

ORYX

Vol. XIII No. 4

July 1976

Notes and News

The UK Government has appointed three Scientific Authorities to advise on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, which the Government, while not formally ratifying, implemented on January 1st this year. The Scientific Authority for

**Advisers
for the Trade
Convention**

Animals is asked to advise on two main areas: applications for import and export licences for live animals and also some products, and amendments to the lists of species to be controlled. The members, who include the

FPS Hon. Secretary, are: Professor V. C. Wynne-Edwards FRS (Chairman), Dr M. R. Brambell, Peter Conder, Dr G. B. Corbet, R. S. R. Fitter, Miss A. G. C. Grandison, Dr C. J. O. Harrison, Professor Sir Andrew Huxley FRS, J. Reid, T. H. Scott, E. H. Tong, and R. C. Upton. The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, will act as the Scientific Authority for Plants, and the Nature Conservancy Council is the third Scientific Authority to advise on general nature conservation policy. As we go to press the Bill to provide specific powers to implement the Convention is before Parliament, and the Government is expected to ratify in June.

The Malaysian Game Department has made the remarkable discovery of a group of 10–20 Sumatran rhinos in south Pahang Tenggara and north Johore. This may well be the largest surviving group anywhere, and most

**Rhino
Discovery in
Malaysia**

important because it is the only viable breeding group on the Asian mainland – no other known group in Malaysia numbers more than three animals. The rhinos roam the lowland dipterocarp forest surrounding the proposed highland Endan-Rompin National Park, forming a buffer

zone. The park itself is unsuitable for rhinos, because of both its altitude and lack of rhino food. Most of this buffer-zone forest is scheduled for sustained yield forestry, which involves little disturbance and would not harm the rhinos. But there is one small area of about 7000 acres that has been included in a government scheme for growing palm oil, and this is vital for the rhinos.

If the forest here were to be destroyed, their range round the park would be interrupted, for they could not get round the cleared area, and they would be much more vulnerable to poaching, which, with rhino horn at about M\$10,000 per horn, is a great temptation. If agreement can be reached to withdraw the vital 7000 acres from the development plan there is every hope that the Malaysian Game Department will be able to preserve a group that is of immense importance to the future of the Sumatran rhino.

All but two of the nine species of gibbons *Symphalangus* and *Hylobates* – the long-armed apes of the deciduous monsoon and evergreen forests of south-east Asia – exist in reasonably healthy numbers, reports David Chivers as a

**Outlook for
the
Gibbons**

result of his field studies and research over the past eight years. (The two are *H. concolor* and *moloch*.) But he believes that 80–90 per cent of the populations could be destroyed in the next twenty years if forest clearance and hunting continue at the present rates, exterminating at

least one species – *moloch* (Borneo) – and possibly three others – *klossii* (Mentawai Islands), *pileatus* (Thailand and Cambodia), and *concolor* (Laos and Vietnam). Only four per cent of gibbon habitat is protected – he would like to see 20 per cent. The urgent need is to stop the wholesale forest clearing (both for man's sake and the gibbons'), which is the biggest threat in all countries, and to create more good forest reserves. He urges that efforts should be made to stop hunting – which is for food, so at the same time alternative protein should be provided – and to educate people in the use of their forest resources. And the pet trade should be banned. In Thailand particularly capture for the pet trade and for research is a serious drain. The outlook is most hopeful in Malaya where the Forest Department is extending protected forests and the siamang, lar and agile gibbons should be able to maintain their numbers.

The Zambian Government has stopped all hunting in ten Game Management Areas, totalling over 32,000 sq km, to allow the wildlife populations to recover and build up numbers. As six of the areas adjoin three national

**Zambia
Watches its
Wildlife**

parcs – two each on the Kafue, South Luangwa Valley and Isangana parks – this should also allow numbers to build up inside these parks, provided that the absence of hunters does not give poachers an even freer hand. The Kafue lechwe, on the Flats on the north bank of the

Kafue River, including Blue Lagoon National Park, have increased by about 10,000 since 1973, and now number 40,000. But on the south bank, including Lochinvar National Park, numbers have fallen disturbingly, from 65,000 to about 30,000. The new Iteshiteshi dam may soon bring another kind of pressure on these lechwe, for the lake is now filling up with water that hitherto has flowed direct to the Kafue Flats; the effect on the lechwe will have to be watched. The black lechwe, too, have been increasing steadily and now number about 25,000 in the Bangweulu Swamps. It is good news that this is



BLACK LECHWE

one of the areas being considered for national park status. Zambia has eighteen national parks covering nearly 60,000 sq km, and representing eight per cent of Zambia's land area. The Government has accepted in principle that the total area might be increased to 15 per cent. Last year, at Dr Kaunda's request, a group of 100 black lechwe were flown to the Chambeshi Flats in the Chinsali District, the President's birthplace (where there was a remnant population as recently as the 1950s) to join a small group which, through the efforts of the Zambia Wildlife Conservation Society, had been successfully settled there the previous year and had started breeding.

The effects of the international trade in coral reef fishes, which has grown enormously in the last ten years, need investigation. It is unlikely that any species is endangered by it, but it could be destroying local populations; it

**Coral Fish
by
the Million**

also has other unfortunate side effects, say H. R. Lubbock and N. V. C. Polunin, in a paper in *Environmental Conservation*. They point to the destruction of coral reefs when explosives are used for collecting fish, changes in the natural ecosystems as a result of heavy collecting of

certain species, enormous wastage of fish, and the danger of exotic introductions – e.g. species from the Philippines (a big exporter) being released in Florida (a big importer). The effect of removing large numbers of certain fish species from the reefs is unknown, but the removal of herbivorous fish, for example, might lead to an increase in algal coverage which could ultimately affect the coral. Most of the fish taken are small, but some may be juveniles of larger species – two to eight centimetres long is the usual range, and price-lists show that anything from 20 to over 250 species might be listed. Ten price lists offered (among others) 60 species from Hawaii, 112 from Ethiopia, 109 from the Philippines, 95 from Kenya and 252 from Indonesia. Based on official figures the authors estimate that over 71,000 boxes, containing between 2 million and 3½ million marine fish, are being exported from Manila, in the Philippines, each year, more than half to the USA, where the tropical marine aquarium market is now a major industry. But the Director of the Bureau of Fisheries in the Philippines believes this to be a considerable underestimate; he puts the Philippines export for the year 1974 at 723,405 kg, which is

'probably equivalent' to about 36 million marine fishes. Some countries do impose controls – for example in Mauritius the sole exporter is the Fisheries Department, which monitors the number of species exported, and Hawaii has a permit system which involves monthly catch reports. But in most countries it appears to be a free-for-all.

The St Vincent parrot *Amazona guildingi* is endemic and endangered, but a survey last year, which FPS aided with a grant from the Oryx 100% Fund, showed that there is still a viable if hard-pressed population. Opossums, rats,

**The Parrot
and the
Predator**

the broad-winged hawk *Buteo platypterus*, and man all prey on the parrots; much the worst is man, who hunts them for food and captures them for pets. Like the monkey-eating eagle in the Philippines, a St Vincent parrot in a cage is a status symbol in the island, and there

are a large number of them; few are properly cared for and no thought is given to breeding. Every year fledglings are taken from the nests to be sold at prices that may be as high as £80 a bird, and adult birds are shot at – 'wing-shooting' – in the hope of wounding them to facilitate capture; inevitably many are killed. The Government has banned parrot exports, but birds are being smuggled out. The Durham University expedition last year, led by Keith Laidler, reports that there are still enough parrots in the wild to ensure the bird's survival, at least for the near future, but that more protection measures are needed, in particular the creation of a well-guarded parrot reserve in the Buccament valley in the south where the largest number of parrots are to be found. To stop the nest robbing the report urges the control of exports, the employment of wardens, using the forest wardens and perhaps even the hunters themselves, and an education programme to make the owners of caged parrots aware of their birds' value and to encourage breeding.

Hawksbill turtles *Eretmochelys imbricata* are declining rapidly in the Atlantic and the Caribbean, and the main reason is the Japanese tortoiseshell trade. High prices are paid for particular shell types – over US \$500 for a good

**Decline of
the
Hawksbill**

mature turtle. Indeed, in one district of Panama this is the chief source of revenue, and according to Professor Archie Carr was the reason why Panama was unwilling to protect the hawksbill in the 1973 negotiations for the international convention on trade in endangered species.

In a paper in *Biological Conservation*, November 1975, Archie Carr and Stephen Stancyk show the serious decrease in nesting turtles on the important Tortuguero beach in Costa Rica in the past twenty years. The number of turtles tagged between 1970 and 1973 was 0.97 per patrol-hour per patrol-mile, whereas for a similar period 1956 to 1959 the figure was 3.7. And, they say, the discrepancy would be greater if account were taken of two other factors – the greater effort to get data in the later period, and the better realisation that turtles turned over and left to be tagged later often right themselves and get away untagged. Despite recent discoveries of new hawksbill nesting grounds

**PACIFIC
RIDLEY
TURTLES**
nesting in
Costa Rica
Howard
Hughes



in other parts of the world, notably in the Torres Strait, the authors say the hawksbill is an endangered species. In Asian countries the tourist trade is the chief consumer - in the forms of stuffed baby turtles and jewelry; spear-fishermen, too, are taking an increasing toll.

The astonishing number of 158,161 nesting Pacific ridley turtles *Lepidochelys olivacea* were marked in February this year at a rookery in Orissa in north-east India. This rookery was only 'discovered' in 1974 - i.e. discovered by

**Huge Turtle
Rookery
in India**

conservationists - it is not mentioned in the Red Data Book. The Orissa government had been issuing licences to allow between 1½ and 2 million eggs a year to be taken for human consumption, but this has now been stopped on the advice of Dr Robert Bustard, FAO adviser to the

Indian Government, and this year both nesting females and eggs were guarded. The rookery, which Dr Bustard suggests may be the world's largest sea-turtle rookery, has been included in the new Bhitarkanika Sanctuary, declared by the Orissa Government last year, to protect both the Pacific ridley turtle and the saltwater crocodile *Crocodylus porosus*. The sanctuary includes twelve offshore islands where there are known to be more turtle rookeries, which will now be investigated.

FPS has sent a letter of congratulation to President Daniel Oduber of Costa Rica on the creation of the Corcovado National Park by presidential decree in December 1975. This superb park on the Osa peninsula, which juts out

**Costa Rica's
New
National Park**

into the Pacific, consists of 113 square miles of lowland tropical wet forest, most of which has never been cut, and with a range of wildlife that includes 139 mammals, 62 reptiles and 51 amphibians, as well as 200 trees, among them jaguar, ocelot, puma or mountain lion, margay,

giant anteater, tapir, sloths, kinkajous, crocodiles and four marine turtles. It could never be good agricultural land, but squatters had been coming in in increasing numbers, and the writing was on the wall. It is a big task for the government of a small country to put across the idea of conserving such an enormous area 'just for wildlife'. WWF and the US Nature Conservancy are helping to raise funds, but only if the park pays dividends in the form of international acclaim for its scientific importance and as a revenue-earner from international tourism can it be done.

If the new Ethiopian Government can translate its promises into action the outlook for the wildlife is encouraging, reports Leslie Brown, following his visit there at the end of last year. The Government has promised to conserve

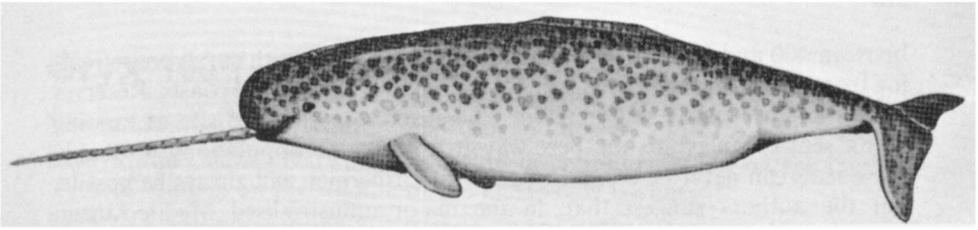
**New Look
in
Ethiopia**

wildlife as part of the national heritage (not primarily as a tourist attraction), but what all agree is urgently needed is to implement existing plans, enact the legislation that is already prepared and above all enforce it. The perennial problem of clearing the national parks (both existing and proposed) of settlers and their domestic flocks should be made easier with the nationalisation of all land in Ethiopia. In the Bale Mountains park (not yet gazetted) the nyala *Tragelaphus buxtoni* appear to be increasing – 72 were seen in one day by Ato Lealem Berhanu of the Wildlife Conservation Organisation (the previous highest comparable figure was 49) – and Semien foxes which now survive mainly in this park (in a southern race) are apparently ‘quite common’. The warden reports a real change of atmosphere in this park, with the administration, and perhaps equally important the students, backing his efforts to preserve it. In the Semien National Park the walia ibex continue to increase and spread outside the park, and poaching is no longer a problem, but settlers in the park with animals that pre-empt the grazing and the cultivation of steep slopes are still serious problems. The Government has included \$250,000 in the WLCO’s budget for resettlement of these invaders and it is a real test of their intentions whether this can be achieved. The same problem is threatening Swayne’s hartebeest in Nachisar, now in a very precarious state; we hope to have a note about this in the next issue of *Oryx*.

The demand for ivory has had a deadly effect on elephant populations in Africa. It could be starting something equally serious for the narwhal and walrus populations in the eastern Canadian Arctic. Ivory now fetches over

**Ivory
Hunting in
the Arctic**

\$25 per pound, and the narwhal’s spirally furrowed tusk, actually an immensely elongated upper tooth (on the males only), may grow to ten feet. The Inuit (Eskimo) people have stepped up their hunting – as many as 400 narwhals were killed last summer off one tiny settlement (population 311) and 200 walrus off another – and Fisheries Research Board scientists fear that the kill of narwhals (probably about 1100) may now be exceeding the births, estimated at 900 (based on a rough estimate of 10,000 for the total eastern Canada population). Canadian regulations allow the Inuit three narwhal and seven walrus per hunter, but this does not (at least in practice) include animals lost, and it is believed that between 10 and 50 per cent of the animals killed sink to the bottom before they can be recovered. Both walrus and narwhal are included on Appendix II of the international trade convention in endangered species; this allows commercial exports, but does nothing to manage the wild populations. A representative committee, including scientists, Inuit and government officials, has been investigating harvest limits, hunting quotas for the settlements, control of ivory sales, and more efficient hunting techniques, such as netting for narwhal, to



eliminate wastage. *Nature Canada*, describing what is happening, also urges that the government should expand its research programmes on both narwhal and walrus, as the lack of data is a serious obstacle in managing the two species.

The Nilgiri langur *Presbytis johni*, once found all along the western side of the Western Ghats in southern India, was hunted to the verge of extinction, mainly because people believed that this monkey's flesh had aphrodisiac and medicinal properties. Now, however, it seems to be recovering in several parts of its range. In 1968–71, G. U. Kurup, during a survey for the Zoological Survey of India (reported in the *Bombay Natural History Society Journal*, April 1975), found that the langurs were no longer to be seen in the neighbourhood of human settlements (for obvious reasons), but that numbers were building up in the Anamalai and Cardamom Hill, especially in the forest reserves, although not in the more settled and disturbed Nilgiri Hills. In 1974 the increase in numbers was much more noticeable, and in some areas troops of langurs were to be seen every mile or so. He believes that if they are properly protected the populations will quickly recover.

**Nilgiri
Langur
Increasing**

'Persecuted by fishermen' is the recurring refrain in a country by country report on the Mediterranean monk seal, with populations declining nearly everywhere and little or no protection. But from Yugoslavia, June 1975, comes a ray of light: 'five or six surviving *Monachus* on the islands of Vis in the Adriatic Sea . . . protected totally . . . the fishermen had been prohibited from visiting the islands'. And in Greece, where there have been a comparatively large number of sightings (including in December 1975 one in the Corinth Canal!), the islands of the south-east Aegean are described as 'the centre of the present abundance of *Monachus*', and there is hope that the Greek Government may consider giving the species total protection. In Libya the colony first reported by W. J. Norris in *Oryx* in 1972 (page 329) was confirmed as surviving in early 1975. The well known Cabo Blanco colony on the Atlantic coast of Spanish Sahara, however, has been declining steadily since 1960, and both in 1974 and 1975 a disturbing number of dead seals (cause unknown) were found along the coastline. The report, published in the February *Newsletter* of the League for the Conservation of the Monk Seal, and signed by Professor K. Ronald, Dr Jean Boulva and Dr David Sergeant, puts total Mediterranean monk seal numbers at

**Saving the
Mediterranean
Monk Seal**

between 400 and 800, scattered throughout the range, with survivors retreating from persecution to caves, remote islands and cliff-bound coasts. Reserves and sanctuaries, they say, guarded where necessary, on the site of existing monk seal colonies are the best way to restore the populations. Probably these seals can never be common again, and fishermen will always be hostile, but the authors suggest that, in the major industrialised Mediterranean countries, city people wanting to see the seals will have a bigger voice.

Two FPS Tours

Following the highly successful tour of Madagascar, Réunion and Mauritius in April, FPS is planning a second, and hopefully even better one, in November this year, led by Sir Hugh Elliott. A whale-watching tour in Canada is also planned, for July 1977, both tours in collaboration with Twickenham Travel.

The main wildlife attractions of the first tour are, of course, the lemurs in Madagascar, especially indris, brown lemurs, and the magnificent sifakas, all endemic to Madagascar and all endangered and reduced to small numbers. The small island of Réunion is one enormous volcano, and the drive that takes you close to the summit ends in a vast and enormously impressive stony desert. Both islands have interesting birds, mostly endemic, which are also the main interest of Mauritius, a very attractive and friendly island, where frantic last-minute efforts are being made, with international help, to save the pink pigeons and Mauritius kestrels, both of which may well be seen. The boat trip to Round and Snake Islands provides a magnificent sea-bird spectacle and the chance of landing on the first, which boasts two endemic snakes (one probably extinct), five lizards, and several palms and other plants found nowhere else in the world, as well as breeding tropicbirds and Trinidade petrels.

The whale-watching tour includes three days in the St Lawrence Gulf, two on board ship, to see both the great whales (fin, sei and minke) and the smaller white belugas, which are numerous; a visit to Niagara (inevitably!); bird-watching on the shores of Lake Ontario; and a stay in the beautiful Algonquin Provincial Park, where northern and more southerly species meet, with a chance of calling-up wolves.

For full details of both tours, which will be limited to 20 people each, write to FPS office. The cost for the first is £750 and for the Canadian £670. There are still some last-minute places on the Galapagos tour starting August 5th.

WWF Congress in San Francisco

'The Fragile Earth - towards Strategies for Survival' is the theme for the WWF 4th International Congress to be held in San Francisco from November 28th to December 1st. The discussions will take the form of six seminars chaired by eminent conservationists, with Sir Peter Scott among the speakers.

For 1977/78 marine life conservation is to be IUCN/WWF's front-line campaign, and this will be launched at the San Francisco meeting, IUCN presenting the global programme and WWF starting the campaign for funds.

The San Francisco meeting is open to anyone interested; full details from WWF, 29 Greville Street, London EC1N 8AX, or 1110 Morges, Switzerland.