

How Can Zoos Help Wildlife Conservation ?

FOUR main themes were discussed at the Symposium on "Zoos and Conservation", held in June at the London Zoo, at which conservationists and zoo directors and their assistants met to discuss how zoos could help wildlife conservation. H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh took the chair at the opening session of the symposium, which was sponsored by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the International Union of Directors of Zoological Gardens and the International Council for Bird Preservation, and in the genesis of which the Fauna Preservation Society played a prominent part. The four themes were : The breeding of endangered species in captivity ; The import, export, transport and sale of wild animals ; Conservation education in zoos ; and Moral and financial support for conservation through zoos.

Severe Losses in Capture

Dr. Lang, director of the Basel Zoo, was emphatic that endangered species can be successfully bred in zoos and returned to the wild, thanks to modern knowledge about nutrition, hygiene and veterinary science, particularly the use of drugs for capturing and transporting wild animals, and Dr. Conway, of the New York Zoo, pointed out that this had in fact been done, and a small number of introductions successfully made. But the difficulties inherent in the capture of wild animals were underlined in a notable contribution from the chief game warden of Kenya, Major Grimwood, who suggested that few zoos appreciated the scale of casualties in capture operations, and that dealers were satisfied with a 10 per cent survival rate. He quoted figures from his own experience : 108 large mammals captured last year, of which only sixteen were alive three months later, and another case of seventy-two captured, with only thirty surviving, and emphasised that these were unavoidable casualties sustained by a responsible game department when every care had been taken. Of vervet monkeys he put casualties at 22–25 per cent, and suggested that birds suffered the highest casualties : one example was a capture of 150 love birds of which only twenty survived after a two-hour journey to Nairobi. An Indian dealer, Mr. G. Munro, was emphatic that the casualty rate in his country was much lower, and Dr. Lane-Petter, of the Medical Research Council, representing the FPS, agreed that conditions in the air transport of animals from India, particularly monkeys, had improved enormously in the past ten years. Major Grimwood listed some of the difficulties of the game department, one being how to decide to which zoos and scientific institutions the quota of different species should be sent ; at a later session the delegates resolved, on the proposal of the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, to set up an international organisation to deal with this among other problems. The full text of the resolution appears at the end of this report. On the question of animals for scientific institutions, such as medical and research centres—the case of one

U.S. centre which imported twenty-six orang-utans last year was quoted—the delegates felt strongly that these centres should be encouraged and helped to set up breeding centres of their own. A recommendation, proposed by the ICBP, that an expert committee should be set up in each country to advise the Government on the effective control of the import and transit of rare animals, was passed.

The need for field ecological studies before capture was emphasised by many speakers, including Dr. John Berry, representing the Edinburgh Zoo, and Dr. Desmond Morris of the London Zoo, who instanced Dr. Schaller's new book on the gorilla as a classic example of what should be done. In rebutting a suggestion that the breeding of endangered species with a view to returning them to the wild was impractical, Dr. Thorpe of Cambridge pointed out that we simply do not know enough about one single species alive to say whether its extinction would be a serious loss for man or not, nor do we know enough about the scale of breeding necessary for re-establishment in the wild.

The role of zoos in educating the public started a lively discussion. Mr. James Fisher thought that 90 per cent of the visitors to zoos never read a label; others felt that this was a considerable overstatement, and that in any case it was the job of the zoos to attract the attention of the public with new techniques. Films, exhibits such as the empty dodo cage, and the red label for an endangered species used in the New York Zoo, of which a photograph appeared in the last issue of *ORYX*, were instanced, and the director of the Antwerp Zoo, Mr. van den Bergh, suggested that not only the public had to be educated, but also the members of the zoo staffs, who should be instructed in conservation and encouraged to participate in nature conservation campaigns—which prompted the query how many naturalists' trusts in England have any zoo personnel on their councils?

The Public's Sympathy—and Its Pennies

Considerable emotion was displayed in discussing whether emotion should play any part in conservation. Mr. Peter Scott, supported by many other speakers, was strongly of the view that emotion was inseparable from wildlife conservation, essential for gaining public support, and in any case no bad thing in itself provided the scientific basis of conservation was kept clearly in mind. Dr. Fairfield Osborn, president of the Conservation Foundation of New York, and a vice-president of the FPS, quoted the case of a very large bequest to the New York Zoo from a woman whose interest in conservation had first been aroused by the campaigns to save the bison and birds of plumage. Wildlife protection, he declared, was an integral part of the work of any good zoo. People have become urbanised, and it is the zoos' job to make them conscious of living things. Conservation to-day brought considerable popular support for zoos, a point that was echoed by Mr. Ian MacPhail, of the World Wildlife Fund, who suggested that "not everyone loves a zoo", and that, by championing conservation, zoos could improve their own popular image. Both he and Mr. Scott suggested ways in which zoos could help to raise funds for conservation—Mr. Scott estimated, on figures from one small private zoo,

that if every zoo in the world installed a "wishing well", which seemed to have an irresistible attraction for people to throw coins in, something like £280,000 a year could be raised for conservation.

The general feeling that the symposium, though the first of its kind, should not be the last, was voiced by Dr. Osborn at the final session, who urged that the next meeting should be in New York.

The resolution proposed by Dr. Conway for AAZPA and passed was :

That an international organisation of zoological gardens, experimental research stations, animal collections and animal traders should be developed through the agency of the IUCN Zoo Liaison Committee; that this federation should be formed, among other purposes, for developing a method of distributing certain rare animals for exhibition in co-operation with the IUCN Survival Service Commission and for co-operating with the IUCN and various national governments in the administration of this method.

SURVIVAL SERVICE COMMISSION

THE third meeting of the Action Group of the Survival Service Commission was held at the offices of the Zoological Society of London on June 22nd to 23rd, 1964, with Mr. Peter Scott in the chair. The Commission heard Dr. Schaurte, chairman of its Rhinoceros Group, describe the plans for saving the last remnant of the Javan rhino, and Dr. Harry Lillie on the plight of the harp and hood seals, which have recently been harvested on an unprecedented scale off the Canadian coast. Dr. Lillie described the difficulties that had arisen in attempting to establish the special seal conservation panel under the International Convention for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries. He pointed out that the estimated population of 3 million harp seals in 1949 had already been reduced by two-thirds in 1960, and if the annual kill was allowed to continue at the present rate of 300,000 to 400,000 the whole population would inevitably be wiped out. In 1964 no fewer than seventy aircraft had taken part in the annual sealing, in addition to ships. It was decided to make a direct approach to the Canadian Government to impose proper conservation practices on the sealing industry.

It was reported that the Orang-utan Recovery Scheme was launched in May with the full co-operation and sympathy of the Singapore authorities, and with funds sufficient to rescue 16 of the 50 or more smuggled baby orang-utans in Singapore and hand them over to reputable zoos.

The future of the unique Madagascar fauna and the report of M. J.-J. Petter were discussed with Professor Bourlière, who reported that this year one of the best nature reserves in the island had been declassified. Special attention was given, and appropriate action suggested, for ten birds, including the Japanese crested ibis, the Hawaiian duck and the noisy scrub bird, and ten mammals, including the blue whale, the Indian lion, Hunter's antelope and the Zanzibar colobus monkey.

Mexico Investigates Turtle Protection

The Director-General of Fisheries in Mexico, Admiral Antonio Vazquez del Mercado, replying to the request of the FPS that the recently discovered breeding ground of the Atlantic Ridley turtle should be protected, says that the question of the turtle's conservation is being studied by the National Institute for Biological and Fisheries Research in Mexico.