

AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE PROTECTION OF NATURE

By THE SECRETARY

The third technical meeting of the International Union for the Protection of Nature was held in Salzburg from 15th to 20th September, the last two days being occupied by excursions in which the majority of delegates took part. The term delegates is used though it is not strictly correct, for participants attended the conference as individuals only. Twelve countries were represented: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Yugoslavia. Unfortunately there was nobody from the United States, a great supporter of the Union, but papers and information from America helped to fill this gap.

From Great Britain there came Miss Barclay-Smith, a member of the Executive Board of the Union and Secretary of the International Committee for Bird Preservation; Lieut.-Col. C. L. Boyle, Secretary of the Fauna Preservation Society; Lord Hurcomb, President of the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves; Mr. Max Nicholson, Director of the Nature Conservancy, and Mr. Norman Riley, Keeper of Entomology, the British Museum (Natural History). On the first evening the Conference was welcomed by the Mayor of Salzburg and other dignitaries.

Professor C. J. Bernard, President of the Union, opened the Conference by speaking very briefly of the two subjects for discussion, Nature Protection and Tourism, and Protection of Fauna and Flora at high altitudes. Mr. Max Nicholson then took the chair. Much material for the discussions which followed was provided by the many papers which had previously been circulated. The official languages of the Union are French and English and interpretation is arranged. On this occasion German was used also.

The discussions on nature protection and tourism when considered with the papers showed how difficult a problem this is. But it can be stated quite simply. Nature is everywhere threatened by the spread of civilization. Yet it is man's environment. He must learn to live in his environment without destroying it.

The need for partnership between tourism and nature protection was clearly brought out by delegates. Man travels, enjoys

nature, begins to understand it and determines that it shall not be destroyed. That is what ought to happen and sometimes does. Discussion and papers showed how often this co-operation—essential to the preservation of natural beauty and to the very existence of wild flora and fauna—was not achieved. Dr. Lothar Machura, president of the Austrian League for the Protection of Nature, referred to Mount Rax, within reach of Vienna, where two square kilometres have vast numbers of visitors every year. In spite of well-organized control this mountain is losing its flowers, for which it is so often praised by tourists, owing to lack of discipline on the part of the tourists themselves.

The national parks of the United States are world-famous, but more than 40 million annual visits are giving rise to very serious difficulties, for the parks are increasingly being regarded more as recreational areas than nature reservations. These difficulties were particularly well discussed in a paper from Mr. Paul Shepard, Jr., of Yale University. "One needs only," he writes, "to spend a summer watching and talking to the hordes of inappropriately clothed and ill-shod people thundering through hotels and camp grounds, asking for movies, golf courses, ski-lifts, swimming pools and complaining of insects and weather, to realize that cultural resources are being wasted. To meet the itinerant from Chicago who is taking his family on a two-week vacation 'so as not to miss anything', through Glacier, Yellowstone, Yosemite and the Grand Canyon, is to realize that some of our compatriots picture the national parks as merely bigger and better city parks." Referring again to America, Dr. Willard van Name was quoted upon the immense camping grounds with their hotels, garages, restaurants and parking places which, he says, are ruining for ever the unique and beautiful places in the parks. The floor of the Yosemite Valley, for instance, was a big city during the tourist season.

The paradox of national parks and tourism became very clear. To encourage visitors to the parks is essential, for otherwise they will lack the public support without which attacks by commercial interests and even by government departments cannot be resisted. Yet visitors by their carelessness, ignorance, even merely by their numbers endanger the very existence of the parks as nature reserves.

In the Netherlands the protection of nature is particularly difficult owing to the density of population and expanding industrialization. Holland cannot close large areas in order

to protect nature. Perhaps therefore it has been necessity combined with the determination of the Dutch which has provided at least one solution which may well point the way for other countries. Mr. Evert Roderkerk described how the problem had been tackled in De Kennemerduinen National Park, of which he is the director. This park was founded in 1950 to provide both for the protection of some of the finest sand dunes with their bird life and also for recreation. Within a radius of $12\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the park there live over a million people. The solution lay in the realization that only a very small proportion of visitors wanted to wander far from the roads or the seashore, but that nevertheless none of them wanted to feel restricted. Every facility for the public was therefore provided near the entrance to the park, including a camping ground for a thousand people and playgrounds. Thence a road led to the beach where further facilities could be found. Outside these areas, that is in the parts of the park more precious to naturalists, it was forbidden to leave the paths. These arrangements had been completely successful and the damage done to nature very slight indeed.

Many further important points were brought up during the discussions on nature protection and tourism, one being the desirability of co-operation between tourist organizations and bodies interested in nature protection, so that tourists should not only know what they should not do, but why apparently harmless actions would do damage. Another was the necessity for positive action. Tourists should be told what there was to see and how it could be seen. The subject of education cropped up continually but it was decided that this was too vast a question for unprepared discussion. It would be specially discussed at the next meeting of the Union.

Next day the conference turned to the protection of flora and fauna at high altitudes. Dr. Roger Heim, Director of the French National Natural History Museum, took the chair and laid down the course for the discussion. Clearly the subject was divisible into two. Firstly it was concerned with facilities for visitors to the mountains. How could scenic beauties and wild life be preserved when cable and funicular railways reached mountain tops, there to find hotels and restaurants? Secondly, how could the ever increasing need for water and power be met without defacing the alpine country?

Herr Gams, Professor of Botany at the University of Innsbruck, spoke of the importance of the protection of the watershed and how necessary it was that protected areas should

be patrolled by official and voluntary organizations, as was done in Bavaria and the Tyrol.

For the protection of the flora short lists of totally protected plants were needed, but there should be longer lists of those which should not be sold. Local restrictions were also necessary. In an interesting paper Herr Walther Schoenichen had suggested that the whole alpine flora should be shown in a series of small reserves and that an international sign for the protection of plants should be introduced, similar to that already in use for the protection of game.

The protection of the edelweiss was then discussed. It had received an altogether unjustifiable reputation and consequently was disappearing. It was no true alpine plant for it had come to the Alps only during an interglacial period. If the public could be made to understand this and that it was really hardly a flower at all, it would be less uprooted. The name came from Salzburg during the eighteenth century. Previously it was known as the wool flower or stomach-ache flower.

The danger to animals was partly due to superstition. The flesh of the alpine marmot was supposed to have medicinal qualities, and the golden eagle was alleged to carry off babies. Great success had been achieved in the rehabilitation of the ibex in the Gran Paradiso Park in Italy, and its re-establishment in Switzerland.

Two conflicting points of view were clearly demonstrated when a delegate from the Netherlands described his horror in finding a road being built to the world-famous Tennenberge ice caves and even a cable railway being made to reach them. He had heard that visits to these caves were going to be put under private enterprise. But the action of the Austrian Government was ably defended. At present a visit to the caves was a mountaineering exploit, impossible to the great majority of people. The whole business of making them accessible was being most carefully controlled so as not to spoil the natural scene. There would be no question of floodlighting or anything of that sort. A delegate pointed out that in the American national parks which he had recently visited no funicular or cable railways were allowed. People who could not walk to the top stayed at the bottom. No more such should be allowed in Austria, there were enough already.

When it came to hydro-electric schemes the only hope was thorough investigation and discussion between engineers and bodies concerned with nature protection. When this was

done a reasonable compromise could often be reached. Engineers were not totally unconcerned with the damage their schemes do to nature.

And what will be the outcome? There has been a general exchange of information and opinions between people concerned in their various countries with the two subjects which were discussed. Schemes for co-operation between nature protection and tourism for instance can now be put into effect with mutual understanding. Co-operation between hydro-electric schemes and nature protection has been made a little easier. The resolutions which have been passed will make at least some impression upon those to whom they will be sent. But no less important and effective will be the many private talks which delegates from many countries have had with one another.
