



On Linga Holm

We managed to pen almost 90 per cent of the flock – over 700 animals – for shearing, and next day, when the sheared animals had been released, made a census of the whole island. The grand total came to 828 sheep, comprising 203 rams, 371 ewes and 254 lambs. The rams were running in large groups and included one especially impressive bunch of 38 animals.

This stocking rate is much higher than we had intended originally, and we marked about 350 animals to be culled in order to reduce the flock to a conjectured optimum of about 200 ewes plus rams and followers; this should allow adequate kelp for all the sheep so that none are forced back to a diet of grass. It was noticeable that the interior of the island had been grazed more heavily than in previous years. If the numbers are not controlled there is a danger that some strains or families within the flock will revert to subsisting on the herbage, although the existing flock of 800 sheep were obviously in good health. The criteria of selection for the breeding stock were teeth, horns, age, colour and freedom from defects. Preference was given to old ewes that were sound and in good condition. Colour was not a factor of high priority but we tried to maintain the breed's full range of colours – white, grey, grey-brown, black and moorit. Lawrence Alderson writes that as he left the island, 'a fresh westerly was throwing up a rich harvest of kelp on the falling tide, and the sheep thronging industriously on the rock shelves at the North Taing and the north-western corner of the island, where the most abundant seaweed lay, were positive proof of the success of the Trust's first major conservation project.'

Otter Havens

By the end of 1977 the two workers for the Otter Haven Project, Angela King and Angela Potter, had established sixteen havens, with the consent of the landowners, eight in Dorset (Rivers Frome and Piddle) and eight in Devon (Yeo, East Yeo, Tavy and Taw); they are monitoring them monthly in order to assess their effectiveness. Many landowners have shown great interest in the project, and offers of land for havens have come from all over the country. One useful opportunity for research on otter behaviour is on the River Piddle where the Water Authority is doing some major maintenance work and has agreed that the two Angelas (as they are, of course, known) should monitor the effects of this disturbance on the otters. They are also planning to discuss with drainage engineers in each water authority area the best ways to minimise disturbance to otters during such operations. The Otter Haven Project was launched by the Vincent Wildlife Trust, which is funding it, and FPS.