Letters

Wolves persecuted in British Columbia

In the October 1983 issue of *Oryx* there was a report in News and Views about the wolf-shoot in Alaska. In the January issue there is a brief account of an annual wolf-kill permitted by the US Interior Department in Minnesota.

Do you know that at present in British Columbia staff of the Environment Ministry from the Provincial Government are shooting wolves from low-flying planes in the Peace River area? Wolves are trapped, shot, and poisoned in this province as a matter of routine, but this plan is intended to kill 80 per cent of the 500 to 700 wolves believed to be in this area. The Ministry's decision to pursue this action is based on some rather sketchy reports from its own biologists. The wolves have not attacked livestock; the pressure on the Environment Ministry comes from a powerful hunting lobby. The Environment Minister, Mr Tony Brummet, represents Peace River in BC's Legislature.

I believe that the wolf's existence in this continent is threatened, and I write to you in a rather faint hope that perhaps some well-informed international pressure could be brought to bear on the Government of British Columbia. There should be some places left where the wolf is not persecuted.

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Another Falkland viewpoint

I am sure the Falklands articles (*Oryx*, January 1984) were well intended and correctly pointed out that the 1982 conflict had minimal effect on wildlife. Unfortunately they give a misleading impression of the effects of the garrison and potential development, which could be harmful if conservation is seen to be linked to the preservation of large absentee-owned farms. There is ample evidence within the Falklands that small owner-occupied properties can and do successfully integrate conservation and farming.

I worked in Port Stanley during 1983 and whenever possible visited other parts of the islands to study birds. This proved difficult because besides mined beaches and transport problems the interior of the larger islands held few birds.

There certainly are interesting birds in the Falklands but they are almost entirely confined to certain islands and coasts where suitable habitat and food supply occur. Although the populations of black-browed albatross and rockhopper penguin must be internationally important, on most islands no-one knows which species of nocturnal petrels and shearwaters occur or in what numbers. The military presence offers the only realistic opportunity of surveying uninhabited islands; when I accompanied military groups to see wildlife I was always impressed by their behaviour. The venues included Volunteer Point Nature Reserve, where I found no evidence remaining of 'serious disturbance' (*Oryx*, page 22), many healthy penguins and where the owner was concerned that one incident should not be blown up out of proportion.

Many development proposals have already been shelved and actual changes will be on a much smaller scale than, for example, in Shetland where internationally important seabird concentrations still exist despite massive oil-related development. Agriculture seems certain to remain the main Falkland occupation and no-one I spoke to anticipated the introduction of intensive systems. Neither article mentioned such excellent examples of practical conservation as Carcass or Sealion Islands, which are owned by Falkland Islanders who maintain tussock grass as an integral part of their sheep-farming systems. Both successfully operate with fewer than 2000 sheep yet they have more birds of more species than the larger ranches, where grazing is relatively uncontrolled, or even than the small islands with dense tussock stands which are often regarded as the best habitat for birds in the Falklands. However, the value of tussock has never been properly evaluated along with other factors such as the absence of introduced predators or the rich food source provided by kelp along island beaches.

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This letter has been shortened for reasons of space.

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