

Tragedy of a Turtle

Survival Service Commission Meeting at Lucerne

THE desperate plight of the Atlantic ridley turtle was described to the Survival Service Commission of IUCN by Professor Archie Carr at its meeting in Lucerne in June. The remarkable breeding behaviour of this turtle was not known until the 1950's, when the breeding ground was discovered on the Gulf coast of Mexico. On one day between April and June, the whole population, at that time some 40,000 turtles, come up to lay their eggs above high tide mark, at a different place each year along a 90 mile stretch of deserted beach, an event called the arribadas. But since the discovery depredations on the eggs and adults by local fishermen have reduced the turtles to a miserable remnant. For three years now there has been no arribadas at all, and the last big one was in 1953. The turtles now come up the beach erratically in twos and threes, on different days, in different places.

The major cause of the catastrophe to the turtles, Dr Carr believes, is the sealing off of certain lagoons on the coast, leading to increased salinity of the water and the disappearance of the fish. As a result local fishermen, having been deprived of their living, have turned to the turtles, taking four-wheel drive vehicles on to the beach and collecting the eggs in lorry loads to sell in the villages.

The turtles are fully protected by the Mexican government, but the law is not enforced. The only way to achieve enforcement appears to be by patrolling the beach with soldiers during the vital months April to June. Even now, with the turtle population so reduced, Dr Carr believes that if this were done it would be possible to build up the numbers again.

The Commission agreed on the urgent necessity of protecting the Atlantic ridley turtle, which is a full species and the only reptile known to concentrate its breeding activity in this remarkable way, both in time and place. Steps are being taken to see if the necessary patrols can be arranged to enforce the protection of the turtles.

The Aye Aye in Madagascar

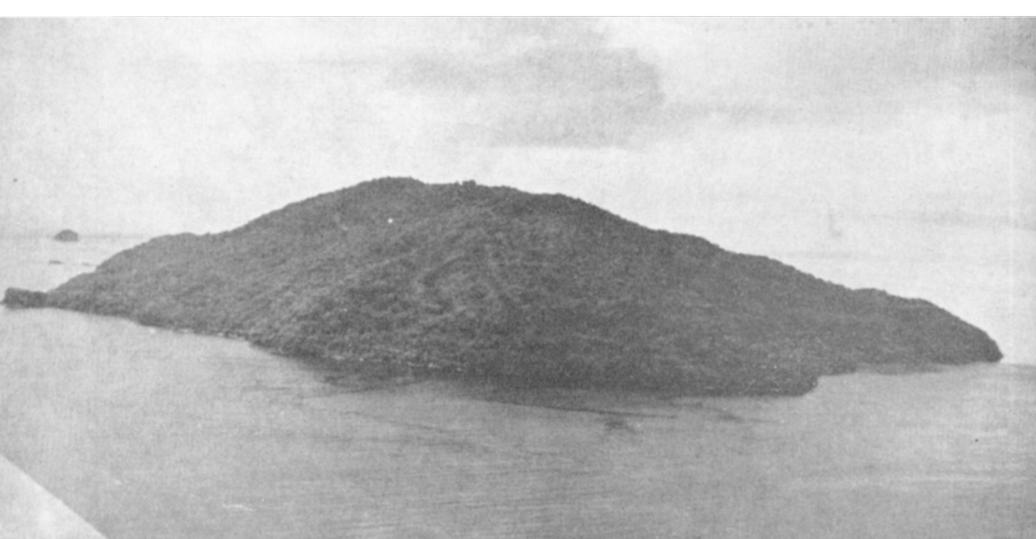
Dr Jean-Jacques Petter reported to the Commission on what is indeed an eleventh hour rescue attempt for the rarest of the Madagascar lemurs, the aye aye, whose numbers may now be as low as nine or ten animals. Driven out of their only remaining habitat, the coastal forest of north-eastern Madagascar, by wholesale felling, they have invaded the plantations of the villagers who are wiping them out. The Malagasy government has now declared the small island, Nossi Mangabé, as a reserve, and Dr Petter's assistant in Madagascar, M. Peyriras, is now engaged in an attempt to capture aye ayes and transfer them to the island. Two other lemurs are already on the island



J. J. Petter

THE AYE AYE

Plate 1: A nocturnal animal and the rarest of the Madagascar lemurs for which a reserve has been created on the island Nossi Mangabé, as described in the Survival Service Commission report opposite.



Plates 2 and 3

J. J. Petter

NOSSI MANGABE AND ITS FORESTS

**The island has a religious significance for the Malagasy people
and its indigenous flora has remained untouched.**





Plate 4

Bill Robinson

A BEAUTIFUL AFRICAN CAT—THE SERVAL

Reproduced from "Wild Animals in an African Park", by Rennie Bere, reviewed
on page 316, by kind permission



Plate 5

Michael Woodford

ARABIAN ORYX, part of the fine herd of 19 animals at the farm of HH Sheikh Qassim bin Hamad al Thani, Minister of Education of Qatar, Arabian Gulf, consisting of eleven males and eight females of which five are calves. Sheikh Qassim, who has just become a life member of the FPS with a generous donation of £100, started the herd in 1962. A herd of about 40 Arabian gazelles are also breeding freely at his farm.

MUSK-OXEN from the north-east Greenland wintering in Copenhagen Zoo before being released in south-west Greenland as part of the conservation experiment described on page 279.

Photograph by Erik Parbst from the International Zoo Yearbook by permission



Plate 6

but occupy a different ecological niche. The Commission recorded its pleasure at the action of the Malagasy Government, and congratulated Dr Petter and M. Peyriras in their splendid work for the aye aye and the other rare lemurs.

A resolution passed by the IUCN General Assembly at Lucerne expressed satisfaction at the creation of this island nature reserve for the aye aye and other endemic lemur species. It requested the Malagasy Government to give greater protection to unique species threatened with extinction on the mainland, and to consider making a similar island reserve off the western coast for the preservation of the very different but equally interesting and important fauna and flora of western Madagascar.

Polar Bear Research

Mr Russell Train, President of the Conservation Foundation, announced that the Foundation has made a grant for a two-year study on polar bears, to be carried out by Dr Richard Cooley. The study will emphasise the political, economic and social issues involved in the conservation of polar bears, and seek to develop positive recommendations for international action.

The Canadian Wildlife Service plans to survey from the air the polar bears of the islands on the east side of Hudson Bay, and to investigate the possibilities of immobilising polar bears. It is also advising the North-western Territories Government, which controls polar bear hunting, how to keep killing at an acceptable level. Hunting is restricted to native peoples, but their increased mobility has led to increased kills. The normal annual rate is about 600 bears, but this is believed to have been exceeded in 1965-66.

The first international conference on polar bears, held in Alaska in September, 1965, decided to initiate international research on the ecology and movements of polar bears, and the SSC has agreed to act as a centre for the collation and dissemination of the information obtained. Russia is the first country to ban all killing of polar bears.

Dr Gottschalk, Director of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife in the USA, reported that one American hunting organisation, the National Rifle Association, has dropped its polar bear badge, and another, the Boone and Crockett Club, has eliminated the use of aeroplanes in competitions for trophy bears. Greenland has made restrictions in polar bear hunting, and the use of aircraft is prohibited.

LEOPARDS IN ISRAEL AND JORDAN

THREE leopards have been seen this year in Israel, in the Mt. Meiron nature reserve in Galilee. An account of the shooting of a leopard in the Wilderness of Judaea, in Jordan, in October, 1964, together with a photograph of the hunter holding the dead animal, is given by Ian Blake in a recent IUCN Bulletin. After extensive enquiries Mr Blake decided that this was the first leopard to be reported there in the last hundred years.