

# The Fauna Preservation Society

APRIL, 1961

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## EDITORIAL NOTES

**INTERNATIONAL.**—The Headquarters of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources is now in Switzerland. Address—Morges (Vaud), Switzerland. Mr. G. G. Watterson, who was Senior Forestry Officer in the Food and Agriculture Organization in Accra, has been appointed Secretary-General. He will be assisted by Mr. George Truchel, the Union's Scientific Officer.

**GREAT BRITAIN.**—*The Council for Nature* has opened a conference and holiday centre on the shores of Lake Coniston, in a house once the home of John Ruskin. After the requirements of groups of naturalists and individuals affiliated to the Council for Nature have been filled, accommodation at this centre is available to others interested in natural history. For further information write to: Mr. Stanley Jeeves, Resident Manager, Brantwood, Coniston, Lancashire.

**Toxic Chemicals.**—There is no longer doubt that agricultural chemicals are poisoning many wild birds and other animals. Heavy casualties are feared this spring, for the soil is waterlogged and seeds dressed with poison will be exposed longer than usual. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, 25 Eccleston Square, London, S.W. 1, requires information on any outbreaks of poisoning—the place, numbers and species killed, and, if possible, the name of the seed dressing used. The R.S.P.B. will also receive, for analysis, corpses of birds, pigeon-size or larger. Photographs of corpses, as found, are useful.

**THE GREAT INDIAN RHINOCEROS.**—It was not until Sunday, 26th February, that the Society learned of the proposed shooting in Nepal of a Great Indian Rhinoceros, an animal on the world list of species in danger of extinction. After consultation between the Officers of the Society, a cable was sent to our gracious Patron pointing out the rarity of the Great Indian Rhinoceros and asking that the Nepalese authorities should be urged not to allow any rhinoceroses to be shot during the royal visit.

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Professor J. G. Baer, President, IUCN, cabled to King Mahendra of Nepal to the same effect.

It is most unfortunate that so little time was available for our cables to reach Nepal and be considered, for a female rhinoceros was shot on Monday, 27th February. The young one accompanying its mother was allowed to escape.

On Friday, 3rd March, the following letter appeared in *The Times* :

SIR,

The report of the shooting of a Great Indian Rhinoceros in Nepal by the Foreign Secretary will cause dismay among all those interested in the preservation of rare animals. This rhinoceros now exists only in India, where about 400 still live under complete protection mostly in the Kaziranga Reserve, Assam, and in the Rapti valley, Nepal.

Its status in Nepal has been so uncertain that, in 1959, the Survival Service Commission of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, supported by the Fauna Preservation Society, the Bombay Natural History Society and interested Americans, sent Mr. E. P. Gee, an acknowledged expert from Assam, to make an investigation and to suggest measures necessary to preserve this rhinoceros. As a result of Mr. Gee's report, we believe that about 300 rhinoceroses still live in Nepal, and we know that its position there is insecure. The loss of a single animal is very regrettable, but even more important is the question of example.

The possibility also cannot be ignored that a catastrophe such as disease might reduce the population below likelihood of recovery, and the species is in fact fully entitled to the place it holds on the list of animals in danger of extermination throughout the world.

The report states that the shot rhinoceros was a female accompanied by her young one; if this is true, no further comment is necessary.

Yours faithfully,

C. L. BOYLE.

Secretary, The Fauna Preservation Society.

On 6th March, Professor Baer wrote to His Majesty The King of Nepal deploring the killing of a rhinoceros, drawing attention to Mr. E. P. Gee's report on the rhinoceros in Nepal and offering,

on behalf of the Union, the expert assistance of technical consultants in conservation.

**THE KERGUELEN ISLANDS.**—Press reports have stated that the French Government proposes to carry out hydrogen bomb tests in the Kerguelens, a remote group of islands in the south Indian Ocean. We are pleased to hear from Professor F. Bourlière, of Paris, that the plan has been given up, although a launching site for missiles will be built in the Kerguelens and will itself raise problems. Regulations to preserve the seals and penguin colonies are now being studied.

Many years ago the Kerguelen archipelago was declared a national park and fauna reserve. Any suggestion of the mass destruction of its wonderful fauna and special flora would have raised international protests.

**GOUGH ISLAND.**—The British Section of the International Council for Bird Preservation reports that the Administrator of Tristan da Cunha visited Gough Island in 1960. He has reported that all goats have been destroyed and that the fourteen sheep still remaining are confined to the area surrounding the weather station. This removes a threat to the preservation of one of the finest of island sanctuaries. An article on Gough Island appeared in *Oryx*, IV, 3, November, 1957.

**KENYA.**—The Society has given £500 to the “Water for wild animals” fund, which is being raised by Mr. Mervyn Cowie, Director of the Royal National Parks of Kenya. The object is a water development programme in the Tsavo Royal National Park, where there is enough vegetation to support a considerable amount of wild life, but no water for animals to drink.

**OPERATION NOAH.**—In July, 1960, as in July, 1959, Kariba lake ceased to rise and, for the time being, no more islands were inundated. Rescue operations stopped while some of the unit's staff, and for part of the time the launch *Erica* also, were engaged on a survey of possible game sanctuaries. Mr. F. I. Parnell, Director of the Game Department, Northern Rhodesia, has written to say that the value of *Erica* was clearly demonstrated when much of the rescue area was infested by massive growths of the water weed *Salvinia*. Without *Erica* rescue work in quite a large area would have been impossible.

An interesting ceremony took place on the 16th February, 1961. The American Consul, Mr. C. Pletcher, unveiled a plaque which has been posted in *Erica* in recognition of donations sent by the Defenders of Wild Life, Washington.

ALASKA.—We read in *National Parks Magazine*, published by the National Parks Association, Washington, of the establishment, of three new wild life ranges in Alaska. The largest is the Arctic National Wildlife Range of 14,000 sq. miles in the northeast corner of the State. Second the Kuskokwin comprises about 3,000 sq. miles in the deltas of the Kuskokwin and Yukon rivers in Western Alaska and may be the greatest breeding ground for waterfowl in North America. Third the Izemek of 649 sq. miles at the westerly end of the Alaska peninsula is a sanctuary for ducks, geese and shorebirds on migration and is also inhabited by brown bears and Stone's caribou, *Rangifer arcticus stonei*.

GUATEMALA.—We are pleased to hear from Dr. Jorge A. Ibarra director of the Natural History Museum of Guatemala, and president of the Natural History Society of Central America, that Lake Amatitlán was made a wild life sanctuary on 12th January, 1961. This is the second such sanctuary in Guatemala. Lake Atitlán, the first big wild fowl refuge in Central America, was proclaimed in 1959 especially to protect the Giant Grebe (*Podilymbus gigas*) found only in this area.

MESOPOTAMIAN FALLOW DEER (*Dama mesopotamica*).—This deer was once feared to be extinct but a few are now known still to exist in small patches of forest in south-west Iran. News has been received from Dr. Charles Reed, who was made several visits to the Middle East for the Chicago Oriental Institute, that a few of these deer are carefully preserved in an area of south-west Iran because of the known interest of the Shah's brother, Prince Ghulam Reza.

THE MANATEE.—The inquiry into the manatee which the Survival Service Commission is undertaking has brought much interesting information. It happens to coincide with a world-wide interest in this creature as a possible destroyer of unwanted vegetation in tropical rivers and lakes, especially of *Eichhornia crassipes* which has suddenly become a world-wide pest, making many waters practically impassable.

Mr. W. H. L. Allsopp, research fisheries officer in British Guiana, who has recently visited London, told us that manatees require a water temperature of not less than 65° F. and feed on almost any tropical water weed including *Eichhornia* and *Salvinia*.

Manatees are more widely spread in the rivers of British Guiana than had been supposed and where they have been introduced into canals, are clearing aquatic weeds so effectively that \$480 per mile is being saved. Government departments have so far used some seventy manatees for this purpose.

Thirteen others are in use by private industry and ninety more have been asked for. There are over 1,200 miles of canals in British Guiana and more manatees will be used if measures can be taken to prevent their escape or drowning, and if effective protective legislation is introduced.

The manatee's relative, the dugong, which like the manatee is good eating, seems to be in greater danger. It is a coastal species feeding on seaweeds, and its conservation is difficult.

ARABIAN ORYX.—Very bad news has reached the Society of an attack upon what we fear to be the last remaining population of the beautiful white *Oryx leucoryx*. A raiding party from Qatar on the Persian Gulf entered the Eastern Aden Protectorate with motor vehicles in January, 1961, and shot at least twenty-eight oryx.

An investigator found tracks of terrified oryx everywhere but hardly a living animal. Two oryx were eventually netted; one, a young male, had shot-gun wounds and died. The other, a female, possibly pregnant, is still alive at the time of writing.

The Society and the Survival Service Commission of IUCN is exploring the possibility of supporting an expedition to capture some surviving oryx in the hope that they may be taken to some reserve where they can breed in peace. This oryx, which inhabits only the deserts of Arabia, is on the world list of animals in danger of extermination.