

Notes and News

The Palau Islands in the Pacific, which the Thirteenth Pacific Science Congress described as 'of scientific and park value unequalled in Oceania', are the site selected by an industrial consultancy for possible development as a superport

Superport in the Pacific

for supertankers. There is worldwide opposition to the plan, which would turn the US Trust Territory into a calling station and processing complex for oil bound from Iran to Japan. To the American consultant, whose brain-child the project is, the reefs are 'among the world's broadest and strongest . . . shoal areas, which can be filled with dredged material from the lagoon bottoms or crushed rock extracted from the limestone hills of Babelthau Island'. On Babelthau itself – the largest island in the group and planned to house auxiliary facilities, a petrochemical plant and residential, administrative and maintenance buildings – there are both freshwater and estuarine crocodiles, dugongs, boas, fruit bats and five species of rare birds. Some hope for the islands lies in various US environmental laws, opposition among the Palauans themselves, and a movement to have the site set aside under the World Heritage Trust Convention.

A report on the effects of tourism in the Galapagos Islands speaks of the 'harmonious relationship' between tourists and wildlife. This is a pleasant change and an achievement for which we have to thank Ecuadorian National

Tourists and Wildlife in Galapagos

Park Service's sensible management of the problem. Dr M.P. Harris and Dr T. de Vries point out that Galapagos animals were already tame and accustomed to people when tourist boats began to arrive, but also that the restriction of people to prescribed trails, which the Ecuadorian National Parks introduced in 1973, and the high standard of the guides (who are required to take a fairly rigorous course and pass an examination) are important factors in ensuring that people behave properly and cause the minimum disturbance. No animal colony in the islands appears to be seriously affected by tourists, and the fur seals in one much-visited area have not only increased but become tamer. One interesting case is that of the land iguanas on Plaza Island. Ten years ago these iguanas were exceedingly shy,

bolting down their burrows at the first glimpse of a human. But a few years later, at the first sign of a boat coming in, they would be down at the landing place in some numbers, 'demanding' food, and voraciously consuming bananas and biscuits and no doubt other foods if offered as well. This, say the authors of this report, caused a breakdown in normal territorial behaviour which could have affected breeding success. Now that feeding these iguanas is banned their behaviour has more or less returned to normal.

Last year in the Galapagos Islands feral dogs destroyed most of the young Galapagos giant tortoises, the product of four breeding seasons (1971–1975), in the best nesting area on Santa Cruz island, although dogs had never before

been seen anywhere near this part of the island. Dogs have also destroyed a large proportion of the land iguanas, both adults and young, on Santa Cruz and in Cartago Bay on Isabela island. Because the dogs can kill all sizes of land iguana the damage they do to them is even worse than to the tortoise population. Feral cats are another menace, killing young iguanas to eat. Plans to deal with the situation include taking survivors of the land-iguana massacre to the Charles Darwin Research Station for captive breeding, the stationing of permanent wardens at critical points, and a campaign to kill as many dogs and cats as possible. On San Cristobal island the feral dogs seem to have been exterminated. No trace of them has been found for several years, and 80 young tortoises have been found that had bred in the wild. All have been weighed, measured and marked for future study.

If American West Coast tuna fishermen are to continue using dolphins as guides, they will have to do it without killing the dolphins, because a US district court judge, upheld by a Court of Appeals, has ruled that the 1972

Marine Mammals Act must be applied. The practice which the tuna fishermen were defending is the one that exploits the dolphins' habit of swimming near the surface above a school of tuna; the fishermen surround the dolphins with nets and pull in the tuna, frequently ensnaring, injuring and drowning the dolphins in the process. Though the Act specifically outlaws this, the fishermen have been carrying on as though they were exempt, while the Commerce Department, which was supposed to enforce the law, appeared to view its role rather as that of a census-taker. But in March 1976 District Court Judge Charles Richey ruled that Congress had meant what it had said in 1972: 'it shall be the immediate goal that the incidental kill or incidental serious injury of marine mammals be reduced to insignificant levels approaching zero mortality'. Zero seemed to be some distance from the 72,000 spotted dolphins and 21,000 eastern spinner dolphins estimated to have been killed in this way in 1974. The fishermen got no help from either the chairman of the appropriate House subcommittee when they asked for new legislation or from the US Court of Appeals, which in August upheld Judge

Richey, modifying his decision only to the extent of delaying the ban until the end of the tuna season in January 1977. So far no technological alternative, such as sonar devices that would warn the dolphins of the enclosing nets, has been found both feasible and acceptable, and so it looks as though the fishermen's only legal choice will be to find the tuna for themselves. An unfortunate footnote, however, comes in unconfirmed reports that European and African fishermen have been copying American techniques and killing perhaps as many as a quarter of a million dolphins a year.

An expedition last year to look for kouprey *Bos sauveli* in the Dongrak mountains in south-east Thailand, on the Cambodian frontier, confirmed the evidence of a previous expedition that some kouprey survive there, and cross in the rainy season from Cambodia to Thailand. The expedition never saw a

**Kouprey
Survive – but
for how long?**

kouprey but considered the evidence of hunters they questioned to be reliable. But, says Peter Enderlein in his report on the expedition, the destruction of the forest and the kouprey habitat is speeding up. A road has now been built right into the hills to bring out the timber that is being felled continuously, settlers are moving in, plantations of tapioca and maize are multiplying, and forest is changing from evergreen to deciduous. Shooting was to be heard day and night, with parties of hunters using powerful flashlights at night (and benefiting from the new road). No large animals at all were to be seen – an observation confirmed by the local hunters. The proposal to make the Dongrak Forest into a national reserve, which the Thai Government is apparently prepared to accept, in order to protect the kouprey, the other wildlife and the watershed, does not look promising when the whole area has been allocated in timber leases. If a reserve could be created, and the tree felling and indiscriminate hunting stopped, says the report, it is very likely that the kouprey and other animals would return, but it is also essential to secure the protection of adjoining habitat in Cambodia, and the report urges that international organisations, including FAO and IUCN/WWF, should negotiate with the Cambodian Government to this end.

The amalgamation of two national parks – Bandipur, which is one of the nine Project Tiger areas, and Nagarhole – and two major wildlife sanctuaries – Mudumalai and Wynad – in South India into one national park of 2000 sq

**Park Proposal
for
South India**

km to be called the Jawahar National Park is the imaginative proposal of a group of Indian scientists in the University of Kerala and the Indian Institute of Science at Bangalore. Such a park would probably enclose the largest elephant population in India as well as great numbers of gaur, sambar, chital, wild boar, mouse deer, black-naped hare, sloth bear, hunting dog (dhole), grey langur and giant squirrel; rarer species include four-horned antelope, barking deer, panther, tiger, jackal and striped hyena. The addition of a third sanctuary, Brahmagiri, would provide suitable

areas to introduce Nilgiri tahr, Nilgiri langur and lion-tailed macaque, which occurred not far away until recently; blackbuck could also be introduced, which would mean that the park would protect all the major South Indian mammals. The authors of the report making this proposal have surveyed the entire area, which is one of the most extensive contiguous forest areas in peninsular India, but inevitably cattle grazing is a severe threat everywhere, except to some extent in the Bandipur Project Tiger area. In the Mudumalai Sanctuary alone 20,000 cattle are permitted to graze, and of the Wynad Sanctuary the authors say, 'it can be categorically stated that absolutely no area . . . is free from grazing'.

The Arctic caribou population of Alaska is declining and, since wolves eat caribou, it must be the wolves' fault. This is the apparent reasoning behind the plans of the Alaskan Department of Fish and Game to cull the wolf population on the Brooks Range in the northwestern part of the state by 80 per cent. According to state game biologists, the threatened caribou have declined from 240,000 in 1970 to around 40,000 in 1976, and it is estimated that humans and wolves together take 45,000 a year. But the human-to-wolf kill ratio is reckoned at about three to one. Eskimos, who today have snowmobiles and rifles, are no longer simply subsistence hunters, and the Department seems to have further overlooked such possibilities as natural population cycles, overgrazing, and disruption caused by the new Alaskan oil pipeline. Neither are there any reliable wolf counts for the region, making the 80 per cent figure meaningless. Moreover the effect of killing so many wolves would be to increase the number of births and increase survival rates in the young to bring wolf numbers up again. In 1976 some 100 wolves were culled at a cost of \$250,000. Presuming that the 1977 operation will aim for many times that number, economics may turn out to be the wolves' best hope.

For 130 years New Zealand has been felling native forest trees, clear-felling the forests, without thought for the future. Now there is not enough native forest left to fulfil even present commitments. The Government has got to stop this rake's progress, plan and think. The lines of its thinking were described by the Minister of Forests and of the Environment, Mr V.S. Young, in a speech in Wellington last year, reprinted in part in *Forest and Bird*, August 1976. The Minister is fully aware of the folly of what has happened, which of course is not unique to New Zealand, and pointed out how the process had speeded up in recent years, when increasing affluence had produced competing claims for less and less forest. The result, he said was that 'the indigenous timber industry . . . will soon be a thing of the past. We have reached the point where we must reserve the more important examples of our remaining virgin lowland and lands for posterity. We (have) . . . to phase out our indigenous saw-milling industry'. (The industry is a big employer in

**Will Killing
Wolves
Save Caribou?**

**The Last
of the
Native Forest**

some districts, hence 'phase out', not 'close down'.) 'Man is as much a naturalised species of south Westland as the white heron,' says the Minister. 'I must have concern for the welfare of both.' The Government's new policy involves a switch from clear-felling to selective logging of native trees, such as rimu, kauri and beech, the substitution of exotics wherever 'suitable', and eventually the creation or extension of reserves to include more native forest. Selective logging, the Minister claims, will still leave a natural forest community; 'no major adverse effect on wildlife is likely to result'. How does he know?

At least 40 Mediterranean monk seals have survived in the Greek Northern Sporades islands, reports Dr Thomas Schultze-Westrum, who last year visited the easternmost island, Piperi, under the guidance of local fishermen, and

**Paying
for
Protection**

filmed a colony consisting of five adults and three pups. Uninhabited, with numerous caves and small beaches suitable for seals and a rich fish supply, Piperi has been suggested to the Greek Government as the ideal centre for a large marine conservation area, which would protect not only the seals, but sea birds, Eleonora's falcon, and a great variety of plant communities. As everywhere, protecting the seals from the fishermen is the big problem. The nearest settlement, Alonisis, has 40 fishing boats; their owners could wipe out the colony in a season if they wanted. The fishermen, if they are to be persuaded to leave the seals in peace, must benefit, not lose, by their presence. Dr Schultze-Westrum suggests a free issue of nets at the beginning of the season, compensation for fish taken by the seals out of the nets, plus a small cash reward; mere compensation for destroyed nets will not satisfy them, and visits by tourists, which could bring an income, can only be encouraged outside the breeding season – mid-August to mid-October.

In overcrowded Britain even semi-natural habitat for wildlife is scarce, so that how the 150,000 farmers in England and Wales who farm at least 20 acres intend to manage their land is of vital importance. A survey of the 'attitudes and

**Farmers
and
Wildlife**

intentions' of 305 such farmers showed that 13 per cent expected to destroy an appreciable amount of wildlife habitat in the next 10 years, but a similar number, especially on the larger farms, intended to improve or create it – especially woods, shelter-belts, copses, marshy land, water and scrub. About a fifth of the farmers were 'naturalist' or 'sporting' farmers, and they occupied the largest farms, which probably means that their functions are more supervisory and that they can devote more time and money to managing their environment as a whole. As might be expected, farmers in contact with wildlife conservationists are more likely to improve or create habitats for wildlife – a point well known to naturalists' trusts even if they are not all so successful in acting on it. And another point for the trusts to note was that nearly a quarter of the farmers were interested in letting land to conservation bodies, at least for short periods and at nominal rent. The

survey was made in late 1974 by ADAS – the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service; the report, 'Wildlife Conservation in Semi-natural Habitats on Farms', is published by HMSO, £1.25.

FPS Annual General Meeting

Sir David Serpell, Chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council, was the speaker at the FPS 1976 Annual General Meeting on June 16, chaired by the President, Lord Zuckerman.

Sir David spoke of NCC's work in protecting important sites 'from Shetland to the Scillies', including some 150 national nature reserves, with a total staff of only about 500. He also spoke of the international aspects of the Council's work, particularly participation in the wetlands programme (12 wetlands of international importance have been declared in the UK) and the Man and the Biosphere programme (15 UK 'biosphere reserves' of international importance have been selected).

'With this site protection work', he said, 'particularly at international level, we have to be very careful to prevent it becoming just sticking another label on to something that already exists – after all, our Biosphere Reserves are all national nature reserves, or have equivalent protection. At the moment our scientists are pressing a number of international bodies to stop devising new sets of labels and to concentrate on getting on with the job of getting practical results out of existing schemes.'

Elections

The meeting opened with the approval of the Annual Report and Accounts, and the election of five new Vice-Presidents:

Professor A.G. Bannikov, USSR
 The Earl of Cranbrook, UK
 Dr Kai Curry-Lindahl, Sweden
 Major Ian R. Grimwood, Kenya
 Dr Lee M. Talbot, USA

Three members of Council retired and were warmly thanked by the Chairman for their services: Sir William Collins, CBE, Lt Col J.P. Grant of Rothiemurchus MBE, and Major W.N. Scott.

Three nominations to fill the vacancies were confirmed: Dr Malcolm Coe, Miss A.C.G. Grandison and Dr John MacKinnon.

The Officers were re-elected, and the proposal that the Honorary Editor be made an officer of the Society approved. The Chairman, Sir Peter Scott, proposed a warm vote of thanks to the Zoological Society of London for much help throughout the year and especially for the provision of office accommodation and services.

A wine and cheese supper was served and the film *Gorilla* shown by courtesy of Mr Aubrey Buxton and Anglia Television. Members were able to enjoy a beautiful evening in the Zoo Gardens by courtesy of the Zoological Society.

The 1977 AGM will take place on Tuesday, July 5, in the meeting rooms of the Zoological Society of London, Regent's Park. For details of this and other meetings see page 512.