

rape *O. reticulata*, which is too rare in Yorkshire to represent any threat to the innumerable thistles of that broad county – indeed one wonders why the parasite of such a common group of plants should be so rare. The three sedges are brown galingale *Cyperus fuscus*, which appears irregularly around muddy ponds in the south, starved wood-sedge *Carex depauperata*, which may still be hanging on not far from the World Wildlife Fund's new headquarters at Godalming, Surrey, and triangular club-rush *Scirpus triquetrus*, confined to the Tamar and one or two other muddy southern estuaries.

Of the remainder, the most notable are: adderstongue spearwort *Ranunculus ophioglossifolius*, a rare buttercup with only two sites, both in Gloucestershire, one of which qualifies as the smallest nature reserve for the *Guinness Book of Records*; alpine catchfly *Lychnis alpina*, with only two sites, one in the Lake District and the other on the high moors at the head of Glen Clova, Angus; field wormwood *Artemisia campestris*, one of the specialities of the East Anglian Breckland, around Thetford; downy wound-

wort *Stachys germanica*, which appears in most years on the limestone north of Oxford; least lettuce *Lactuca saligna*, with only one good colony, on a sea wall in Essex; and wood calamint *Calamintha sylvatica*, which for many years, since at least 29 August 1843 to be precise, has adorned a single bank in the Isle of Wight.

It is an offence to pick, uproot, destroy or sell any of the 62 plants now protected by the new Act, or even to attempt to do any of these things. It also remains an offence to uproot *any* plant without the permission of the landowner or occupier. To qualify for the new schedule a wild plant must be 'in danger of extinction or likely to become so unless conservation measures are taken'. This means that vulnerable as well as actually endangered plants can now be protected. And it is the duty of the Nature Conservancy Council to review the schedules at five-year intervals and recommend additions and subtractions. So for the first time Great Britain has a reasonably comprehensive measure for protecting rare plants.

Sperm Whales' Fate Postponed Again

Richard Fitter

At its annual meeting last July the International Whaling Commission deferred a decision on the sperm whale quota for the North Pacific to a special meeting in March this year in Brighton. This proved the most inconclusive meeting the IWC has ever held. Once more the decision was postponed, this time until next July. Seven days of deliberation by the Scientific Committee in Cambridge three weeks previously had produced, as so often before thanks to inadequate data and disputed computer models, an ambiguous choice of options. The IWC commissioners had to choose between a quota of 890 male sperm whales, a

nil quota, or putting it off again. They put it off again. The reasons for the scientific ambiguity are exceedingly complex, but there is no reason to suppose that they will be any less complex next July or that the recommendations will be any different. But it is always easier to do nothing than to do something. One may well wonder whether all this expenditure of scarce resources, scientific as well as financial, is justified. Technically the allocation of a quota would infringe the IWC's New Management Procedure (NMP), but in practice the quota of 890 would make little difference to the rate of species

Some of Britain's Newly Protected Plants



- 1 Whorled Solomon's seal
- 2 Lizard orchid
- 3 Wild gladiolus
- 4 Early spider orchid
- 5 Adderstongue spearwort
- 6 Alpine catchfly
- 7 Bedstraw broomrape

decline (this is one of the complexities!). Having already defied the NMP by allowing a quota for bow-heads in Alaska, the Commission would threaten the credibility of the NMP if it allowed another infraction for the sake of another small coastal whale industry, that of Japan. But if a zero quota is imposed, Japan can quite legally, under the Convention, refuse to adhere to it. That is why it was easier for the commissioners to do nothing this time.

As a small compensation for the

ridiculus mus produced by the main item on the agenda, delegates were able to hear statements from the United States that the number of bow-heads struck but not killed had been substantially reduced, and from Japan, Norway and South Korea justifying their refusal to abandon the cold harpoon (agreed last July) by their failure so far to come up with a satisfactory substitute. But Japan assures us that research to find a safe explosive harpoon continues vigorously.

Good News About Orang-Utans in Sarawak

Michael Kavanagh

Hopes that a viable population of orang-utans can be conserved in Malaysian Borneo have been given a big boost by the discovery that they are more widespread than had been expected. In August–November last year a research team, consisting of officers from the National Parks and Wildlife Office of the Sarawak Forest Department and five scientists sponsored by WWF Malaysia, surveyed the proposed Lanjak-Entimau Orang-Utan Sanctuary adjacent to the Indonesian frontier. Previous reports had led them to expect to find orangs in the southern part of the proposed sanctuary, where the terrain is most rugged and there has been least human activity, but the development of a novel survey technique showed that the apes inhabit the northern part as well.

Orangs build nests in trees both for sleeping in at night and also for day-time dozing. Sometimes a single ape will build several nests in one day. One of the forest guards discovered that many of these could be spotted from a low-flying helicopter. A systematic survey flight was organized with the aid of the Royal Malaysian Air Force and in one hour of flying, nearly a hundred were counted.

More down-to-earth reconnaissance

and census walks showed that the apes are illegally hunted but it was concluded that with adequate protection, the population would increase until it reached the carrying capacity of the forest. Tentative plans to translocate orangs to Lanjak-Entimau from doomed tracts of forest elsewhere in the state were abandoned. Although the numbers of animals that would be involved in such an exercise might be very small, the disruptive effect on the resident community might be very great.

Healthy populations of other animals found during the survey included Sarawak's acrobatic lesser ape, the grey gibbon, two langurs and two macaques. Borneo has eight hornbill species of which seven were recorded in the area. Happily, they included large numbers of the bird that is Sarawak's official state emblem, the rhinoceros hornbill *Buceros rhinoceros*, and also the very beautiful but threatened Bulwer's pheasant *Lophura bulweri*.

Although Lanjak-Entimau has suffered from some shifting cultivation in the past, and the local Iban people have been free to hunt there – as long as they did not touch any protected species – the survey confirmed that the proposed sanctuary will include some excellent hill forest with