in the field knows well, over every facet of the natural world—air, land and sea. And not least among his achievements is the invention and implementation of the Red Data Books, which must have done as much as anything to popularise and spread the wildlife conservation message. Above all he is a chairman who demands—and gets—action.

Road killings and the gassing and digging out of sets are the main threats to the badger, it was agreed in a recent discussion among Mammal Society members representing 30 counties. In 13 of these

Threats counties badgers were believed to be decreas-
to British ing, and static in 10; no county was free of
Badgers gassing and digging, and digging at least is
increasing. Now, thanks partly to public revul-

sion at this horrible sport and a general up-
welling of public feeling in favour of the badger, two badger pro-
tection bills are before Parliament. They are very different. Lord
Arran's Bill is a blanket protection of badgers, which would be
unlikely to succeed in its present form, however much badger
lovers might want it to. Lord Cranbrook's amendments, by allow-
ing for the possibility of controlling badgers actually proved to be

doing damage, would transform it into a badger conservation bill, on the lines of the Seals Act, which would have a much better chance of success. Mr Peter Hardy's Bill is directed only against trespass for the purpose of badger digging, and, thus limited, is likely to satisfy only the backwoodsmen. However, the best parliamentary advice suggests that both bills have been introduced too late in the session to succeed, and it is likely that we shall have to have another go in the autumn, when it is to be hoped that an agreed measure will be possible. By then, also, the main outlines of the comprehensive wildlife protection bill being prepared by the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves should be available, and the badger bill can be dovetailed with that.

At its annual general meeting last year the Society urged the Government to ban the import of baleen whale products into Britain. The baleen or whalebone whales, especially the fin and sei, are the ones currently in danger from over-harvesting on the high seas. It took the Government nine months to make up its mind—a well known gestation period—but it has now done so, and has done exactly what we asked.

Since last June, as a result of a report specially prepared for us by the Friends of the Earth, we now know that there are satisfactory substitutes for sperm oil. We therefore now urge the Government to ban the import of sperm whale products also.

In March twenty-six countries signed a convention in Washington, DC, which, when ratified by ten of them, will come into force to control the international trade in endangered animals. This represents a great triumph for IUCN, which has been pressing for it since its Nairobi meeting in 1963, and also for the United States Government, without whose determination a much weaker measure would have been agreed. The

United Kingdom was one of the signatories, and, as one of the countries with legislation already in existence enabling it to achieve most of the aims of the convention, will, we trust, be one of the earliest ratifiers. The convention strictly controls the trade in endangered animals (as listed in three schedules) between the signatory countries, and will be discussed in greater detail in the next issue of *Oryx*. Here we may just note how two main sticking points at the conference were resolved. Products have to be recognisable as originating from an endangered species to qualify for protection, and whales and other sea mammals are included.

**Britain
Bans Whale
Products**

**Convention
Signed
at Last**

Six Arabian oryx from the World Herd at Phoenix Zoo, in Arizona, were transferred last autumn on loan to the San Diego Zoo's new wildlife park, an area reasonably like the desert of

**Spreading
the
Oryx Risk**

the oryx's homeland. Two areas of three to four acres each have been set aside for them. The policy to disperse some of the herd to avoid the dangers of disease—such as has already reduced Sheikh Qassim's herd in Qatar—was agreed by all the trustees and owners of individual animals in the Phoenix Herd, which stems from Operation Oryx: FPS, WWF, the London and Phoenix Zoos, and the Shikar-Safari Club. Already Phoenix Zoo had exchanged a male oryx (of which they have a predominance) for a female from the Los Angeles Zoo, where the herd is predominantly female; they were delighted when their animal arrived to find she was already pregnant and soon gave birth to a healthy calf.

The new Australian Government has started its career with a burst of wildlife conservation measures such as can hardly ever before have emerged from one Government in so short a time. A

**Conservation
Boom
in Australia**

complete ban is imposed on the exports of all crocodile skins and products, the import of all whale meat and other whale products and the export of all kangaroo skins and other kangaroo products, and new legislation is proposed to prohibit the import and export of a list of other endangered species. As the kangaroo skin export business is worth some £13m a year, the skins going mainly to the United States, this is a most remarkable move. In the next *Oryx* we hope to have a detailed report from Australia about the new measures and their effects and implications.

There can be few lake environs in the world that harbour 17 endemic species of plants and animals—but Lake Pedder in south-west Tasmania does. It would seem an irrefutable argument

**The Battle
for
Lake Pedder**

for conserving the area, which was made a National Park as long ago as 1955, but already Lake Pedder is being flooded behind two huge dams built by the Hydro-Electric Company of Tasmania, despite the continuous fight against the scheme by conservationists. The worst damage, they say, could still be averted if the flooding is stopped before the end of the 1973 winter (our summer); it is thought that the endemic species will 'mostly recover if the water level is lowered again by then', because they are accustomed to complete inundation in winter; but the area must dry out in summer, and this the

dams will prevent—quite certainly these species will then disappear from the earth. The new Australian Government's remarkable activity in the field of wildlife conservation immediately on taking office has encouraged conservationists to make a desperate last appeal, and the FPS has joined with other conservation organisations to urge the Government to take what is obviously at this stage a very difficult decision. A full description of Lake Pedder, with discussions of the issues and history of the case is published by the Australian Conservation Foundation: *Pedder Papers, Anatomy of a Decision*, obtainable from ACF, PO Box 142, Carlton, Victoria 3053, at \$1.00 post paid.

If evidence were needed that NERC, the Natural Environment Research Council, does not really know what conservation is about, it is to be found in the acclaim it has given to its own working party's lamentably timid report on

**Go Slow on
British
Marine Parks**

Marine Wildlife Conservation. Although it admits that there is no logical reason why our national reserves, designed 'to preserve representative samples of ecosystems and of geological and geographical features in Great Britain' should not include a full range of littoral and sub-littoral ecosystems, the working party almost stands on its head in order to find reasons why it should be illogical. The plain fact is that it is legally difficult to extend nature reserves below low-water mark, and good administrators will go to any lengths to avoid making suggestions that call for fresh legislation. Hence the failure of the working party to follow up the logic of its own report and make recommendations for a satisfactory series of underwater nature reserves all round our coasts, and perhaps one or two marine parks in the south-west, e.g. around Lundy and the Scillies. It will come in time, but first we must go through the bureaucratic farce of finding reasons why the inevitable must not be allowed to be.

Fifty-seven nations have ratified the international agreement to control waste dumping at sea following the conference in London last autumn. Certain highly dangerous substances—including indestructible synthetic materials, mercury and cadmium, and high-level radioactive and chemical and biological warfare substances—

**Cleaning up
the
World's Seas**

are banned. For others a special permit is necessary—pesticides, cyanides, fluorides come in this category; nothing may be dumped without a general permit. A second meeting next year will decide how the convention is to operate and, it is hoped, provide some controls. The British

Government, according to the *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, is now anxious to sponsor a world clean rivers programme—rivers are the main source of the pollution of the seas. Considerable progress on this has been made in Britain—new fish species appear in the Thames every year—but a glance at a river like the Mersey suggests we have a long way to go.

'I take great pleasure in announcing the break-up of the largest ring of traffickers in illegal animal skins ever uncovered', the Assistant Secretary of the Interior, Nathaniel P. Reed, said to the press in February, and the scale of the operations uncovered gives some idea of the smuggling that is going on. A New York firm of fur merchants, Vesely-Forte, and 32 other defendants pleaded guilty to importing illegally from Mexico and Brazil on 50 separate occasions between December 1970 and April 1972, the skins of 2723 otters, 2984 ocelots, 419 jaguars, 78 pumas, 5975 margay and 3 giant otters. At Kennedy Airport, New York, four crates labelled leathers, in transit from Brazil to Canada, were found, through the accident of one having a small hole, to contain spotted cat skins; this sparked off a mammoth seven-month investigation. It was found that the skins were bought in countries all over the world and shipped to storehouses in Canada and Switzerland, neither of which prohibits traffic in endangered species; they were then sold either to other American firms or to processors in Italy, France, Belgium, England, Greece and Germany. In only five months last year the firm handled 30,068 ocelot, 46,181 margay, 15,470 otter, 5644 leopard, 1867 cheetah, 1939 jaguar, 468 puma and 217 giant otter skins. The moral for conservationists is, as we all know, that it is not enough for one country to ban the trade in endangered species; to be effective it must be international.

Is there any justification at all for the pet trade in wild animals? In South America vast numbers of animals including birds are collected in the Amazon jungles and Colombian forests—nobody knows how many are killed in the process—

**Latin America
and
the Pet Trade** sold to traders and exported through centres such as Leticia in Colombia and Iquitos in Peru, mainly to Miami. In the three years 1968–70 about 200,000 monkeys alone went to the US market, and 85 per cent were reckoned to be for the pet trade. Smuggling and the use of false documents are rife. One US dealer alone received 854 illegally exported monkeys in 3½ months—and he was only one of nine importers in Miami. The dearth of wildlife along all the Amazonian rivers is now well

attested—to a depth of 20 km along navigable waterways is one reliable figure—and it is not the Indians who collect the animals who get the big money. Peru and Brazil have banned the export of *Red Data Book* species, but animals are smuggled out to Colombia. Discussing this appalling trade at the Seminar on Tropical Biology in the Amazon Region, in Iquitos last November, K. M. Green, who had studied the trade in Colombia for a year and could produce facts and figures, demanded that all consumer nations should pass legislation prohibiting the pet trade, and Felipe Benavides, redoubtable battler for Latin America's wildlife, announced his intention of urging the Peruvian Government to nationalise their wildlife as a major natural resource, just as oil and the guano have been nationalised; and he urged other governments to do the same. Alberto Donadio, who also has studied the Colombian trade (with the aid of an FPS grant), accused the traders of criminal methods, and urged a multi-national agreement between all Latin American countries to stop a trade that benefits no one but a few traders, and to rationalise the use of their wildlife. He urged an immediate five-year ban on all wildlife exports to permit the status of many species to be assessed and rational use decided. There is no doubt that he is right. When we find the highly endangered cotton-top marmoset and the golden lion marmoset in the lists of species exported drastic action is called for. What is needed is for the USA and some European nations to stop the pet trade in wild-caught species completely.

Two and a quarter million tortoises have been imported into Britain since the Animals (Restriction of Importation) Act came into force at the beginning of 1965, according to the 7th annual report of the Advisory Committee set up under the Act. In 1971 the number imported was 185,243, a decrease of some 50,000 on the previous year, which may or may not indicate that numbers in the wild are also falling. But this trade always seems to be one of the more pointless ones. Who has benefited from the premature death of all these tortoises at the onset of the first winter after they were imported to Britain? It can surely have given little satisfaction to the people who bought them. Nobody would think of buying a dog or a budgerigar that would not live through the next winter. Why then a tortoise? With the rarer animals, it seems fair to conclude that the Act is doing its job, though many people would like to see it extended to cover a wider spectrum. Cats and tapirs have already been added. Why not ungulates, rodents, crocodylians, snakes and lizards, to make an almost clean sweep of higher

**Tortoises
by the
Million**

report of the Advisory Committee set up under the Act. In 1971 the number imported was 185,243, a decrease of some 50,000 on the previous year, which may or may not indicate that numbers in the wild are also fall-

vertebrates other than birds (which have their own separate Act)? During 1971 only four great apes were imported—thanks partly to the rabies scare—and the five rhinos were doubtless all southern white rhinos, of which there is a surplus. But the Committee has insufficient powers to inquire whether it is really necessary for animals to be imported. If the Zoo Bill is passed, it may be easier to judge whether any particular zoo or safari park is justified in wishing to draw yet again on the dwindling supplies of wild animals to replenish stocks which it ought to be breeding.

A field station for captive breeding of two of the world's most endangered primates—the golden lion and the golden-headed marmosets—is now operating in the Tijuca National Park, near Rio de Janeiro. This has been made possible by a gift of \$15,000 from the US Appeal of WWF. These marmosets occur only in Brazil. The golden lion *Leontideus rosalia*, whose original range included the Tijuca park area, is reduced to fewer than 400 in the wild, all in one forest, and that disturbed and damaged by road developments; the golden-headed *L. chrysomelas* is estimated to number under 500 in the wild. The field station already has nine golden lion and five golden-headed animals, the latter including two pairs, and the Director, Dr Adelmar Coimbra-Filho, intends to trap and bring in others that are isolated in small pockets of forest where they cannot hope to survive. If breeding can be achieved animals will be released in the 8000-acre reserve that is planned at Poco das Antas. The future of these marmosets is so precarious that captive breeding seems the only hope.

The desperate state of the rarer wildlife species in Sardinia and the horrifying rate of habitat destruction and 'development' in the island, particularly in the west, is described by Franco Tassi, Director of the Abruzzo National Park and a trustee of the Italian WWF, in their newsletter. The Sardinian fallow deer may be extinct; if not it is so nearly so that any sightings must be kept secret. The Sardinian (Corsican) red deer, nearly extinct in its only other home in Corsica, survives mainly in two small populations, one on Monte Arcosu, west of Cagliari, the other on the Monti dei Sette Fratelli (Mountains of the Seven Brothers) east of Cagliari. Together with a few other very small scattered herds, the total population does not exceed 150 animals, which, divided as they are, is only doubtfully viable. The mouflon, found mainly in the Gennargentu Mountains (where a winter sports centre is planned with lifts

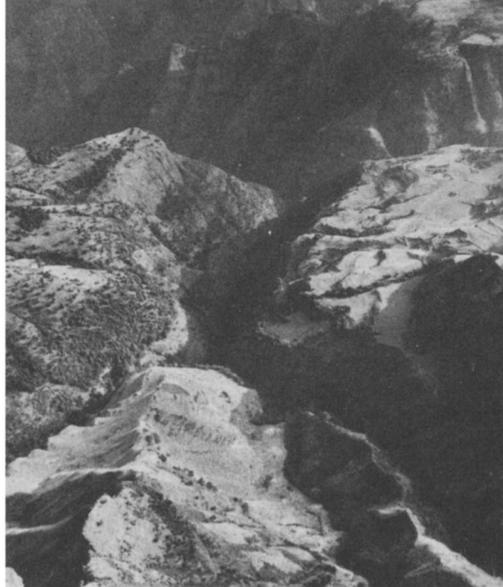
**Disasters
in
Sardinia**

and cableways and a road to the highest peaks) and on Monte Alto, and recently introduced on two small islands, Asinará and Figarolo, is estimated to number about 700 animals. Worst placed of all is the Mediterranean monk seal, with a population estimated at 15 animals around the entire coast. Two died in the winter of 1971/72, after getting entangled and strangled in fishermen's nylon nets. (When the nets were made of rope the seals would break their way out and those that were not shot by the furious fishermen got away). For the famous Grotto del Bue Marino (sea ox), one of the seals' last refuges, there are development plans to include piers, bridges, artificial lighting and even a platform for dancing. For some birds of prey, notably the vultures, the tale is the same; thanks to shooting and poisoning only about 200 griffon vultures survive, while the lammergeier, the bearded vulture, is probably extinct in the island. There are some signs of interest in conserving the wildlife among the island's inhabitants—a Sardinian section of the Italian WWF was recently founded in Cagliari—but it has an uphill battle in the face of the property developers, who can win local support with promises of jobs etc. Demonstrators against the plan for a Gennargentu National Park dubbed it 'the Park of Police and Masters'. It would in fact conserve some of the only real wealth of Sardinia.

A census of the walia ibex *Capra walia* in the Semien Mountains National Park in Ethiopia in February 1972 suggested that the population inside the park was between 150 and 200 animals;

**Threats
to the
Walia Ibex**

but believed to be small. As the world population of this endemic Ethiopian animal, the census results are not encouraging, but the warden of the Semien park, Jurgen Müller believes that, with good supervision, the walia can be protected for the next 10–20 years, and indefinitely if human interference can be stopped—but 'too many people are living inside or near the park boundaries', he writes. 'They depend on the forests for fuel and lumber, their animals overgraze the area till erosion sets in, whereupon they move away and destroy another area.' The Semien Mountains National Park was gazetted in 1969, but much needs to be done to make it effective. Mr. Müller, whose appointment as warden has had a marked effect, reports that the sixteen game scouts are keeping poaching down in the higher parts of the park, but in the lower land poaching is severe; however, three new camps for twelve guards are promised in 1973. Even more disturbing is the brief report of Dr B. Nievergelt, who has previously studied the ibex and who in 1971 made a short visit to look at the walia habitat in the Semien park for WWF.



1966...

1972

The walia ibex, he points out, depend on natural undisturbed mountain forest and alpine meadows, as well as, of course, rocks. What he found was severe destruction of their habitat as his comparative photographs show. In one area (Sederek Chenek) he estimated that a quarter of the habitat had disappeared in three years due to cutting and fires (deliberately started). A large area of true heath in the upper forest had been burned and destroyed, and although new shoots were appearing growth is very slow at these high altitudes (over 10,000 ft). Dr Nievergelt also drew attention to the danger of cross-breeding between walia and domestic goats, which are brought into the park to graze, and could be a serious threat to the wild ibex.

Argentina has embarked on a 'quick-action programme' to conserve its vicuña, which survive in very small numbers in five provinces. Last year representatives from these five met in San Juan, where the largest number of vicuña is believed to be, to decide how Argentina could stop the slaughter and build up the populations. The meeting decided—and the decisions have since been ratified by the five provincial governments—that a one-million-hectare vicuña reserve should be created in the high Andes, a Biological Experimental Centre established for urgently needed research, an education campaign launched, and a census made in the two neighbour provinces of San Juan and La Rioja in January 1973—the first such census ever to be made in Argentina—during which experiments would

**Argentina
and the
Vicuña**

be made with capturing methods and some animals tagged. The moving spirit behind all this was Sr Dalmino J. Cutillo, wildlife expert in the Direccion Nacional de Recursos Renovables, and already 10,000 hectares of land in the Andes at 3000m (some 10,000 ft) have been selected for the Biological Centre which is now being equipped. Writing about these encouraging moves, Sr Cutillo describes the objects of the plan as not only to save the vicuña for its cultural, scientific and economic value but also to make the most economic use of marginal lands, and, by rational use of the vicuña and its products, to raise the Andean people's standard of living. He pays tribute to the work of the Nature Conservation Society of Argentina, and adds that the initiative now being taken by Argentina was inspired by Peru's example, and especially the enthusiastic work of our FPS Vice-President, Felipe Benavides, who has been a lone—but very persistent and forceful—voice for many years. His efforts are now bearing fruit.

In 1971 the total population of vicuña in Chile was estimated at the unbelievably low number of 450–650 animals, and was clearly heading for extinction there. Now, however, a determined effort is being made to build up the population in the

**Vicuñas
and Flamingos
in Chile**

Lauca National Park (in the Andes in northern Chile, close to the Bolivian frontier). After attending the International Vicuña Conservation Conference in Lima in December 1971, the administrator of the vicuña farm in Caquena, Sr Italo Lanino, decided to concentrate on protecting the wild vicuña rather than farming, and that the best place to start was the 400,000 hectare Lauca Park. He has succeeded in getting the co-operation of the local police, and last August a park administrator, Sr Rafael Correa, was appointed and installed. Sr Correa is now making a vicuña census, at the same time acting as game inspector (in co-operation with the police) and trying to make local people conservation conscious. The Chilean member of the Survival Service Commission's Vicuña Group, Jurgen Rottmann, visited the southern end of the park, including the Surire Salt Lake, last August, together with the administrator, and was able to count 142 vicuña on the salt flats: the number of young animals was about half the number of females. A flamingo census at the same time showed between 2000 and 2500 birds of which, much to their surprise, all but a hundred were James's flamingo, the rarest species. (See 'The Rarest Flamingo', by Tony Morrison, *Oryx* January 1972). The 400 young birds, half of them unable to fly, must have hatched from eggs laid in June, which is the middle of winter. Sr Rottmann suggests this was probably due to exceptionally late and exceptionally heavy rains.

Fourteen threatened animal species in Sarawak—including dugong, earless monitor lizard, tarsier, clouded leopard, slow loris, Malayan peacock pheasant and eight hornbills—were recently

**\$50,000 for
one
Monitor Lizard**

added by the Governor in Council (under the Wild Life Protection Ordinance) to the First Schedule of Protected Animals. This means that they cannot be taken without a licence from the Chief Game Warden. Fifteen species were already on the list, among them proboscis monkey, orang-utan, Sumatran rhino, green, hawksbill and leatherback turtles, and nine birds. In addition no apes, monkeys, bears or deer may be exported without a licence. The new species were added at the request of the Sarawak Museum, whose Curator, Mr Lucas Chin, writes that the rare earless monitor lizard *Lanthanotus borneensis* is in great demand for scientific research; a visiting American animal collector advertised that he would pay up to US \$50,000 for a specimen. Slow loris and tarsiers *Tarsus bananus* are becoming scarce because of habitat disturbance; a graduate student from the Max Planck Institute is studying this little known tarsier in the field. The helmeted and rhinoceros hornbills are hunted mainly for food, but their ivory is made into ornaments which, with their fine tail feathers, are bought by tourists.

The auk populations of the North Atlantic are under as heavy a series of threats as any bird populations anywhere in the world. For many years they have been particularly liable to suffer from

**The Auks
under
Threat**

oil pollution, and more recently they have been shown to contain residues of PCB's. Two more threats were underlined at the recent Xth Conference of the European Continental Section of the International Council for Bird Preservation, at Mamaia, Rumania. It is now known that in recent years half a million auks have been killed every year in the mono-filament nets used for the Greenland salmon fishery, twice as many as had originally been thought. Fortunately this fishery is being scaled down, and will stop, apart from local fishermen within territorial waters, at the end of 1975. However a similar threat still menaces the shearwater stocks of the North Pacific, where three million birds are believed to be drowned every year in the nets of Japanese fishermen. The other threat to the Atlantic auks arises from sport shooting (incredible as it may seem) in the Bay of Biscay and off the Norwegian coast. Auks are protected in French territorial waters, but in international waters there is nothing to prevent hunters shooting these decreasing and protected birds. Off Norway the shooting of razorbills and guillemots has long been a popular sport and has only declined in

recent years because the auk stocks have declined. The Conference urged the Norwegian Government to stop this practice.

A battle to save the last 20,000 acres of untouched (and scientifically unexplored) rain forest in Sri Lanka from logging has been engaging conservationists both in the island and overseas.

**Battle for
a Sri Lanka
Forest**

This is the Sinharaja Forest. As a result of protests from the Ceylon Wildlife and Nature Protection Society and others, the Prime Minister, Mrs Bandaranaike, appointed a committee, headed by a Minister of State, to report on the proposed exploitation. In their representations to the Prime Minister, the Wildlife Society pointed out that the Forest had never been studied systematically and nobody knows what it contains, but that 'it is the richest natural ecosystem with a large number of indigenous species, and a great untapped potential for study, research and new products from which prosperity may spring'. Once destroyed—and even the proposed selective logging will do that—it is gone for ever.

The alligator situation in the southern United States illustrates some management problems that can arise when an endangered species is successfully protected and numbers build up again.

**Alligator
Problems in
the USA**

Alligators were given full protection in 1966 when heavy poaching and habitat destruction had depleted numbers severely. The protection has been so effective in some areas that Florida is now estimated to have 250,000 (a 53-per-cent increase in four years), and in 1971–72 wildlife officers there received 4873 complaints about them. They captured and translocated 1680 and had to destroy 52, but they believe some 5000 were illegally taken and about 1400 illegally destroyed. When people see an 'endangered' species proliferating in such numbers it needs careful management to prevent them taking the law into their own hands. In Louisiana, where also there was a rapid increase in 'gators', there was disagreement between the various conservation organisations: the state decided on a closely supervised harvest, the federal organisation protested, and the rest, with inadequate information, took sides. Whether any attempts were made to translocate excess alligators from Louisiana to other states where numbers were still depleted was never known. As so often the problem is one of control. If a controlled harvest could be achieved without opening the flood gates to poachers the alligator could be taken off the endangered species list where it clearly does not belong.