

The Fauna Preservation Society

DECEMBER, 1958

EDITORIAL NOTES

GREAT BRITAIN.—*Council for Nature*.—Until now there has been no central body in Great Britain representing those interested in the study and protection of animals and plants. There has been no effective way of mobilizing public interest and support to meet the ever-increasing threat to unspoilt areas, nor of attracting funds for the defence of the various societies' interests, which may often be of general public concern. Now local societies can unite for their common good in The Council for Nature, which has been formed under the Patronage of His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh and the Presidency of Lord Hurcomb.

By October, 130 societies had joined the Council ; committees on " Conservation " and " Services to Societies " had been formed and had started work.

The address of the Council for Nature is 41 Queen's Gate, London, S.W. 7. Telephone, KNightsbridge 7733. All British natural history societies should join.

The University of London will again be holding in 1959 a course for its Certificate of Proficiency in Natural History. The course is open to any person interested in the study of living things in their natural habitats. For further information, apply immediately to the Secretary, Natural History Certificate Course, Department of Extra-Mural Studies, University of London, Senate House, London, W.C. 1.

Deer in Scotland.—At last the Government has moved to end the scandal of red deer poaching in Scotland, with all the hideous cruelties which this commercial " gang " poaching has involved.

On 29th October a Bill to protect and control deer in Scotland was introduced in the House of Lords. When it becomes law, fines from £20 to £500, and up to two years' imprisonment, or

nb

both, may be imposed for poaching in its various forms. Close Seasons, from 21st October to 30th June for red deer stags and from 16th February to 20th October for hinds, are proposed but these will come into effect only in 1962.

A permanent Red Deer Commission will be set up.

THAILAND.—It is a pleasure to learn of the use which the Association for the Conservation of Wild Life in Thailand makes of the films we lend them. Dr. Boonsong Lekagul writes that, between 28th August and 22nd September, 1958, our films were shown at twenty places, sometimes several times, to a total audience of 31,000 people. Besides the general public and the priests, those who saw our films included universities and schools, the Air Force Club, military officers and police cadets. There was an audience of 2,300 at the University of Agriculture.

KENYA.—Good news has come from Amboseli reserve, long threatened with ruin by the trampling of Masai cattle walking to and from the only permanent water supply in the district. This year, at the beginning of the dry season, the water in the papyrus swamp seven miles east of the great dry lake of Amboseli, instead of falling began to rise. The warden, Mr. W. H. Taberer, and his assistants immediately saw that if this new water could be taken to the lake along the dry bed of the old Simek river, not only could a long march by cattle be avoided but the most important part of the reserve be saved for wild life. With the co-operation of the Masai the work of digging out the channel started. By October, $2\frac{1}{2}$ cubic feet of water per second was entering the Simek from the swamps and the head of the flow had reached half-way to the lake. Here, on the 13th October, the Masai watered 3,000 cattle, saving them an eleven miles trek and giving them five hours extra grazing. More than half the distance from the swamps to the dry lake has been dug, using only the limited machinery available to National Parks, but now a hummock has been reached and heavy equipment is needed for further progress. Only Government can provide this and it is earnestly hoped that they will do so, once the permanency of the new flow is certain.

The new water can only come underground from the south, where the snow-covered mass of Kilimanjaro borders Amboseli. Just before the water began to rise a slight earth tremor was reported and we may guess that a crack has opened somewhere underground to allow unknown reserves of water to well upward. The salvation of Amboseli may be in sight.

SOUTHERN RHODESIA.—Readers will remember that one of the problems in Southern Rhodesia is the displacement of wild animals by the rising waters of the Zambesi which, as a result of the Kariba dam, will flood over a thousand square miles of country in Southern Rhodesia, *vide Oryx*, IV, 4, p. 228.

The Governor of Southern Rhodesia, Vice-Admiral Sir Peveril William-Powlett, a member of our Society, now informs us that two game rangers have been appointed who, besides managing the two new non-hunting reserves of Chizarira and Matuziadona, will watch the shore line of the rising Kariba lake, paying particular attention to the islands and any animals which may be marooned. Fortunately the dam will be first closed some time between November, 1958, and February, 1959, when most of the larger game animals have vacated the riverine vegetation of the Zambesi and have moved into the escarpment foothills. Migration from the escarpment towards the river usually occurs in May and June of each year, when water supplies give out and food is becoming scarce, and by this time the water-level of the lake will have risen to submerge the riverine vegetation and the animals will have to find new pastures.

Trouble is expected with monkeys and baboons which may climb trees to escape the rising waters, probably with dire consequences to themselves. The smaller mammals and ground birds will also suffer. It is almost impossible to foresee how the wild animals will react but an assurance is given that all reasonable precautions will be taken to save as many as possible and to prevent undue suffering.

SOUTH AFRICA.—Report No. 14 of the Department of Nature Conservation, Cape of Good Hope, brings sad news of the remnant of the elephants of the Knysna forests. In 1869 there were about 500 of these elephants but by 1902 only 30–50 remained.

In 1957 Mr. A. Fraser, Mr. D. J. Brand and Dr. D. Hey surveyed the 100 square miles of the forests and estimated the herd to be only seven or, at the most, nine elephants. Although everything possible has been done during the last 50 years to protect the Knysna elephants, they have not been able to recover from the killings at the turn of the century.

U.S.A.—The report by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service published in this number gives news of some of the endangered species which are the Service's special care. News of other species is given in a report to the American Society

of Mammalogists by its Conservation of Land Mammals Committee, of which Dr. A. W. F. Banfield is chairman.

The prairie-dog (prairie marmot), for instance, has been greatly reduced throughout the Great Plains region because it conflicts with agriculture, though in Colorado, Montana, Wyoming and South Dakota many "dog towns" are holding their own or even increasing. In Arizona, the only State in which extermination is feared, steps are being taken to preserve prairie-dogs.

The black-footed ferret, *Mustela nigripes*, which lives in prairie-dog towns and preys on the "dog", is now very scarce but still known certainly to occur in South Dakota. It is the only representative in North America of the Old World group of black-bellied weasels, to which the polecats and their relatives in eastern and northern Asia belong.

The beaver, threatened with extermination at the beginning of the century, has been re-established over much of its original range in both the United States and Canada. The barren ground grizzly is increasing and spreading south-east across the central tundra of the Northwest Territories. The puma, or mountain lion, is reported to be extending eastwards in Colorado with the spreading deer population.

JAMAICA.—Readers will remember that our Society gave notes on local wild life preservation to the members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association who visited the British West Indies this summer. Mr. Bernard Lewis, Director of the Science Museum, Kingston, now writes that Mr. J. A. N. Burra, Chairman of the Wild Life Protection Committee and Conservator of Forests, explained the Committee's programme to two of the visitors, Lord Hastings and Mr. Blenkinsop, and during a long drive showed them the most important places.

BRITISH GUIANA.—We hear from Mr. Vincent Roth, Director of the British Guiana Museum and Zoological Park, that the wild life situation has deteriorated considerably in the last eight years. Not only have the present and recent Governments been indifferent, but the public care nothing for preservation, most of them being only interested in local fauna for the sport and monetary profit it brings. Perhaps the greatest sufferers are the migratory shore birds which are slaughtered by the thousand, only a small proportion of those destroyed being used for food.

The grey-breasted tree duck, at one time one of the commonest

ducks, could be seen in thousands up to ten years ago. But shooting throughout the year, without heed to the breeding season, has most seriously reduced its numbers. The beautiful Cock-of-the-Rock, *Rupicola rupicola*, is shot without discretion.

Any day of the week in Georgetown one can see the law being openly flouted by men carrying protected finches in cages half a cubic foot in size.

During the fish-spawning season farmers go up the small coastal rivers in large parties and net off the tributaries in which the lukanani, *Cichla ocellaris*, are laying and catch them by the hundred. The giant arapaima, *Sudis gigas*, of the Rupununi district is being seriously reduced in numbers through indiscriminate catching by local people and the neighbouring Brazilians.

BOLIVIA.—We are glad to have been of some use to a member of our Society, Dr. Hernando de Irmay, who was, until recently, Director of the Bolivia Afforestation, Hunting and Soil Conservation Service and is now preparing a draft for the first legislation for fauna conservation in that country. The scientific staff of the British Museum (Natural History) has most kindly checked Dr. de Irmay's lists of the animals of Bolivia, while advice on the laws themselves has been tendered by Captain C. R. S. Pitman, based on his long experience of game legislation in Africa.

GALAPAGOS ISLANDS.—In 1835 Charles Darwin visited the Galapagos Islands in H.M.S. *Beagle* and it is generally believed that it was his appreciation of the extraordinary fauna he found there which guided his mind towards evolution by natural selection, and so to the publication in 1859 of the *Origin of Species*. Man now threatens this unique fauna—and because of its tameness, it is especially vulnerable to his attack. The giant tortoises and land iguanas are endangered; the fur seal has been restricted to the northern islands; the larger birds form an easy prey to egg collectors and feather hunters.

How serious the danger is was shown in 1957 by a six-months biological reconnaissance sponsored by the Pan-American section of the International Committee for Bird Preservation, *Life Magazine*, the New York Zoological Society and the Conservation Foundation. The Government of Ecuador, UNESCO and the International Union for Conservation of Nature co-operated. The reconnaissance was carried out by an Austrian zoologist, Dr. I. Eibl-Eibesfeldt, who had taken part in a similar expedition

in 1954. He was accompanied by Dr. Robert I. Bowman of San Francisco State College.

To naturalists the destruction of the Galapagos fauna is unthinkable and international support is being sought to establish in the Galapagos a Darwin biological station for research and conservation.

BLACK BEARS.—Mrs. Freda Davies has written from British Columbia to say how much she enjoyed Mr. E. P. Gee's article in the last *Oryx* describing his visit to national parks in North America. Commenting on the colour of the black bear in Canada, Mrs. Davies, while agreeing with Mr. Gee that most of the black bears seen in close proximity to settled areas are black in colour, points out that there are many others ranging from dark brown to creamy blonde. While at Lake Edith Chalet a short distance from Jasper Park Lodge she spent many hours watching bears of various colours visiting the garbage pit, climbing trees, begging titbits at the kitchen door or swimming in beautiful little Lake Annette nearby. Two especially interesting animals were Diana, a huge dark brown female with three lively cubs, and Golden, a truly magnificent beast. One of the most beautiful sights imaginable was this enormous creature moving with slow deliberate grace down through the forest aisles, the setting sun bathing his fur in a golden glow.

Turning to C. Tate Regan's *Natural History* we read that the American black bear, *Ursus americanus*, varies in colour from black to cinnamon, slaty grey or even dirty white. Its range is from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico.