

## NATURE PROTECTION CONFERENCE BEIRUT, JUNE, 1954.

Under sponsorship of the Society of the Friends of the Trees of Lebanon and of UNESCO, a conference of scientists from the Near and Middle East was held at Beirut from 3rd–9th June, 1954. Mr. Edward Graham, Director of Plant Technology, attended from Washington, Lieut.-Colonel C. L. Boyle came from Britain, on behalf of the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves and the Fauna Preservation Society.

Discussions showed that in much of Syria and Lebanon, for instance, annual grasses, which do nothing to prevent erosion, and thorny shrubs with tapering roots, which do little, have replaced perennial grasses and forests. The spreading roots of the perennials bind the soil together and build up humus beneath the surface, but the others have survived because they resist grazing by sheep and goats.

Forest protection existed in Roman times. It was mentioned that the Emperor Hadrian's regulations, carved in stone, protecting four kinds of tree, could still be seen. But demands for fuel have increased enormously. Mr. Y. Salti, from Jordan, said that he had seen good olive trees cut to provide vital needs. Under a new law in Jordan, when the great majority in a village voted against goats, only three tethered goats per human family were permitted. Enforcement was sometimes difficult, because the few who wanted to keep the goats were usually those who owned the rifles.

The conference recognized the spectacular success of forest conservation in Cyprus, achieved by control of goats and of charcoal burning, and by insisting that bakeries should be oil-fired. Everywhere a cheap oil stove was needed to save wood. It was suggested that it might even pay the oil companies to sell oil stoves at a loss—had not oil lamps once been distributed free in China? Some felt that the solar cooker, worked by the sun's rays, is the solution, if only it can be produced cheaply.

Elimination of fauna has accompanied destruction of flora. Professor Kosswig, from Turkey, told how, since the pelicans on Lake Marmara had been killed, there had been overpopulation of small carp with delayed development and failure to reach full size. As the rare monk seal still appears yearly on the Turkish coast, it was recommended that a questionnaire about it should be sent to appropriate schools in Turkey. Similar inquiries had previously given good results.

Egyptian scientists recommended protection of the Nile monitor and of the four large lizards of the genus *Uromastix*, the only herbivorous lizards. They insisted that nature reserves should contain as many habitats as possible, including ponds for the preservation of water insects. In considering education, stress was laid on the importance of the mosques. The fellaheen were very responsive and had a deep faith in their religious teachers.

Many mammals were recommended for protection, particularly the Arabian oryx in Irak and Saudi Arabia. The Cyprus mouflon, whose numbers have increased to about 300, was cited as an instance of successful protection.

During a visit to the best-known group of cedars, it appeared as if grazing in their vicinity had been stopped. There were, however, only a few signs of natural regeneration—prevented perhaps by human trampling. At Ryak the conference saw some of the research work of the Franco-Lebanese agricultural college and, on the last day, the work being done in fixation of the coastal sand dunes, by grasses backed by plantations of the umbrella pine, *Pinus pinea*.

A full report of the conference will be prepared by the Middle East Science Co-operation Office and suggestions for the implementation of the resolutions sent to the appropriate bodies.

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