

The Fauna Preservation Society

NOVEMBER, 1955

EDITORIAL NOTES

Mr. Alfred Ezra, O.B.E.—We record with sorrow the death of Mr. Alfred Ezra, at the age of 82. He was one of our Society's greatest supporters and, until nearly the end of his life, a regular attendant at Council meetings. He became a Vice-President of the Society in 1938.

"Nature's Dominion."—At the time of writing Mr. Mervyn Cowie, Director of the Royal National Parks of Kenya, is still touring England, Scotland and Wales showing "Nature's Dominion" and lecturing for our Society.

A report on the tour will appear in the next *Oryx*. So far it has been an outstanding success. Both the Adult Education Centre at Leicester and the Royal Festival Hall, London, in which there were more than 2,500 people, were filled to overflowing. The audiences saw a splendid film and listened entranced to a most moving appeal for the preservation of the wild animals of Africa before it is too late.

A new Bird Film.—We are very pleased to draw members' attention, in the leaflet which comes with this journal, to the colour film "Birds in Britain", which will be shown at the Royal Festival Hall on the 21st January, 1956. Mr. James Fisher will introduce the film.

May we take this opportunity to thank both the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the London Natural History Society for the publicity given to "Nature's Dominion" in *Bird Notes* and the *London Bird Report*.

The University of London announces the extension of its Certificate of Proficiency in Natural History, formerly restricted to teachers, to all interested in the study of living things in their natural habitats. Work for the certificate involves a directed course of private reading at home; attendance at two practical courses, four weeks in all; an approved plan of field work and examinations. For further information apply to the Secretary, Natural History Certificate Course, Department of

Extra-Mural Studies, University of London, Senate House, London, W.C. 1.

Great Britain.—The Nature Conservancy has announced eight new nature reserves, the enlargement of two others and the formation of the Humber Wildfowl Refuge.

Hales Wood is an area of 20 acres near Saffron Walden in Essex. Here the true oxlip flourishes in the water-logged boulder-clay.

Tring Reservoirs Reserve of 50 acres consists of the banks of the four reservoirs. It is a famous bird sanctuary and was, in 1938, the first recorded nesting site in Britain of the little ringed plover. Many kinds of duck and other water birds nest there also.

Applications to visit the above two reserves should be made to The Nature Conservancy, 19 Belgrave Square, London, S.W. 1.

Roudsea Wood, an area of 287 acres in the south of the Lake District, is one of the most varied woodlands in the British Isles and has a corresponding variety of birds and insects. The main part consists of two parallel ridges. One is of limestone crowned by yew, with oak and ash on its flanks and a luxuriant ground flora. The other is slate, with oak-wood which has in part been coppiced for charcoal production.

On the seaward side, where Roudsea Wood slopes to Morecambe Bay, the transition from salt marsh to woodland can be studied. On the landward side there is the transition of peat vegetation to that of limestone and slate. Roe deer are always present, occasionally fallow and red deer also.

Wybunbury Moss, of 8 acres in South Cheshire, is a "Schwingmoor"; that is a sphagnum peat bog with its centre floating on water. At the margin deposits of sphagnum and fen peat form an organic layer over the glacial sand.

North Fen, in the Lake District, an area of 5 acres, shows a succession of vegetation from open water, rich in mineral salts, through reedswamp, mixed fen, open carr to closed carr and bog.

Further information about these three reserves may be had from The Nature Conservancy, Merlewood, Grange-over-Sands, Lancashire.

Wychwood Forest, of 647 acres in Oxfordshire, is the remnant of an extensive forest which was in possession of the Crown from the Norman Conquest to the nineteenth century. It carries mixed woodland consisting mostly of indigenous hardwoods which it is intended shall regenerate naturally.

Application to visit this reserve should be made to The Nature Conservancy, Furzebank, Wareham, Dorset.

Hermaness, on the island of Unst, Shetland, together with Muckle Flugga and the Outstack, form a reserve of 1,071 acres. It is chiefly important for its breeding sea birds, which include great skuas, red-throated divers and eider ducks.

Noss, also in the Shetlands, is an uninhabited island of 774 acres; it has high cliffs on which many sea birds nest. It exhibits striking erosion in sandstone and phyllites of the Old Red Sandstone age.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds provides wardens at Hermaness and Noss. Further information from The Nature Conservancy, 12 Hope Terrace, Edinburgh 9.

Castor Hanglands and Kingley Vale.—Mention of the formation of these reserves has already been made in *Oryx*. Castor Hanglands has now been completed by the addition of 113 acres of woodland rich in insect life, of which the black hairstreak butterfly and the chequered skipper are especially important. Application for a permit to visit should be made to The Nature Conservancy, 6 Upper King Street, Norwich.

Kingley Vale receives a final 17½ acres, consisting of heath on the clay soil of the plateau, in marked contrast to the grassland of the chalk slopes. Thus the reserve is valuable for studying the distribution of species restricted to either calcareous or acid soils.

There is no restriction on access. Application to undertake research may be made to The Nature Conservancy, Furzebrook, Wareham, Dorset.

Humber Wildfowl Refuge. This, the first such refuge established under the Protection of Birds Act, 1954, extends over 20 square miles of tidal flats and water between Brough and Trent Falls. It protects the main Humber roosting area of the pink-footed goose. All shooting and access, except in the course of navigation, is prohibited from 1st September to 20th February. A warden has been appointed.

Italy.—We would like to congratulate Professor Alessandro Ghighi on his work for the protection of birds in Italy, even though, as he himself writes, all he was striving for has not been achieved. However, the shooting season will now close on 21st March instead of 31st March, and the use, during the spring, of any kind of net for catching birds has been forbidden.

Among other reforms for which the High Council of Agriculture, of which Professor Ghighi is a member, are working, is the total suppression of the "passate". This is a vertical net

used in mountain passes as an extension to permanent devices for catching birds.

Ceylon.—We have been pleased to see in England Mr. C. E. Norris, Secretary of the Wild Life Protection Society of Ceylon, and to receive from him at a general meeting on the 12th October, an account of the work of his society.

Nyasaland.—Mr. G. D. Hayes, Secretary of the Nyasaland Fauna Preservation Society, has also been to this country. He gave Council the good news that, according to the latest plans, the road from Chigombe to Tomali will not now cross the Lengwe game reserve. Both the Nyasaland society and ourselves have been interested in this very important matter, for the Lengwe reserve was created to preserve the nyala from extermination and is one of its few remaining habitats.

Mr. Hayes spoke also of his hopes that a nature reserve, or perhaps a national park, might be established on the Nyika plateau in north Nyasaland. This suggestion has for some time been before our two societies, and discussions are being held with the Colonial Development Corporation who have an experimental afforestation scheme on the plateau.

Since 30th June, 1955, not only has the use of gin traps been prohibited in Nyasaland but also their ownership and sale. The Nyasaland Government thus sets a fine example to Great Britain.

Uganda.—We are pleased to see that Mr. R. M. Bere has been appointed Director and Chief Warden of Uganda National Parks.

Fears for the virtual extermination of the crocodile in Lake Victoria appear to be unfounded, although a very heavy toll has been taken of the larger ones which are of commercial value. We are informed that there are still plenty of crocodiles in the vast swamp regions of Uganda which are difficult to penetrate and unattractive to the crocodile hunter.

In the Murchison Falls Park Section of the river Nile, there are fully 7,000 crocodiles below the Falls, as well as hundreds above them. The vicinity of the Falls is a breeding ground. It might be unwise to plead for the preservation of the crocodile in Lake Victoria on the ground that preserving it would indirectly aid the fisheries. Neither Lake George nor Lake Edward contain crocodiles but they are well stocked with the same fish as Lake Victoria.

Canada.—An appreciation of the caribou situation in the eastern Mackenzie and Keewatin districts has been issued by the Canadian Wildlife Service.

The barren ground caribou range over an immense area. From the Mackenzie river to Hudson Bay, from the Arctic islands to northern Manitoba, Saskatchewan and north-eastern Alberta, caribou flesh and skins provide clothing and shelter for Eskimo and Indian alike.

In 1948-49 Dr. A. W. F. Banfield, of the Canadian Wildlife Service, carried out an aerial survey of the caribou. He estimated a total of 668,000 animals. There is no reason to believe there were fewer, there may have been more. Dr. Banfield predicted an annual decline of 32,000 caribou. This spring, 1955, Mr. J. P. Kelsall carried out a similar survey resulting in a figure of 300,000 and, a specially important point, huge herds were no longer to be found. Again there seems no likelihood of gross error.

The reasons for this great reduction in the caribou are not fully known. Wastage by Eskimos and Indians due to killing beyond their needs and incomplete use of carcasses are thought to be major factors. Destruction of the range by over-grazing is not thought to be a principal cause.

Among immediate steps recommended if the caribou are to recover are—reduction of human use by elimination of waste, provision of storage for meat and the substitute of fish and bison for caribou meat. An increased slaughter of bison in Wood Buffalo Park had already been planned in accordance with sound herd management.

The importance of education is stressed and the personal concern in the conservation of the caribou which each individual bears; otherwise there may be no caribou for future generations to concern themselves about. Although the extent of depredation by predators is not yet known, the conclusion reached in the *appreciation* is that at this critical stage no significant loss should be tolerated, and that therefore wolf control should be intensified. The possibility of establishing reindeer herds should be considered, but cautiously.

U.S.A.—The Dinosaur National Monument used to be one of the lesser known national parks of America. Now it has become symbolic of them all; for here is being fought a battle whose loss would have pernicious effects throughout the American park system and repercussions everywhere.

A huge hydro-electric scheme is before Congress. It involves twenty-seven major dams on the Colorado River, among them Echo Park dam in the Dinosaur. For five years the defenders of national parks, led by the National Parks Association, have concentrated opposition on this dam, which would raise the

Yampa River, in its most spectacular gorge, by no less than 400 feet. It would be the first such scheme to be undertaken since the National Park Service was established in 1916 and would smooth the way for schemes to build some twenty other such dams—in Grand Canyon, Glacier, King's Canyon, Yellowstone, Yosemite, for instance.

Mr. Fred Packard, who wrote in *Oryx*, ii, 6, on the citizen's responsibility for national parks, tells us in the editorial of *National Parks Magazine* that a committee of Congress has approved the Colorado project as a whole, but with the Echo Park dam deleted. There is still danger that Congress itself will replace Echo Park and pass the complete scheme.

In 1966 the National Park Service will have existed for fifty years. By then, if present trends continue, eighty million people will visit the parks every year. So the Service, wisely looking forward, has organized MISSION 66 to study the resultant problems.

Obviously the conflict between nature protection and public use will continue, to be resolved only by compromise. Only the more venturesome visit the wilder parts of the parks; small areas can therefore be devoted to intensive public use, while those who seek the wilderness can still find it. This is good for the parks, perhaps their salvation, but difficult to reconcile with the idea of human relaxation in solitude to which the parks owe at least their idealistic conception. A similar situation in De Kennemerduinen, the Netherlands, was discussed at the Salzburg conference of the International Union for the Protection of Nature and described in *Oryx* ii, 3.

The Secretary of the Interior, in a letter to the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, the bureau of his Department that administers wild life refuges, has allayed fears that a number of them might be given over to development. He writes with pride that the Department of the Interior, far from succumbing to external pressure to permit exploitation of refuge lands, is concerned with the acquisition of additional areas.