

The Fauna Preservation Society

DEATH OF HIS MAJESTY THE KING

The Fauna Preservation Society records with deepest sorrow the death of its beloved Patron, His Majesty King George VI.

EDITORIAL NOTES

Assam.—We are pleased to learn from Mr. E. P. Gee, whose article on the Great Indian Rhinoceros appears on page 224, that a Wild Life Committee has been set up in Assam under the chairmanship of H.E. The Governor. Much of what is being done in Assam to preserve the rhinoceros and other animals is, without question, due to Mr. Gee's tireless work.

Readers will note that, in keeping with the times, the Kaziranga Game Sanctuary has been re-named the Kaziranga Wild Life Sanctuary. It is interesting that the demand from China for rhinoceros horn seems to be falling off. Let us hope that this is correct and proves in time to help the Javan and Sumatran rhinoceroses.

A most interesting report has reached us from Lieut.-Colonel H. S. Wood, I.M.S. (Retd.), of having seen in Assam the Snub-nosed monkey, *Rhinopithecus roxellanae*. We have consulted Dr. Osman Hill, an expert on monkeys, who tells us that Colonel Wood's description certainly agrees with *R. roxellanae*, except for size, a very uncertain factor. This monkey has never yet been known to occur outside E. Tibet and N.W. China to Koko-nor.

Kenya.—Early in January a strongly attended meeting was called at Nyeri by Lieutenant-Colonel James Corbett, C.I.E., author of *Maneaters of Kumaon*. Deep concern was expressed at the rapid rate at which game was being destroyed in the district between Mount Kenya and Aberdare. The reasons for the

decrease were discussed and several resolutions were passed which it is hoped will result in better protection. Finally there was formed "The Nyeri Game Preservation Association", Chairman, Lieutenant-Colonel Corbett, Secretary, Mr. Evan Pughe.

We wish the new association every success and will give it every help in our power. We hope that under its inspiration a strong wild life protection society, with a field covering the whole of Kenya, will come into being.

The Kruger National Park.—That all may not be well in the Kruger is suggested by Dr. A. Jurriaanse in an article in *The Farmer's Weekly*, a South African periodical which has been sent to us. It is said that Elephant and Buffalo are increasing but that antelopes, except Inyala, Kudu and Impala, are decreasing rapidly. The blame is put on too much theorizing by experts in Government offices, who have ordained that there shall be no grass burning, because grass burning constitutes interference with nature, and upon the lack of control in the numbers of carnivores, especially lions. This again, says Dr. Jurriaanse, is due to refusal by theoretical experts to allow any interference with the balance of nature, but he also blames the authorities for paying too much attention to the demands of the public to see lions at all costs. Dr. Jurriaanse stresses that the object of the Kruger Park is neither to provide an experimental farm nor a show place for visitors. The welfare of the animals must be the only law.

Annual grass burning has been part of the ecology of vast areas of Africa, including that of the Kruger National Park, from time immemorial and has been one of the factors which has given rise to the wonderful array and variety of wild animals which live there. If it is now stopped there is little doubt that a marked change in the fauna will take place. Probably the larger antelope which dislike long grass will leave the park and their place be taken—as indeed is happening now if Dr. Jurriaanse is correct—by buffalo and elephant. It would seem that to stop grass burning entirely is to turn the park into a scientific experiment—maybe a very interesting one but hardly in accordance with the object of a national park.

The question of reducing the number of carnivores by shooting is more problematical. The carnivores did not prevent the rapid increase in the numbers of antelope when the park was first formed. Why should they now suddenly cause a great decrease?

We hope to be able to publish in *Oryx* 6 a comment on these issues by Colonel Stevenson-Hamilton.

Nyasaland.—Members will remember that in 1950 correspondence, mentioned in *Oryx* 1, passed between our President and His Excellency The Governor of Nyasaland upon the possibility of making the Mjeti Hill area into a game reserve or national park. We are pleased to say that we have now heard from the Nyasaland Fauna Preservation Society that the area is to be closed to hunting for three years at least.

The final decision on the area will depend upon whether it is found that it can contain sufficient game all the year round to be suitable as a game reserve. Everything will be done to improve the water supply, for water appears to be the limiting factor.

We also heard from the Nyasaland Fauna Preservation Society that the Northern Rhodesian Government were considering making a national park in the Nyika Plateau, part of which is in Northern Rhodesia and part in Nyasaland, and that it was hoped that Nyasaland would take part in the scheme. The Nyika Plateau is said to be one of the most beautiful parts of Africa, with a considerable animal population and uninhabited by humans.

In answer to his inquiry on this subject our President has been informed by the Chief Secretary, Nyasaland, that the Nyasaland Government consider that it would be premature to try to arrange the proposed joint national park with Northern Rhodesia until the possibility of the Nyika Plateau for ranching and forestry has been considered. In the meantime, in order to ensure the preservation of the game and to enable further consideration to be given to the best means of giving full protection to the area, the area of the high Nyika has been closed to hunting.

West Africa.—There can be no doubt that in recent years baboons and other monkeys have enormously increased in West Africa. Among the reasons given for this are the decrease of the hunting of monkeys for food, particularly where Mohammedanism has spread, and the increased killing of leopards and other cats for their skins.

The damage by monkeys to native crops especially cacao, from which chocolate and cocoa are prepared, has been very great and steps have had to be taken to fight the nuisance.

The monkeys of Sierra Leone may be fairly easily divided into harmless species and those harmful to crops. The harmful include baboons, the Sooty Mangabey, the Putty-nosed monkey and, strangely perhaps, the Chimpanzee. Among the harmless are the Diana Monkey and the three species of Colobus found in Sierra Leone.

The Colobus monkeys are leaf eaters and very seldom come to the ground ; the Diana Monkey lives in high forest feeding on wild fruit and insects.

In Sierra Leone the unavoidable destruction of monkeys is undertaken in local and infrequent drives ; these are organized and controlled, a reward being given for the head of each monkey. The heads are then buried and are in no condition to be produced at a later drive.

The situation in The Gambia appears to be less satisfactory, for there, according to a report in *The Times* of 19th December, there seems to be no organized monkey control but a reward is given for every and any monkey tail. This system, or lack of system, lays itself open to many abuses. As was found in Sierra Leone, " tails " can be made from monkey skins ; so why not from the skins of other animals ? The Gambia has a very long frontier ; we can imagine a highly profitable import business in tails from French territory. In the hunt for tails is it likely that harmless monkeys will be spared ?

Two Parliamentary questions were asked on this subject on 27th February. In the House of Lords, Lord Ailwyn asked whether the rewards offered by the Government of The Gambia for destruction of baboons and other monkeys, did not result in indiscriminate slaughter and, in the House of Commons, Mr. Peter Freeman asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies to ensure that only humane methods were employed.

The replies given assured the questioners that there was no killing of rare animals or those not known to be destructive, and that the killing of monkeys was carried out as humanely as possible.

We hope that the Government of The Gambia will take note of the concern aroused by its method of monkey destruction, and will substitute a properly organized and controlled system.

Uganda.—On going to Press we are informed by the Colonial Office that the National Parks Ordinance, based on the findings of the National Parks Committee, is shortly to be considered by the Legislative Council.

West Indies.—We are very glad to hear, from Mr. A. S. Vernay, of the formation in the Bahamas of a Society for the Protection of the Flamingo. President of the Society is Mr. Elgin Forsythe ; a strong Committee includes Mr. Richard Pough and Mr. John H. Baker, President of the New York Audubon Society. Skiffs fitted with outboard motors and other equipment have been bought. Wardens will be appointed.

We hope to include an article on this subject in our next issue.

Deer-drive in Essex.—On 26th January a paragraph appeared in the *East Anglian Daily Times* stating that a deer-drive was to take place in Elsenham district on 5th February. It was said that a hundred local farmers and other reliable shots were being asked to take part, with the object of destroying a herd of deer which had become a pest to local fruit growers. Protests were received by our Society and two conferences were attended by the Secretary, one at the office, in Chelmsford, of the County Pest Officer, Mr. G. Woodward, and a second at Henham, near the site of the damage.

The damage is caused by from twelve to fifteen fallow deer, descended from "escapes", living mostly in Easton wood, but moving also to smaller woods in the district. To the orchards of the Elsenham jam factory the damage is heavy; elsewhere it has, so far, been negligible.

It was agreed that this thickly farmed country was unsuitable for deer and that therefore, much as an offer of £20 from a member of our Society to feed them was appreciated, the deer could not be permanently preserved. Neither the erection of deer-proof fences nor the trapping and movement of the deer was considered practicable. The idea of a deer-drive was however abandoned, as it was considered inhumane and inefficient, besides being dangerous to those taking part and to onlookers.

Finally it was agreed that the deer should be gradually eliminated by shooting. This work, which would begin at once, was entrusted to Mr. E. E. Harman, a local gamekeeper, with very many years' experience. We are convinced that no better arrangement could have been made.

The Otter.—In the Report of the Committee on Cruelty to Wild Animals, commonly called the Scott Henderson Report, it is recommended that a thorough investigation should be carried out into the natural history of the Otter, particularly its feeding habits in various river conditions. Accordingly the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare has called together a committee, on which the Zoological Society of London and the Fauna Preservation Society are represented, to inquire into the life history of the Otter, its breeding cycle and feeding habits. It is hoped that a grant for this inquiry may be obtained from the Nature Conservancy; if so, a research worker will be employed and the work begun.

The Red Squirrel.—Mr. A. D. Middleton, writing to us about the supersession of the Red Squirrel by the Grey, *vide Oryx* 3, says that there was a great fall in the Red Squirrel

population between 1905 and 1910, with some circumstantial evidence of an epidemic of disease. Then numbers increased again, but not in areas in which the Grey had been increasing.

Mr. Middleton has often seen a Grey start to chase a Red, but the clumsy Grey can never catch the agile Red in the tree tops. He thinks it likely that the Grey kills young Reds in the nest.

The Whooping Crane.—All reports of the appearance of the Whooping Crane in the Province of Saskatchewan are recorded by Mr. Fred G. Bard, Provincial Museum, Regina. During 1951 104 cranes were reported, but of these eighty must be regarded as doubtful. Of the twenty-four cranes of which reports can be definitely accepted, some may be the same birds seen by different people.

I.U.P.N.—We welcome the first number of the *Bulletin* of the International Union for the Protection of Nature. It begins very modestly with four pages, but contains interesting information on nature conservation from many parts of the world. It is extraordinary to learn of a project to turn waters from their natural Atlantic outlet into the Mediterranean, and of another to rob the Mediterranean of water from the Pyrenees by diverting it into the Atlantic. One wonders whether the final outcome of such geographical changes can be adequately foreseen.

The *Bulletin* will be issued every two months.

Wild Life Films.—Members of the Council of the Society were kindly invited to advance showings of the two wild life films "Where No Vultures Fly" and "Stronghold of the Wild."

"Where No Vultures Fly."—This is a spectacular, highly dramatic film in technicolour, based on the formation of the National Parks in Kenya. As it was chosen for the 1951 Command Performance it is unlikely to be missed by film lovers.

Made by Ealing Studios and distributed by the Rank Organization.

"Stronghold of the Wild."—This film should be seen by all members of our Society. It is a simple, straightforward account of the attractive part of the work of the East Africa Game Departments—Game Preservation. There are many excellent animal pictures and no melodrama.

Made by Mr. Jack Swain, Cardin Film Service. Distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.