

ORYX

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Notes and News

The announcement that the proposed town-site at Two People Bay, in Western Australia, sole site for the noisy scrub-bird, has been cancelled is a remarkable victory for the conservation movement in

The Noisy Scrub-Bird Saved

Western Australia. As one Australian remarked, "Nothing like this has happened before in Australia." The noisy scrub-bird was thought to be extinct when it was re-discovered at Two People Bay in December, 1961. Immediately there were protests, not only in Australia but from all over the world, against the site being cleared for development, and HRH Prince Philip took a considerable interest in the matter. Now the proposal has been cancelled, and a thousand acres has been declared a fauna reserve and vested in the Fauna Protection Advisory Committee, with the expectation that a further 12,000 acres will be vested as soon as legal difficulties have been cleared. Forty pairs of the scrub-bird are breeding in the proposed area, and a full-time warden has been appointed.

The International Whaling Commission is clearly bent on suicide. Unfortunately, while its members will go on living in other capacities, the whales will not. Faced with a situation of plunging catches, the

Excessive Whale Quotas Again

Commission still goes on taking quarts out of pint pots, treating the whale populations as a widow's cruse. Last year the Commission's scientific advisers recommended a quota of 2,500, but the Commission wilfully stuck out for 4,500. In fact, they were only able to catch 4,091 units, and the great majority of these were sei whales (17,583), whose Antarctic stocks were once again reduced by more than one-third, the catch of the large fin whales falling from 7,308 to 2,318. Clearly any sensible manager of the whale stocks, with the long-term interests of the whales at heart, would have suspended Antarctic whaling at once so that the stocks could be allowed to build up again. Realising that some concessions must be made to short-term considerations, the Fauna Preservation Society, taking the best scientific advice available, urged the Commission to restrict the quota to 2,000 blue whale units. However, the Commission once again

chose to flout scientific advice and plumped for a quota of 3,500. As with all decisions where scientific considerations have to give way to political obstructionism, it is a case of too timid and too late. Once more the short-term demands of profit on capital investment by a handful of nations have been allowed to destroy the natural resources which could have been a long-term asset to mankind. When protein from whales is badly needed at the end of the century, it will not be there.

More than half the island of Great Inagua, in the Bahamas, has been declared a national park, to protect the largest remaining colony of the American flamingo. In 1961 more than 10,000 pairs of flamingos nested on the island, which is at the south-eastern

New National Park for Flamingos

end of the Bahamas. An area of 287 square miles has been leased by the British Crown to the Bahamas National Trust; it is remote and difficult to reach with no facilities for visitors. Many other birds breed within the new park's boundaries, including the rare Bahamian parrot, Bahama ducks and West Indian tree ducks; other colonial nesters include roseate spoonbills, reddish egrets, common and snowy egrets, Louisiana herons, brown pelicans, olivaceous cormorants and several terns. An estuary that is being used for experimental raising of green turtles also has a spoonbill colony, and tropicbirds nest on the cliffs. The National Audubon Society has since its foundation kept a watchful eye on this island and its flamingo colony, and it was there that Robert P. Allen, then director of the Society, made his study of the life history and ecology of the flamingo.

Breeding rare animals in captivity, as is being done with the Arabian oryx in Arizona, is one outstanding way in which zoos can help wild-life conservation; examples like the Przewalski wild horse, Père David's

Adapting the Zoo to the Animal

deer and the nene goose have shown how successful it can be. But the failures are more conspicuous than the successes, said Mr W. G. Conway, director of the New York Zoo, in a recent address to the American Association of Zoo Parks and Aquariums. IUCN lists 216 species of endangered mammals, about 83 of which are to be found in zoos. Of these about 35 have bred, but fewer than 15, about seven per cent., have bred consistently, and this, of course, is the acid test. The list of animals which have bred for short periods and then failed—it includes the gaur, klipspringer, vicuña and orang utan—is almost as long as the list of animals that have bred successfully. Examining the reasons, Mr Conway suggested that larger breeding groups and more space for animals were vital; he criticised the tendency to nurse weaklings and then breed from them and to hand-rear young and preserve old animals beyond the breeding age. Most of all he thought that more

attention must be given to the requirements of individual species. Social animals, such as apes and monkeys, must be kept in social groups and given the tools necessary for breeding behaviour; "rubber tyres, ropes and television represent the apparent limits of curatorial imagination in solving the problem of gainful employment for captive anthropoids." The cry is always that animals which do not adapt to captivity are "too specialised." Unfortunately, said Mr Conway, these "specialist" animals are numerous. An animal that feeds at night should be fed at night; one that browses at bush height should be fed at bush height. "It is beginning to appear as if zoos have been spending too much time trying to adapt wild animals to captive conditions and too little trying to adapt captive conditions to wild animals." This is what zoos must now put their efforts into doing if endangered and difficult species are to be successfully bred.

Roadside verges in Britain are valuable areas for the conservation of wildlife, both animal and plant. They represent a significant proportion of the countryside, estimated at about 171,000 acres in England and

**Wildlife and
the
Road Verges**

Wales, and moreover one of the very few wild habitats that is likely to increase. In an article in the CPRE Monthly Bulletin for May, Mr J. M. Way, of the Nature Conservancy's Monks Wood station, points out that most common British wild plants grow on verges, and about 50 species are virtually confined to them. The animals that breed there include 20 out of 50 species of mammals, all six reptiles, 40 out of 200 birds, 25 out of 60 butterflies, and eight out of 17 bumblebees. Verges also have several advantages for conservation purposes: they occur all over the country, and have a variety of soils, altitudes and climate, and being continuous (unlike the usual nature reserves) are as much highways along which plants and animals can travel as the roads are for humans. And as modern farming practice, with its use of machinery and chemicals, destruction of hedges and lack of crop rotation, becomes more inimical to wildlife, the verges become more attractive. The danger to the verges is not so much of wildlife destruction as of losing their diversity by default. For practically no scientific work has been done on the management of them. They are only preserved by periodic removal of the vegetation, and the hand-cutting that used to be the rule preserved them without damaging them. The same cannot always be said of modern mechanical and chemical treatments. Many naturalists' trusts already have agreements with their local county surveyors to leave areas of special interest uncut or unsprayed, but this is only a beginning. What is needed now is the working out of management plans for verges to make the best possible use of them as a wildlife habitat once the requirements of road safety have been met. It is good news that the Nature Conservancy is making a limited survey this year to get information on how important the verges are as reservoirs for wildlife.

Most of what is left of Brazil's wildlife is in the forests, so the new Forest Law passed by the Brazilian Congress last September should do much to protect the wildlife. The law forbids any exploitation of the natural resources of the National and State Parks, a clause inserted at the request of the *Associação de Defesa da Flora e da Fauna*. On slopes with an incline of 45° or more all felling is prohibited, and on slopes

between 25° and 45° only limited forestry operations are permitted. All felling is also prohibited on river banks and lake shores, on mountain tops, the edges of plateaux and on sand dunes. In private forests a minimum of 20 per cent. must be left afforested. In the Amazon region a minimum of 50 per cent. of forest in any rural property must be retained, and to encourage owners forests with more than 50 per cent. of native trees are exempted from taxes; the planting of new forests also brings tax advantages. "A most important help to the State and federal authorities in charge of conservation," is how Mr Nogueira-Neto, President of the *Associação de Defesa da Flora e da Fauna*, describes these new regulations.

The Save the Redwoods League has notched up several victories lately in its campaign to save an adequate proportion of the world's redwood forests. These magnificent trees (*Sequoia sempervivens*), which attain

Saving Redwoods and the Grand Canyon

well over 300 feet, grow exclusively on the Pacific coast of California, where 95 per cent. are in private hands and are steadily being felled for lumber. Within twenty years, it has been estimated, all but an exiguous five per cent. of the world's present stock of redwoods will have disappeared. The League has recently been offered a \$1½ million grant from the Ford Foundation to enable many more redwoods to be bought and saved. Its efforts have also persuaded the California Highway Commission to change its mind about the route of a freeway which would have torn a swathe through Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park, and may yet succeed in doing the same for a freeway projected through the Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park. Moreover the US Government, with the League's support, is now proposing a Redwoods National Park—it is astounding that there has not been one long ago—although some conservation groups consider it is too small, and in the wrong place—43,393 acres in Del Norte county and 1400 acres in Humboldt county. The rival plan for a 90,000-acre Redwood Creek Park is backed by the Sierra Club, the National Audubon Society and other national conservation bodies. But while there is hope for better things for the redwoods, the world famous Grand Canyon National Park faces a serious threat from the proposed building of two power dams by the Bureau of Reclamation, a Government agency. One would inundate the whole length of Grand Canyon National Monu-

ment and 13 miles of Grand Canyon National Park. The other would flood a magnificent but still unprotected stretch of the Grand Canyon. The two dams together would destroy the ecology of the rivers in the area, drown its plant life, drive out its wildlife and devastate most of the habitat in the canyon of the rare desert bighorn sheep.

A small herd of onagers is building up in a game reserve on the island of Barsa-Kel'mes, in the Aral Sea, east of the Caspian, according to the IUCN Bulletin. The reserve was established in 1939 principally

**Onager Herd
in
USSR Reserve**

for saiga antelopes and onagers, and there is a resident staff of scientists and wardens studying the island's animals. One male and seven female onagers were taken there in 1953 from the Badkhyz Reserve in Turkmenistan, the only place where they survived in the USSR. Breeding did not begin until 1955, because the single male proved impotent and had to be replaced, but since 1957 there have been 38 births—16 males and 22 females. Five animals have died.

In east and north-east Greenland the musk-oxen have seriously decreased, and severe winters are thought to have been the main cause. In 1953-54, for example, the snow was three metres deep in places

**Musk-oxen
Transferred in
Greenland**

(instead of the usual half a metre) with sheets of ice on top, making it very difficult for the animals to dig through to the Arctic willow that is their main food. Fearing that the musk-oxen of the north-east might be wiped out by a succession of severe winters, the Greenland zoologist Chr. Vibe planned to transfer a small herd to south-west Greenland, where severe conditions do not usually occur at the same time as in the east, and in the *International Zoo Yearbook* the Director of the Copenhagen Zoo, Svend Andersen, describes how this was done with the Zoo's aid. In 1961 a six-man team, using tranquillising drugs (three times the recommended dose for sheep pacified a bull calf musk-ox for 20 minutes), captured 14 calves and took them to Copenhagen Zoo for the winter. One died, but the rest were taken back to Greenland the following July and released in the south-west, at Tatsit Ata Bay. They established themselves successfully, for two years later two calves were seen, indicating that the three-year-old cows had bred at the normal time, and the group was several times seen from the air. A second expedition in 1964 captured seven male and nine female calves and two female yearlings (no yearlings had been seen on the first expedition, an indication of the severity of the 1961-62 winter), and, after a winter in Copenhagen, four male and 10 females were released in the south-west in July, 1965. The musk-ox is not known ever to have occurred in south-west Greenland, and transfers have been made purely to establish a reserve population in case of disaster in the east, but the

experiment has also shown a part that zoos can play in conservation, and that at least certain species of wild animals are able to adapt themselves to the wild in a suitable habitat after a period in captivity. A photograph of the musk-oxen is on Plate 6.

In eastern Europe wolves, which have been almost exterminated from western Europe, have increased in numbers, especially since the last war, largely as a result of political factors. In a paper on the wolf in Finland, in *Annales Zoologici Fennici*, Dr Erkki Pulliainen points out that changes in land ownership, agriculture and hunting led to completely different practices. With the break-up of private estates, hunting as a sport and trade was replaced by hunting under state control, and official hunters were concerned with the fur bearing animals; wolves received little attention and increased. At the end of the last war Finland ceded large areas on the eastern frontier to Russia. These lands the Russians neglected. Fields returned to forest, game increased and so did wolves, until in the 1950's they began to cross into Finland, where they met with a hostile reception from farmers and landowners. Many were hunted and shot, and after reaching a peak in the winter of 1962-63, their numbers dropped drastically—and the wolf's attempt to repopulate Finland was defeated. Until the 1880's wolves occurred over the whole of Finland, but by 1900 they were to be found in less than half the country, and mainly in Finnish Lapland where they survive to-day. Their treatment there, says Dr Pulliainen, shows how man can control the population, and also the futility of the bounty system. The reindeer keepers know the wolves individually by their tracks, and by destroying dens and cubs they keep the population below a certain limit. They can also distinguish the sexes by the tracks, and they do not kill females because that would lose them the easy bounty for the cubs.

The need for the wildlife conservation movement in Britain to become more closely integrated, with a view to reducing the number of organisations, is widely felt. At the Naturalists' Trust Conference in

Merger in the Conservation Field ?

May, organised by the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves, a suggestion from the Director of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds for a merger between the SPNR and the RSPB, so as to form one reserve-owning conservation body, received general support, and a resolution was passed unanimously requesting that the means and stages by which such a merger might be achieved should be explored. The Chairman, Mr Christopher Cadbury, also revealed that discussions were already taking place between the SPNR and the Council for Nature on their future relationship. Few people doubt that the conservation movement could speak more authoritatively if it spoke with one voice. The RSPB now

has a membership of nearly 30,000, while the SPNR acts as the co-ordinating body for the strong Naturalists' Trusts movement which has developed so rapidly in the last ten years; it now commands a total membership of more than 20,000 and protects more than 20,000 acres. For the moment the specialist societies such as the FPS are not involved, but if the major integration can be achieved thought will have to be given to how they fit in.

The Red Book

The World's Endangered Mammals and Birds

THE Survival Service Commission has now made available to all who are interested its information on the world's endangered species of mammals and birds with the publication of the first two volumes of the Specialist's Edition of the Red Book, by IUCN in collaboration with the International Council for Bird Preservation. These two loose-leaf volumes cover 277 kinds of mammals and 321 of birds, with the promise, if the venture is successful, of further volumes to come on reptiles, insects, and plants. The loose-leaf format, of course, enables species to be removed, and new or corrected sheets to be inserted at any time, thus keeping the records up to date; the price, £3 10s each volume, includes the cost of this servicing up to December 31, 1970. For an extra charge of £1 a set of 20 strongly made and labelled plastic dividers is available for Vol. 1 (mammals) facilitating quick reference and providing protection for the sheets.

The two volumes are remarkably compact, the pages having been reduced by photo-litho process to 8.3 x 5.8 inches while retaining the clarity that makes for easy reading. With one page to a species, the information includes a short description of the animal, notes on distribution, status, estimated numbers, reasons for decline and other relevant facts. Both volumes achieve their declared aim of providing "in a conveniently classified form the most up to date and reliable data available on all species considered . . . to be in danger of extinction," and they are a tribute to the excellent work of their compilers, Noel Simon, Projects Officer of IUCN, and Colonel Jack Vincent, ICBP Liaison Officer at IUCN. Certainly they should, by spreading the vital information on endangered species round the world, stimulate a flow of information and arouse an interest in our endangered wildlife.

Orders should be sent to IUCN, 1110 Morges, Vaud, Switzerland; orders for the set of two will be sent specially boxed at no extra charge.

OFFICIAL HELP FOR THE BALD EAGLE

In an effort to stop the continuing decline of the bald eagle in the USA, the Secretary of the Interior, Mr Stewart L. Udall, this spring made an order closing off all eagle nesting sites in national wildlife refuges to eliminate disturbance. No timber cutting was permitted within half a mile of a nest, and trees that are potential nesting sites are to be preserved.