

# The Fauna Preservation Society

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## EDITORIAL NOTES

*Dr. G. F. Herbert Smith and Dr. P. G. van Tienhoven.*— Since our last issue the Society and the cause of international nature preservation has suffered grievous loss.

Dr. G. F. Herbert Smith, who died in London on 20th April, had been a member of the Council of our Society since 1938 and a vice-president of the International Union for the Protection of Nature since 1950. He was honorary secretary of the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves, and also of the British Co-ordinating Committee which is of great value in presenting to the International Union the combined views of many societies in Great Britain.

Among Dr. Herbert Smith's qualities that of lucid draftsmanship was outstanding and was always placed at the service of our Society.

Dr. P. G. van Tienhoven died in Amsterdam on 5th May. He joined our Society in 1922 and at this year's Annual General Meeting was elected a vice-president in recognition of his lifelong service to nature protection. Our last letter from Dr. van Tienhoven read as follows: "I appreciate very much that at the annual meeting of the Fauna Society I was elected a vice-president. This honour gives me great satisfaction and is in a certain way a crown on my life's work. Specially I appreciate that I am strongly allied with my friends in England, with whom I have been working during so many years."

*Great Britain.*—On 1st July the Nature Conservancy declared two new nature reserves.

Blean Woods Nature Reserve, Kent, consists of Mincing Wood and Crawford's Rough, an area of 76 acres, part of an extensive tract of woodland between Canterbury and Whitstable. The woods include sessile oak with hazel and hornbeam coppice, chestnut and birch, and a variety of unusual plants. A very important inhabitant is the heath fritillary butterfly which exists practically nowhere else in England.

Monk's Wood Nature Reserve, Huntingdon, is an area of 375 acres containing the last of the ash-oak woodland of the heavy Huntingdonshire clays with its characteristic fauna. It

was here that the black hairstreak butterfly was first discovered in 1828. The wood was cut down during the Great War but has been undergoing regeneration.

The Nature Conservancy also announces additions to Kingley Vale Reserve, Sussex, and Ham Street Woods Reserve, Kent. These, with the other Conservancy reserves, were briefly described in *Oryx*, Vol. 1, No. 6.

*Norway. The Polar Bear.*—Having received notices of trips to Spitzbergen in which a main attraction was advertised as polar bear shooting, we made inquiries about the status and conservation of the polar bear in Norway. Captain John Giæver of the Norsk Polarinstitut, and Dr. Hjalmar Broch, President of the Norwegian League for the Protection of Nature, have very kindly sent most valuable information.

Very little is known of the numbers and distribution of polar bears. In winter climatic conditions preclude observation; in summer the bears are widely spread over the drifting ice. There are numbers around Spitzbergen but whether they are a local population or part of a moving population which inhabits also other parts of the polar basin nobody knows. Statements about numbers from professional hunters are of doubtful value for hunters are inclined to call the stock quite satisfactory, as long as they can get a few bears. After that it may be too late to save the species.

In winter the polar bear is killed for its skin, mainly by parties of trappers whose chief object is foxes. In summer bears are killed by sealers, operating on the drift ice east and north of the Spitzbergen archipelago. The main object then is live polar bear cubs. In summer the skin is practically valueless and shooting trips in summer appear to be designed to satisfy the wish of amateur hunters to shoot "big game". It does not seem, however, that there are very many of these trips.

The polar bear is completely protected throughout the year in King Karl's Land, because these islands are thought to be an important breeding place. It receives no other protection.

The protection of the polar bear is often discussed in Norway, both officially and in the newspapers. It is a very difficult question, not only because of the enormous difficulty of obtaining accurate information, but also because the bears, when on the sea ice, are outside territorial waters. The Norwegian Government's sealing council recently came to the conclusion that no further protection was necessary at present.

Altogether it would seem that the polar bear is not as yet in danger of extinction. Its preservation is of course a matter of international concern.

*The Walrus.*—Captain Gæver also informs us that his Government has decided that no Norwegian vessel shall be allowed to hunt walrus in any waters.

*Ceylon.*—We are pleased to hear from Mr. Tutein Nolthenius, a Member of the Ceylon Parliament, of the progress of wild life preservation.

Last year Mr. Nolthenius worked very hard to arouse public opinion in favour of the elephant. Writing in the *Ceylon Daily News*, he pointed out that protection for the elephant had existed in Ceylon for 2,000 years and had formed part of the traditional duties of Sinhalese kings and pious Buddhist rulers. Now the elephant was in danger and unless great care was taken, would be extinct within thirty years.

Mr. Nolthenius urged the Advisory Committee for Fauna and Flora to stop the issue of licences "at discretion" for the capture of baby elephants; each single capture under licence should be undertaken only by the Zoological Gardens in friendly co-operation with the Wild Life Department. Furthermore no licences to shoot at or kill elephants ought to be issued, but elephant control carried out by the Wild Life Department, whose duty it was. Thus there would be no more slaughter of mothers in milk, no orphans dying of starvation, no festering slug wounds turning harmless herd animals into dangerous rogues.

Writing to us in February last, Mr. Nolthenius said that his suggestions were being considered and that up to the time of writing no licences to capture young elephants had been issued. He is at least sure that, in the future, licences to shoot elephants will not be obtained easily.

In March this year a "Wild Life Week" was held throughout Ceylon. Mr. Aloy Pereira's film "Ruhuna National Park" was shown and arrangements were made for its future showing, free of charge, to audiences everywhere. Six thousand posters, of three different designs by young Ceylonese, were distributed. Dr. R. L. Spittel broadcast about wild animals. Prizes were offered for essays by schoolchildren. The elephants at the Dehiwala Zoological Gardens displayed banners saying "Please Save Us".

We know well that work such as this cannot be carried through without enormous effort and great expense. Many

indeed, must have been the helpers ; great credit is due to them and especially to Mr. Tutein Nolthenius, to Mr. Aloy Pereira, and also to the Shell Company of Ceylon whose generosity made the Wild Life Week possible.

*Canada.*—Mr. Richard Glover, whose article on the muskox appears on pp. 76–86, has written also to answer the question of how many muskoxen can its arctic habitat support. “ Much fewer,” he says, “ than the southerner might suppose. For two reasons ; first much of the Arctic Barrens consists of lakes or rocks which produce no grazing, except some mosses ; second, when grazeable plants can grow, they have only some eight weeks of summer in which to do it. The land can support no greater head of game than can live for twelve months on the vegetable growth of eight weeks.”

Mrs. Freda Davies’ article on the whooping crane shows how small is the chance of saving this magnificent bird from extinction. The chief of the Canadian Wildlife Service confirms that the breeding grounds of the whooping crane are still unknown, though during 1952 a locality in the North-West Territories and one in Northern Alberta were suspected.

The *Saskatchewan News*, publishing a photograph of two whooping cranes in flight, has appealed for aid in saving the bird from extinction. The public are asked to report any whooping cranes seen on their migratory flights across Saskatchewan and to help to protect them from careless hunters.

*The Bahamas.*—Good news comes of the flamingoes at Inagua. Last year, owing to the excellent work of Mr. Robert P. Allen, who spent six weeks on the nesting site, nearly the whole hatch of about 4,000 survived.

Mr. Arthur Vernay, President of the Society for the Preservation of the Flamingo in the Bahamas, writes that this year also everything is going splendidly, and that the birds are doing all they can to bring about a successful season. The only things to be feared are hurricanes and torrential rains.

A somewhat minor campaign is being started for the preservation of the burrowing owl. These birds nest in the “ rough ” on the golf course, where it is a lovely sight to see them standing guard outside their holes. In due course they are joined by their young.

*Australia.*—The surveys carried out by the Fauna Protection Panel of New South Wales upon the distribution in that state of the brush turkey and the Australian bustard are complete.

The brush turkey is found to be present in the scrubs of the

coast ranges between the Queensland border and the Hawkesbury River, but very rarely seen west of the Great Dividing Range. The close protection afforded to the bird is amply justified. The Australian bustard, which is a nomadic bird, is now very rare in New South Wales, though at times appearing in the north-west part in fairly large numbers.

*The Monte Bello Islands.*—We publish on p. 124 a report on the possible effect of the recent atomic explosion on some of the fauna of the Monte Bello Islands. The author, Surgeon Commander G. Wedd, R.N., was medical officer of H.M.S. *Campania*, which was part of the naval force present at the explosion. He collected many interesting species for the Zoological Society of London and for the British Museum (Natural History).

*International Union for the Protection of Nature.*—A meeting of the I.U.P.N. will be held at Salzburg, Austria, from 15th–20th September, 1953, the last two and a half days being devoted to excursions. The subjects for discussion are :—

- (1) Nature protection and tourism.
- (2) Protection of fauna and flora at high altitudes.

Invitations, which are not restricted to members of the Union, and full details may be had from: The Secretary-General, International Union for the Protection of Nature, 42 Rue Montoyer, Brussels, Belgium.

We should like to draw readers' attention to the following publications. Particulars from the Secretary-General, as above.

*A lesson on nature protection for distribution to schools.*

*A 14-page booklet entitled "What is Nature Protection?"*

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