

## SHORT NOTES

## RED DEER IN SCOTLAND

In the last *Oryx* Mr. Whitehead states that before the war "approximately 11,000 red deer stags were killed annually". I have been intimately connected with deer forests and stalking for a considerable number of years and this figure seems to me excessive.

In stalking circles the normal number of stags killed annually in regular deer forests was always considered to be between 5,000 and 6,000. The 1922 report of the Departmental Deer Forest Committee gave the estimated number of stags and hinds killed in 1916-17 as just under 12,000, and in 1917-18 17,500. The normal kill in deer forests was placed at 6,000-7,000 stags and 5,500 hinds.

In 1939 7,000 stags were killed; 1940, 9,000-10,000; 1941, 6,000 (it was estimated that the winter of 1940-41 was responsible for the deaths of from 40,000-50,000 deer); 1942, 5,000; 1943, 5,500; 1944, 4,500; 1945, no figures; 1946, 6,000-7,000.

The above totals are from regular deer forests. Mr. Whitehead's figures may be correct, but they assume that an additional four or five thousand stags were killed in lands outside these areas, and this seems a little hard to believe.

The total deer population is difficult to compute; experienced observers in 1939 placed it at about 200,000 head. The most experienced professional stalker I know writes: "My own opinion is that the number of deer in Scotland is very much lower than anybody realizes and I doubt very much if there are more than from 60,000 to 80,000 on the hoof to-day."

I know something of the large forests of the central Highlands and am certain that not one of them holds 500 stags to-day. Even if the hundred-odd forests of over 10,000 acres held 500 deer each and the other ninety-odd small forests held 200 each (a good many do not hold a single beast) the total would work out at some 700,000 only. We ourselves have less than a third of our pre-war stock and I believe this is pretty general everywhere. The heavy toll of the war years and the winters of 1947-48 and 1950-51 is now showing."

Mr. Perry is, of course, quite right in saying that lack of winter feed presents the most serious threat to the survival of the red deer in Scotland.—H. FRANK WALLACE.

Both Mr. Richard Perry and Mr. Kenneth Whitehead seem to suggest that the normal ratio in red deer is one big stag to twenty-five other deer. In countries such as the Caucasus, where deer live (or lived) in natural conditions, I never saw more than four hinds with a stag (and seldom that number) in the rutting season. At that moment, of course, young stags would not be allowed near a hind. I believe that the large numbers of hinds seen in Scotland with a master stag is completely unnatural and probably harmful to red deer. At any rate the Caucasian deer make their Scottish cousins look pigmies. I should estimate that a big Caucasian stag weighs forty stone, with a head to match. No doubt leopards, bears, wolves and eagles take a good toll of young deer and there is capital feeding and any amount of covert for the survivors. Moreover their range is practically unlimited and they do not live on an island. They are also amazingly difficult to catch.—ANTHONY BUXTON.

#### LESSER HORSESHOE BAT IN SHROPSHIRE

I believe Lieut.-Colonel Goodwin to be in error in his statement that his bat from Nash Court, Ludlow, was the first record for the county.

Barrett-Hamilton (in his *History of British Mammals*, 1910) reported one in the Worcester Museum from Dowles, on the Shropshire side of the Worcester border. This bat is widespread in the Denbighshire limestone areas, and I have ringed specimens in the Ceirog valley within a mile or two of the Shropshire border. Probably the bats are occasionally to be found in immediately adjacent parts of Shropshire.—G. E. HESKETH.

#### DORMICE AND THEIR DIET

The British native dormouse, *Muscardinus avellanarius*, has many interesting features ; and not the least interesting of these is the question as to whether or not it eats insects. If half a dozen popular natural history books are referred to, it is probable that the result will be confusion. One writer will claim that insects form a substantial part of the food of dormice, another will deny this, while others will be discreetly silent. Where lies the truth ?

I have kept many dormice in captivity—in fact I have a pair at the time of writing ; and I am always hoping to breed them as I do not think this has ever been done. I have paid much attention to the food preferences of my “sleepy mice”, as they are still called in some southern counties, and I am reasonably certain that individual dormice differ in their attitude to