

The Fauna Preservation Society

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EDITORIAL NOTES

GREAT BRITAIN.—The Nature Conservancy has declared new reserves in Scotland, Kent and the Isles of Scilly and additions to several reserves already existing.

The Isle of Rhum.—41 square miles, in the Inner Hebrides, is of great geological, botanical and zoological interest. The mammals range from the pigmy shrew to the Atlantic grey seal. It has its own special mouse and is one of the homes of the Hebridean vole.

There is a herd of nearly a thousand red deer and at least two pairs of golden eagles. As they are undisturbed, a detailed study of their food and habits can be made.

Only twenty-eight people live on Rhum. Visitors may land but are asked not to range over the island.

St. Kilda.—The islands of the St. Kilda group, three and a half square miles altogether, were bequeathed to the National Trust for Scotland by the fifth Marquess of Bute. The Nature Conservancy is now leasing the islands and providing a warden to protect their wild life.

During the Ice Age, the ice sheet covering most of Britain stopped short of St. Kilda, which escaped with one small glacier and probably remained as crowded with sea-birds as similar places near the Greenland ice cap now are. These ancient colonies still exist and include the world's largest colony of gannets, 17,000 pairs, fulmars in even greater numbers and hundreds of thousands of puffins.

The St. Kilda field mouse flourishes. The Soay sheep have looked after themselves successfully since 1980, when the human population left the islands.

Visitors will be welcomed without formality but must help in protecting the wild life of these wonderful islands, for there are serious problems involved. If, for example, a single pair of rats got ashore at St. Kilda, their progeny might destroy the bird colonies which could not be protected.

Caerlaverock. 10 square miles, on the Solway Firth, consists partly of merse, which is salt marsh, and partly of foreshore and mud. The sequence of vegetation landwards from the sea shows how the marsh has developed and formed new ground. Outer colonizing zones of creeping sea hard grass, *Puccinellia maritima*, trap the sand at low tide and gradually build up the ground. Further up the shore, drainage channels develop and wet hollows are left on the surface. Still further inland maritime plants gradually disappear and grasses predominate. This is the final stage of marsh development—a rich grassland with excellent pasture. Sometimes, however, this natural process of land reclamation is reversed and tides begin to eat away the land that they have built.

A study of salt marsh conditions at Caerlaverock may suggest how to overcome this process of erosion, one of the serious problems on the Solway.

Caerlaverock is a noted wintering place for wildfowl, including pink-footed, barnacle and grey-lag geese, shelduck, mallard, wigeon, teal and pintail. Common tern, four species of gull, red-shank, dunlin, oystercatcher and shelduck nest on the saltings.

High Halstow reserve, in Kent, covers Northward Hill, an area of 131 acres owned by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. It is a great breeding place for ducks, including garganey and sometimes pintail and wigeon. It is the only place in southern England where shelduck breed in the open, and it is the site and feeding ground of the largest heronry in the British Isles. Application for permits to visit the reserve may be made to The Nature Conservancy, 19 Belgrave Square, London, S.W. 1.

The Isles of Scilly.—For many years the wild life of the small uninhabited outlying islands of the Scilly group have been carefully protected privately. Now official backing against development or other threats is necessary, and has been given by the Nature Conservancy in agreement with the owners, the Duchy of Cornwall.

The vegetation of these islands is unique in the British Isles and they offer also outstanding opportunities for studying isolated insect populations. There are breeding colonies of Manx shearwaters and other sea birds.

Applications to visit the islands may be made to the honorary warden, Lieut.-Commander T. M. Dorrien-Smith, Tresco Abbey, Isles of Scilly, Cornwall.

Additions have been made to the following reserves :—

Cors Tregaron (see *Oryx*, III, No. 2) has been enlarged from 1,500 to 1,842 acres. The new area includes the botanically most interesting part of the raised bog. It is also a favourite wintering ground of the Greenland white-fronted goose and a great place for other wildfowl.

Wrens Nest on the borders of Staffordshire and Worcestershire, now increased to 74 acres, is internationally known as a geological exposure of Upper Silurian rocks. It has yielded the best fossil fauna in Britain, including trilobites, shells, corals and sea lilies of some 300 million years ago. Differences in the successive strata reflect the depth of the sea when they were laid down.

In the middle of last century when the limestone was quarried for a flux used in iron smelting, the quarry men found a ready market among residents of the Black Country for the fossils they uncovered. These may still be found in profusion.

No permits are required to visit the area, but are necessary for scientific research work there.

Wybunbury Moss, in Cheshire, has been increased from 8 to 24 acres. It is a "Schwingmoor", that is a sphagnum bog with its centre floating on water; it is formed in a steep-sided kettle-hole in sandy glacial material. The vegetation is extremely interesting.

Applications to visit this reserve may be made to The Nature Conservancy, Merlewood Research Station, Grange-over-Sands, Lancashire.