

News and Views

A New Look for *Oryx*

We must begin 1983 with an apology because this issue of *Oryx* will reach you a little later than intended. The reason is that we have made some major changes and there were almost inevitably some delays involved in the changeover process. From this issue, *Oryx* will be published in its new, redesigned format four times a year, in January, April, July and October, and we hope to catch up with our schedule by April.

The Society has entered into a very favourable publishing agreement with Blackwell Scientific Publications: despite appearing quarterly we shall make considerable savings on publication costs, thus freeing more of our income for other aspects of our conservation work.

Some of the changes are responses, at least in part, to suggestions made in the membership survey carried out in 1981 by Bill Staunton. One new section, not included in this issue but intended for the near future, is a letters page; the Editor would especially appreciate short letters (under 300 words) and reserves the usual rights to shorten long ones.

Our new look was designed by Keith Whitehead, Head of Graphics at the British Museum (Natural History) and we are most grateful to him. Our colour cover would not have been possible at all except for the generosity of Edward Wright who has donated this to ffPS; we extend our thanks to him as well as to Bruce Coleman, who has allowed us to reproduce his colour transparencies free of charge.

Taman Negara: a National Park in Danger

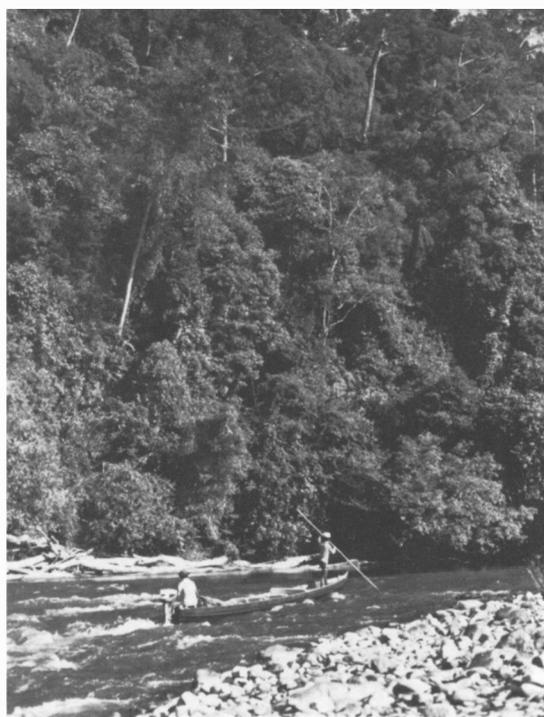
Despite public protest it appears that the richest part of Peninsular Malaysia's national park, Taman Negara, will disappear beneath floodwater if the proposed dam on the river Tembeling is built for the National Electricity Board's (NEB) hydroelectric scheme.

Taman Negara, first named King George V National Park, was declared in 1938/39 by the States of Kelantan, Pahang and Trengganu and renamed after the country gained its independence. Its 4343 sq km of mainly mountainous country with a fringe of foothills and lowlands are

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still Peninsular Malaysia's sole national park. Only ten per cent of Taman Negara is lowland forest, a habitat which will probably be soon lost to logging or agriculture in Malaysia, but this is the area where more than 70 per cent of the park's species of fauna and flora are found, many of them rare or endemic. And about one-third of this area will be flooded if the dam goes ahead. The consequences will not be confined to the destruction of the lowland forest wildlife but will affect even animals not restricted to this habitat—elephant, tapir and rhinoceros, for example—which may depend on specific food plants or on the salt-licks found there.

The Tembeling dam would flood, in addition to 130 sq km of Taman Negara, more than 2000 ha of cultivated land and 10,000 ha of potential agricultural land. It would also require the relocation of more than 2500 people, including the Orang Asli who are still partly hunter-gatherers.

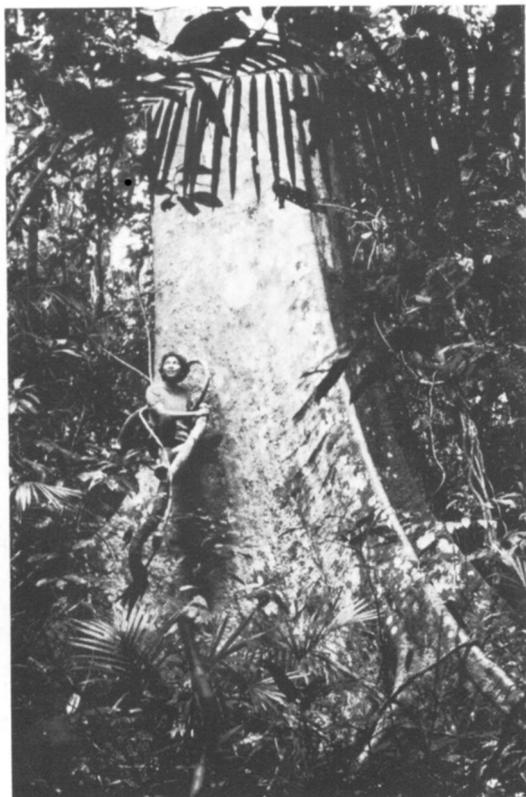


The site of the Tembeling Dam which will provide less than three per cent of Peninsular Malaysia's power needs in 1988. The resulting lake will flood 130 sq km of national park land, historical and archaeological sites and require the relocation of 2500 people.

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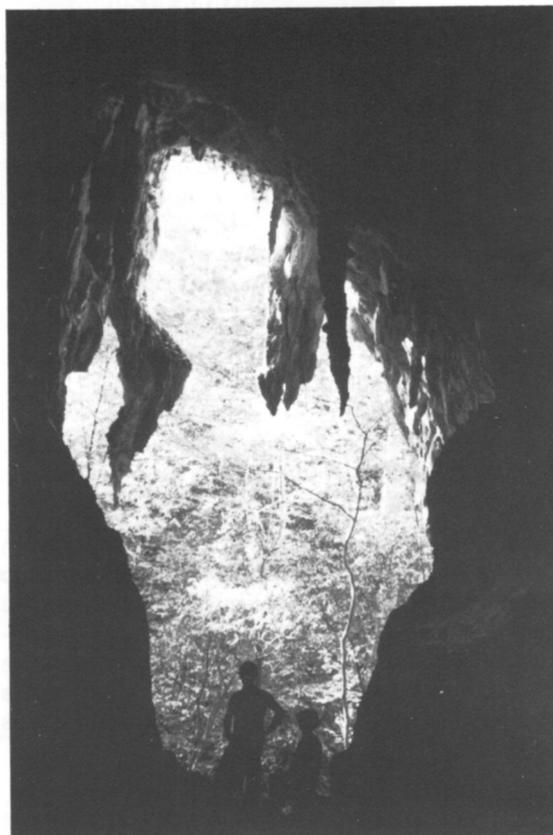
In exchange for all this destruction the scheme is expected to produce 110 MW of electricity, less than three per cent of Malaysia's projected needs in 1988, but only until the dam silts up, which experts say could happen within 30 years. Alternatives do exist: the National Electricity Board has identified several other hydroelectric projects which would generate as much power as the Tembeling scheme yet would not affect national park land.

The only 'benefit' from the expensive flooding will be the profit to be made from logging in and around the lake prior to impoundment. It is estimated that more than 250 sq km of virgin forest within the park would be logged if the project goes ahead.



Only about one-tenth of Taman Negara is lowland forest where are found the tallest trees, the greatest diversity of wildlife and the richest timber resources. One-third will be lost to the Tembeling Dam and more than 250 sq km of the national park will be logged.

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Cave of the Dancing Leaves, Taman Negara. Limestone caves, river trips, wildlife observation hides, forest walks, and fishing and swimming areas attract more than 12,000 visitors to Taman Negara each year. Two-thirds of the current visitor attractions will be destroyed by the Tembeling Dam.

Taman Negara has been saved before, once in 1970 from logging on its south-west edge, and again in 1977 when previous proposals for the dam were shelved with no public explanation. This time the public outcry has resulted in the Government insisting on an environmental impact assessment before the final decision is made. But that assessment is in the hands of the NEB who have commissioned scientists, economists and sociologists from the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia to carry out the studies. It is disquieting to hear that their findings will not be made public but used only as a supporting document for the NEB's final report.

Possibly it is not too late to save Taman Negara yet again; a vigorous campaign to do so is underway. But should things have gone this far? The

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very existence of a national park presupposes that the designated area is inviolate in perpetuity and the question of whether to build a dam or not should never have been raised.

Stop Press The Malaysian Government scrapped the Tembeling Dam project on 15 January 1983.

Hope Fades for Whaling Ban

The optimism generated at Brighton in July 1982 by the International Whaling Commission's (IWC) decision to phase out commercial whaling by 1986 was short-lived. Japan, USSR, Norway and Peru all filed objections to that decision within the 90-day period allowed. In addition, Peru objected to the quota of 165 for Peruvian Bryde's whales and Chile, who abstained from every vote at the July meeting, objected to the zero quota for Bryde's whales in her waters. Of the seven nations that voted against the decision in July, Brazil, Iceland and Korea did not file objections.

Japanese officials report that, in objecting to the ban they do not necessarily mean to defy it in three years time but wish to reserve the right to do so, hoping by then to produce scientific evidence to support their position. If Japan were to continue whaling after 1986 she would be in danger of losing a substantial portion of her fishing rights in US waters (worth \$425 million to the Japanese in 1981). There is US legislation which prohibits imports of fish products from nations disregarding IWC ruling and restricts those nations' rights to fishing in US waters and recently more than two-thirds of the US Senate called upon the Government to invoke it if necessary.

In contrast to the official Japanese position it appears that the Japanese people are in favour of a whaling ban. The Nippon Research Centre, the Japanese affiliate of the Gallup Poll, published the results of a poll on 30 October which shows that 76 per cent of Japanese people favoured accepting the IWC's decision to stop commercial whaling in 1986. The poll was taken by random sample interviews with 1471 adults throughout Japan between 7 and 12 October.

We must now wait until 2 February 1983 to see if further objections are filed; in the light of the first objections the objection period was extended for a further 90 days.

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The Over-crowded Ark

As modern-day Noahs, we need to start getting our act together. Our Ark, in the form of save-species programmes, is not nearly big enough for all the creatures wanting to crowd aboard. Some are going to be submerged beneath the rising floodwaters. If, then, space in the Ark is going to be accorded through a system that amounts to 'by invitation only', which species will qualify?

While we try to put together a response to that momentous question, we might recognise the scope of our current predicament. We are not only seeking to be a modern-day Noah, with an Ark that is far too small. We are also playing God on a grand scale, snuffing out species with every day that goes by. By the end of the century, we may have denied a share of the One-Earth home to at least one million of the planet's five to ten million species.

In short, we are deciding the fate of huge numbers of species. Generally speaking, we are not doing it deliberately, still less wantonly. But we are doing it effectively, and increasingly. With every tick of the clock, we are 'deciding' that there is not enough room for all of Earth's millions of species, at the same time that we allow space for human-kind's growing numbers and their growing expectations.

Agonising Choices

It is likewise becoming plain with every tick of the clock that we cannot help all species under threat. We do not have endless funds for preservation programmes. There is simply not enough money to go around—not by a long way.

Meantime we continue to allocate our save-species funds pretty much as we have always done. We assign funds to those species that have found favour with us—which means that we automatically deny them to other species. This means, in turn, that we implicitly give priority to certain species in preference to others. In short, we turn thumbs up for some and thumbs down for others. We may not choose it consciously, and we hardly ever do it systematically. But we choose nonetheless.

So the time may have come when we should ask ourselves an agonising question: Which species

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are 'most deserving' of a place in our Ark? And which species are, by consequence, to be considered less 'worthy'?

This is not to say—and the point is emphasised here—that some species are somehow to be considered as 'not worth saving'. On ethical grounds alone, *all* species are worth saving. The lowliest microbe, as a manifestation of creation's diversity on Earth, surely possesses as much 'right' to future existence as the tiger and the blue whale. But in a situation where we cannot assist all creatures in trouble, we shall find that, willy-nilly, we do choose. Whether we like it or not, we are deciding in favour of some and against others—against many others.

Tough Decisions

Tough as it will be to make decisions of this sort, we need to act as realistically as we can. Nobody will enjoy the challenge of deliberately consigning threatened species to oblivion. But in so far as this is, of necessity, being done, we might as well do it with as much rational discretion as we can muster. In other words, we should determine the future of species by design rather than by default—and we should devise ways to set about the task as fairly and efficiently as possible. In essence, we need to put our limited funds and scientific muscle to most productive use.

But how are we to make our choices? How can we balance the fate of the cheetah against some obscure mollusc? How can we decide between a spectacular sunbird that gives pleasure to many people, and some spiky plant in the depths of the Amazon rainforest that may not even have come to scientists' attention?

Fortunately, there are some guidelines that we can mobilise to help us to confront our dreadful dilemma. We can consider various characteristics of species—their anthropomorphic attributes, their biological traits, their ecological features, their economic values and the like. The more we can investigate these various factors, the better we can devise a 'shopping list' of those species that deserve our support, no matter what.

Making a Shopping List

There is not space here to consider these criteria in detail. But let us recognise that it is possible to

come up, albeit less than comprehensively, with objective assessments to help us in our judgements. For instance, a species that is the sole representative of its genus surely deserves precedence over a species that shares a genus with several other species. Certain species play such critical roles in their ecosystems that their elimination could lead to a 'domino effect' of linked extinctions. Certain species, notably those at the end of food chains, serve as sensitive indicators of the health of their ecosystems—and it is precisely the last slot in a food chain that often means the species occurs in small numbers, making it unusually susceptible to extinction. The Bengal tiger, a clear candidate for anthropomorphic arguments in light of its charismatic clout can, when its own ecosystem is safeguarded in order to ensure the creature's survival, allow other less glamorous species to 'piggyback' on its public appeal. When we set about methodical analysis, we find that numerous indicative data come to light that help to clarify our thinking while wrestling with the problem of priorities for threatened-species campaigns.

Of course some observers may remark that we should no longer direct our attention to individual species anyway, rather we should concentrate on communities and ecosystems. True: an admirable precept. Nonetheless, the bulk of save-species activities still tend to focus on individual species, as witness the underlying strategy of the *Red Data Books*.

Triage

This is not to say that we cannot do a great deal right now in selecting a number of ecosystems for priority treatment. We know that tropical moist forests appear to harbour 40 per cent of all Earth's species; and that ten per cent of these forests appear to support exceptional concentrations of species, with high levels of endemism. If we were to focus on these high-value areas, we could probably save as many species (i.e. species that would ostensibly be 'doomed to disappear' by the end of the century, unrecorded) as through all our other save-species efforts put together. We could similarly achieve a massive amount if we were to concentrate efforts on coral-reef ecosystems and particular sectors of wetlands. By attempting to devise a hierarchical ranking for

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ecosystems, and by thereby trying to be as systematically selective as we can, we would be practising a form of triage at ecosystem level—determining which ecosystems are highly important, which are very relevant, which are exceptionally rich, and which *must come top* of any conservationist's shopping list.

That dread word triage: what adverse vibrations it seems to stimulate in some people's thinking. Yet triage is surely the name of the game as we anticipate the extinction spasm of the next few decades. The key question is not whether we should contemplate triage as a suitable strategy for some stage in the future (agonising as the prospect may be); the key question is how to implement triage to best effect right now, given that we are already applying a triage approach to our present save-species programmes. Whether we care to admit it or not, we make many choices by the way we assign funds for save-species activities. When we allocate a sum of money to one species, we automatically deny that same money to other species. Herein lies a crucial aspect of the California condor campaign. Whatever the merits of the campaign (and this writer believes that, because of the high public-appeal factor, we should pull out a whole series of stops on behalf of the beleaguered bird), we should not only ask whether a campaign with only a 50/50 chance of success merits an outlay of \$25 million; we should also ask (which, to this writer's best knowledge, has not been asked) whether we could not better spend the same money on entire throngs of other species with better prospect of success.

Red Herrings and White Elephants

Finding ourselves faced with an outsize challenge during the coming decades, we need to expend our scarce conservation pounds and dollars in the way that will bring us the best possible return on our investment. With the benefit of hindsight, can we still assert that it is appropriate to spend a good share of all save-species moneys on island species, many of which prove, by virtue of their island-dwelling lifestyles, singularly unadapted to a man-disrupted world. For sure, island species possess their own intrinsic interest, just as do any other species. But we *cannot save everything*: does such a small part of the species spectrum deserve such a disproportionate expenditure of funds? Indeed, when we look back on the save-species record, we must surely admit that not all activities could be characterised as 'supreme priorities'—otherwise we would not find that certain of our activities have produced a bestiary of lame ducks, red herrings, wild geese, white elephants and dead horses.

As we apply our priority-ranking analyses for threatened species, we need to assemble as many insights as we can. When we started to play Noah, we had all too few clues to guide us, and we goofed. Now we are trying to play God, through selecting the life forms that will be the remaining wildlife companions of our children on Spaceship Earth. We can certainly use all the wisdom we can mobilise.

Norman Myers