

SSC Meeting in Florida

IUCN's Survival Service Commission – in future to be known more sensibly as the Species Survival Commission and so still SSC – met in Gainesville, Florida, in early October under the chairmanship alternately of Sir Peter Scott, who announced that he would be retiring in 1981, and, in Sir Peter's absence, Gren Lucas, who will succeed him. The usual wide range of subjects was discussed, with reports from many chairmen of Specialist Groups, which now number nearly 60. The following brief items arose in the discussions.

For the first time Chinese scientists attended the SSC meeting. They were Professor Sung Wang, of the Institute of Biology, and Dr Ching Ju Tsao, of the Academy of Forestry, Beijing (Peking). Dr Wang reported that giant pandas probably numbered a little over 1000. He spoke of the enormous loss of trees in China – in the 1950s forest cover was 70 per cent; now it is seven per cent. This has deprived primates of habitat and the black gibbon is now endangered in China. Work has started on compiling a Chinese Red Data Book of endangered species, and biologists and zoologists are again being trained.

As a result of Dr George Balazs's marking of green turtles *Chelonia mydas* in Hawaii it was learned that the species may take 50 years to reach maturity.

Wild elephants in Burma are estimated to number 6200 ± 1000 , the Asian Elephant Group reported; trained elephants number 5973. In Nepal there is no viable wild breeding population in any park or reserve; numbers are between 22 and 25. In Thailand only one reserve has been recently surveyed, and numbers there were put at 150-200, with many young animals. A 'guesstimate' of numbers in six other areas gave a total of over 4000.

Middle America, with one of the richest floras in the world – over 20,000 species of plants – has 6200 'candidates' for the endangered list, according to the Biological Conservation Office of the Smithsonian. They are mostly endemics or newly described species, and the numbers continue to grow. In 1981 the Office will tackle the South American lists, which are particularly difficult because there are no up-to-date lists of each country's flora. After that 100 Red Data Sheets for Latin America will be compiled.

Between 20 and 200 million monarch butterflies winter in forests in one area of volcanic mountains in Mexico. The President of Mexico, following a request from the SSC Chairman, Sir Peter Scott, has issued an edict to protect the butterfly, but this does not protect the monarch from logging, which is now the chief threat.

In 1980 the Tortuguero beach in Costa Rica had the largest number of nesting green turtles seen in 25 years. Professor Carr believes this showed that the measures taken to stop turtle slaughter in Nicaragua (where these turtles feed) is now paying off.

More than 75 species of Caribbean animals and several hundred of Caribbean plants are known to be in danger of extinction. An atlas of Caribbean endangered and declining species is being prepared.

The Jonglei Canal in the southern Sudan will be a physical barrier in the migration of at least half a million tiang *Damaliscus lunatus tiang*, reedbuck *Redunca redunca*, Mongalla gazelle *Gazella thomsoni albonotata* and others. Their future is bleak unless the design of the banks takes their needs into account and enables them to cross.

In July 1980 the US Department of the Interior placed 49 plant species on the endangered list and seven on the threatened list. The status of 3617 others is being reviewed.

The Threatened Plants Committee (TPC) gives first priority among island projects to Hawaii, Madagascar and New Caledonia, where the endemics number thousands rather than hundreds. Close behind come the Mascarenes (Mauritius, Réunion and Rodriguez), Marquesas Islands and the Canaries. On mainland top priority is given to rain forest floras and centres of endemism in tropical and subtropical arid lands.

South Africa's trapping of large sharks (to protect bathing beaches) has allowed small shark populations to build up in great numbers and led to a serious drop in numbers of blue fish.

Two botanists in the Smithsonian Office of Biological Conservation, Dr Scott Moril and Dr Ghillean Prance, funded by WWF/IUCN, are to survey the endangered moist forests of eastern Brazil, where coastal forests have been reduced to about one per cent, yet still have a large endemic flora.

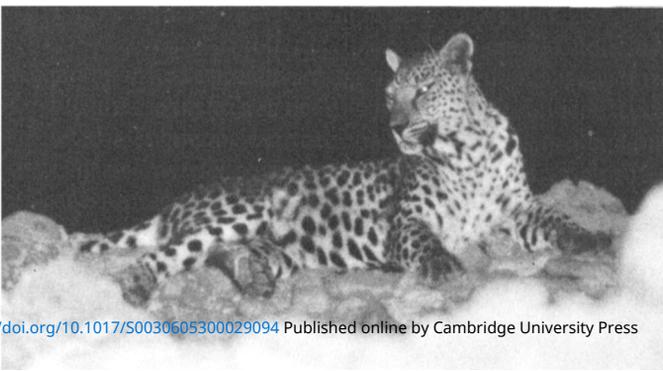
The Cebu black shama thrush *Copsychus niger* has been rediscovered in the Philippines by a US Peace Corps worker. There are believed to be about 40 birds.

Sri Lanka has extended the Wilpattu National Park 18 miles out to sea to protect dugongs and sea turtles.

In August 1980 US agriculturists released over 200 snails *Englandia rosea* in American Samoa, despite the fact that this predatory land snail, introduced into Hawaii twenty years ago, is believed to have been a major factor in the decline of Hawaii's native land snails.

The Japanese Government is making one of the two island homes of the Amami or Ryukyu rabbit a reserve. Previously thought to number about 500 there are now known to be 5000.

In South Africa a population of the bushman hare *Lepus monticularis*, which was believed extinct, has been discovered some distance from its last known area.



A small but thriving leopard population survives in Israel east of the Dead Sea on the creeks coming down from the mountains. This one was caught by a flashbulb coming to a bait.