

# ORyx

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## Notes and News

A bill for the conservation of seals for which the FPS has been working for some years, was introduced into the House of Lords by our Council member Lord Cranbrook on June 10th, and passed its second reading unopposed. The bill seeks to protect both grey and common seals in their breeding seasons (at present only the grey seal is protected), except under licence from the Secretary of State for specified reasons – for scientific purposes, to prevent damage to fisheries or

for management purposes, for example to control an excessive population. The Secretary of State is also empowered to give complete protection throughout the year. The size of the firearm permitted for killing seals is specified and fishermen would be permitted to shoot seals near their nets. Poisoning is prohibited. In introducing his bill Lord Cranbrook pointed out that about 75 per cent of the world population of the grey seal is found in British waters, but we have found that protection (under the Grey Seal Act, 1932) is not enough; we must conserve them, which means management and their use as a resource, for which the government would rely on the advice of NERC (Natural Environment Research Council). The aim of the bill was 'to secure around our coasts, for the enjoyment of all, the highest population of seals that it is possible to have without causing damage to fisheries'. The difficulty of course arises in defining how much damage is damage. To a fisherman and a conservationist it can mean different things.

Four years ago Ernest Neal reported that badgers were decreasing in Britain, in some areas seriously; the reasons, he suggested, were death on the roads, electrification of the railways, effective keeping and destruction of habitat (ORyx, August 1965). The likelihood of a fifth factor – death by organochlorine poisoning from seed dressings, is suggested by D. J. Jefferies of the Nature Conservancy's Monks Wood Experimental Station in a paper published in the April *Journal of Zoology*. Between 1964 and 1968 the corpses of 17 badgers found dead (or, in one case, dying) were examined; five had certainly been killed on the road; of the remaining 12 six certainly and six

### Badgers Poisoned in Britain

probably, died from dieldrin poisoning; some had dieldrin residues in the liver as high as 46 parts per million. The evidence suggests that the poisoning was the result of spring-sown corn seed dressed with pesticides in defiance of the voluntary ban imposed in 1961. It was noticeable that all the poisoned badgers were found in March and April, the time of spring cereal sowing, while those killed on the roads were spread over the year. The author points out that the number killed by poisoning could well be much higher than appears: badgers killed on the roads are very obvious and have to be removed, while poisoned badgers may die in thickets or even in the set below ground. Even more disturbing is the fact that many surviving badgers must be sub-lethally poisoned, a condition that is known to reduce breeding success in other animals. Moreover, the months April/May, when the poisoning takes place, are times when the cubs are being born or are still dependent on the parents.

Believed extinct in the 1950s, rediscovered by Starker Leopold in small numbers in the Sierra del Nido, and locally abundant in 1957–60, the Mexican grizzly bear *Ursus nelsoni* is once again feared to be extinct.

#### **Thin Hope for Mexican Grizzly**

'We reluctantly conclude that it was exterminated early in the 1960s' is Dr Carl Koford's verdict as a result of a survey supported by the Conservation Foundation and WWF, although 'there is still a thin hope that a few grizzlies survive and confine their wanderings to some remote canyon seldom entered by man'. The last reported sighting was in 1962. But the bears had attacked cattle, possibly as a result of the prolonged drought that diminished food as well as water supplies; this may have caused 'a concentration of the remaining population which then suffered a clean sweep'. In 1959 Starker Leopold estimated their numbers at 30–40. 'The few remaining grizzlies are endangered by overhunting', he wrote, and unless some rapid and decisive action is taken by the government to protect these majestic animals there will soon be no more'. His prophecy appears to have been fulfilled.

An urgent plea for the Shimba Hills in Kenya to be declared a national park, to protect especially Kenya's last herds of sable antelope, is made by Dr P. E. Glover in his report following his four-months' survey of the

#### **The Sable in the Shimba Hills**

area last year. The hills are scheduled to become a national park in the Kenya Government Development Plan 1966–70; last year they were declared a national reserve. But the sable are dwindling, and poaching from the villages at the foot of the escarpment is rife and impossible to control. The villagers deliberately burn the grass to attract the animals, and one of Dr Glover's recommendations is that grass fires should be so managed in the reserve as to keep the sable on top of the plateau and away from the poachers. Of the other large mammals in the reserve only elephants are numerous, and he recommends the introduction of black and white rhinos, giraffe, zebra, kongoni, impala and eland as suitable and beneficial for the habitat

and increasing its interest for tourists. The Ford Foundation has given £10,000 for a two-year ecological study of the Shimba Hills, the African Wildlife Leadership Foundation £10,000 to build a wildlife education centre and the Elsa Wild Animal Appeal £3600 for equipment.

In Papua all saltwater crocodiles *Crocodylus porosus* and most freshwater ones *C. novaeguineae* of breeding size are now protected by an amendment to the Crocodile Ordinance which came into force in January this year. It is now illegal to buy or sell skins larger than 20 inches in belly measurement. Offenders are liable to a fine of \$400 (about £200 sterling), which is expected to be an effective deterrent in a country where an established native coffee garden brings in an annual income of only \$100. Crocodile numbers had decreased rapidly in Papua due, as in other parts of the world, to excessive hunting for their skins. The proposal to protect the breeding stock by fixing an upper size limit of 20 inches was one of several recommendations made by Dr H. R. Bustard in a detailed report on the crocodile skin industry in Papua-New Guinea in 1967, extracts from which will appear in a forthcoming issue of ORYX. The size limits had to apply to both species owing to the difficulty of distinguishing between them when shooting at night. A 20-inch skin represents a crocodile of about 8 feet. The 20-inch regulation will protect the whole breeding stock of the saltwater crocodile, since this species does not start breeding until it is 8 to 9 feet long, and most of the freshwater crocodile breeding stock, although this species does start breeding before reaching 8 feet. Moreover, the vast majority of the eggs will be safeguarded since large crocodiles lay many more eggs than smaller ones. An extensive programme explaining the biological importance of size limits in conserving and restoring the once large crocodile populations is currently under way in Papua and also in New Guinea, to which it is hoped similar legislation will be restored.

### Protection for Papua's Crocodiles

The twenty-first meeting of the International Whaling Commission, held in London from June 23–27, was one of the more successful of the series. Proceedings began with the announcement that since the previous meeting an agreement had been arrived at to restrict the catches of whales in the North Pacific. In the Antarctic in the 1968–69 whaling season three Japanese and three Russian expeditions caught a total of 3015 fin whales (compared with 2155 the previous season), 5770 sei whales (10,357) and 2682 sperm whales (2568). This fell short of the quota by a margin of 732 blue whale units. (One blue whale unit equals two fin, or two-and-a-half humpback or six sei whales.) For the 1969–70 Antarctic whaling season the BWU quota was fixed at 2700, somewhat higher than scientific conservationists might have hoped, and also higher than was actually achieved in the Antarctic last season. In the North Pacific the 1970 quotas were set at 10 per cent less than those for 1969: 1332 fin and 4924 sei whales. In addition, a quota was fixed

### Some Hope for the Whales

for sperm whales in the Pacific for the first time: 11,273, a reduction of 10 per cent on the 1968 catch. Two other important decisions were to renew the total protection of the blue and humpback whales in the North Atlantic for a further three years – there is some evidence that protection is beginning to yield results in a revival of humpback numbers – and to continue similarly the Antarctic Sanctuary area. The FPS welcomes these important decisions for the conservation of whale stocks, but, looking to the future, hopes that next year the Commission will be able to take up two points put forward this year by the United States delegation: the need sooner rather than later to adopt separate quotas for the fin and sei whales in the Antarctic, and the separation for quota purposes of the very similar sei and Bryde's whales, of which the former is world wide, and the latter is found exclusively in warm seas. Whale conservation will not be on a really scientific and satisfactory basis until all geographically distinct stocks and populations have their own separate quotas.

A situation in cocoa plantations in Sabah, Malaysia, in which pesticides created more pests than they controlled, is described by Dr Gordon R. Conway, entomologist at the Sabah Agricultural Research Centre, in a paper published in *Natural History*. Cocoa was first

**Predators  
Better than  
Pesticides**

planted commercially in Sabah in 1956 in newly cleared forest land. In 1959 the first serious insect-pests appeared. These were borers, and they were sprayed with high concentrations of DDT and dieldrin – with only partial success. Several other pests now appeared and were also sprayed with chemicals, including dieldrin, endrin, DDT, BHC and lead arsenate, so that in 1960–61 'the cocoa received a very heavy insecticide coverage'. But the situation became worse. In 1961 the borers increased and three new pests appeared: two leaf-eating caterpillars (a looper and a nettle caterpillar) and a plant hopper, all of which became extremely abundant – the hoppers rose in clouds when the branches were disturbed – and in July a fourth pest arrived in several species of bagworms which proved the worst of all: they were highly resistant to insecticides and spread rapidly. The situation was 'extremely serious'. At the end of 1961 it was decided to stop all spraying. Almost immediately a parasite appeared that attacked the looper; by May 1962 numbers had dropped to a level where damage was negligible, and the hopper was also decreasing rapidly. In August a decrease in the borers was noticeable, parasitised by braconid wasps, and by the end of the year borer damage was infrequent. A short period of selective hand spraying, combined with the removal of some host trees (surviving from the original forest), successfully dealt with one borer and also with bagworms. Thus by the end of the year most of the pests which had been deadly important in the two previous years had succumbed to either natural control by predators or selective artificial control. By 1963 even the bagworms were succumbing to natural predators (parasitic tachinid flies) and spraying was no longer necessary. Even more important, five years after the ending of the spraying none of the pests had built up again.

A gift of £78,000 for a two-year research programme on the black lechwe, Zambia's endangered endemic antelope, has been made by the Anglo-American Mining Corporation. This is very welcome indeed for the black lechwe situation is serious. Nearly two years ago, in December 1967, we reported in *ORYX* on their plight – with numbers down from a million at the turn of the century to about 8000 then (reputed to be 6000 now), a pitiful number for the huge

**Money to  
Help the  
Black Lechwe**

area of the Bangweulu swamps; with so few animals to graze them the swamps are wasted, and the lechwe are specially adapted for such grazing. Last year the black lechwe was added to IUCN's *Red Book* of endangered species. Poaching has been a major factor, and this grant will enable 'strong protective measures' to be taken at the same time as research is started to get the basic information on which conservation and management plans can be based. Experiments are also being made in 'farming' black lechwe, and if the herds could be built up in the swamps there is clearly scope for large-scale cropping for meat; this of course would be controlled cropping done scientifically, not the haphazard cropping that the poachers do, which leaves the herds unbalanced, e.g. with a preponderance of males. The Department of Wildlife and Fisheries estimates that the total weight of edible wildlife in Zambia is roughly equal to that of domestic animals; in other words the worst that neglect, poaching and settlement has done to the wildlife has only reduced it to the productivity level of the best that the cattle experts can do. What might not positive management of the wildlife be able to achieve?

The wild elephants in Ceylon number at least 2500 animals, is Dr Fred Kurt's estimate at the end of the Smithsonian/WWF survey in which he took part and described in *ORYX* in September 1968. (There are also 500 tamed elephants.) But most of the wild animals are in

**Buffaloes the  
Key to  
the Elephants**

areas that will soon be cleared for cultivation or in reserves whose future is uncertain, and despite complete protection and all the efforts of the overworked and understaffed Wildlife Department, many elephants are killed by crop-owners every year. Such is the pressure of the cultivation that in the near future the elephants will be entirely restricted to the sanctuaries, so it was important to discover whether these are adequate for both the resident elephants and those that will be driven in from outside. The answer appears to be no, unless drastic steps are taken to deal with the buffalo problem, and last year the Wildlife Department started removing some of the buffaloes in Yala. In this park particularly buffaloes have greatly increased, partly because they have a high reproductive rate and calf mortality is low, but partly also as a result of domestic buffaloes entering the park and becoming feral. These used to be kept down by hunting – for meat or for capture as working animals – but since 1937, when Yala became a national park, this has stopped and numbers are now very high. They graze the grass so short that the elephants cannot get at it with their trunks and resort to scraping it with their

feet. This leaves the soil bare and the result is all too often erosion. The buffaloes also occupy the waterholes for long periods of the day, dirtying the water with their dung, and the investigators found that the movement of the elephant herds out of the park could be correlated with the concentration of the buffaloes at the waterholes in the dry season.

'I do not think that in the whole of Simien there are more than 150 walia ibex in existence', says Dr Bernhard Nievergelt in a report to WWF at the end of his year's study of this endemic Ethiopian animal.

**Only a Park  
Can Save  
Walia Ibex**

In a letter to the Emperor before he left, Dr Nievergelt warned that, without some effective protection, this ibex is likely to become extinct in the near future, for not only are they indiscriminately shot by local people, but their habitat is being cut up and eaten into by small pockets of cultivation and development. Most depressing was the government officials' general lack of interest in preserving the area, while John Blower, wildlife adviser to the government, who has recently walked all round the boundaries of the proposed Simien national park, describes the forest destruction as 'horrifying'. The national park has got no further than paper plans; Dr Nievergelt is emphatic that it is the only hope for saving the walia and would at the same time prove a great tourist attraction and a sound investment. Dr Nievergelt's conclusions confirm what Leslie Brown and others have said before. In a paper on the walia in the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society's journal, appropriately called *Walia*, Leslie Brown, who with Ian Grimwood proposed the national park after their visit to Simien in 1965, says that there should be no conflict between agriculture and wildlife in the walia's precipitous mountain habitat, which is entirely unsuited to pasturage or cultivation. He suggests that, with complete protection – that is, with the law enforced in a well-run national park – the walia could more than double their numbers in a decade. But if this is not done the only hope is that even today it may well be beyond the wit of man to exterminate the species in such precipitous terrain. The Emperor is known to be sympathetic. Perhaps this latest urgent plea to declare the national park will bring the desired result.

The FPS Council has voted a sum of £495 from the FPS/WWF Revolving Fund to support a project of the Italian National Appeal of the WWF for the protection of the much depleted brown bear in Italy. The money

**FPS Helps  
Italy's  
Brown Bears**

will be used to make a survey of the bear populations with recommendations for their protection, and to provide food for the bears when necessary in the Abruzzo National Park where about 60 bears survive, and in the Alps. Because of the scarcity of natural food bears are forced to go long distances in search of it; they sometimes raid crops and beehives, and occasionally kill sheep. In the hope of persuading people to tolerate the bears, or at least overcome their aversion to them, the Italian WWF has taken on the task of com-



#### MY FRIEND THE BEAR

The car sticker that is part of the Italian WWF's campaign to 'improve the image' of the brown bear.

pensating inhabitants of the Abruzzo Park for damage done by bears. The sum required to do this is expected to be about £2000 a year. The Italian WWF has also been taking steps to stop the German dealers who every year raid bird of prey nests, especially peregrine falcons, in Italy. This year two dealers were caught stealing peregrine nestlings, which were confiscated and returned to the nests. The next morning at dawn the same dealers were caught again (although they had been warned by the police to leave the country) trying to steal the same nestlings.

A photograph in the *Observer* of dead jaguars and pumas hanging up outside a German restaurant prior to being served to the customers must have shocked many FPS members. The matter was taken up in a big way

#### Restaurant Serves Jaguar Steaks

by Dr Grzimek, Director of Frankfurt Zoo, and Dr Faust, his Assistant Director, who engineered a large press and television campaign against the restaurant owner (who at first threatened legal action, but decided not to go through with it) and discovered the animal dealer who was supplying the meat. The owner agreed to discontinue the jaguar and promised to do the same for pumas. The fuss should have been enough to deter other restaurant owners. Now Dr Grzimek is investigating the source of preserved tiger meat, processed in the USA, which is being offered in West German provision stores. Tigers are in an even more perilous position in the wild than pumas and jaguars.

Six marine reserves and three marine parks are recommended for Tanzania's 500-mile-long coast where destruction is going on at a rapid rate among the coral reefs due to over-fishing, dynamiting (of both fish and

#### Tree Felling Can Destroy Coral Reefs

coral), shell and coral collecting, trampling and silting. The recommendations are made in a report by Carleton Ray, *Marine Parks for Tanzania*, published by the Conservation Foundation, as a result of a survey made at the request of the Tanzanian national park trustees. This imaginative document, while concerning itself particularly with the problems of Tanzania, also sets out principles and arguments that apply in many parts of the world. The damage done to the coral reefs by silting is an interesting example of this. Off Tanzania the 100-fathom line is close inshore and the coral reefs are in a narrow strip also close in. If deforestation even well inland leads to

erosion, as it usually does, this may mean the silting up of the river mouths which can seriously damage and destroy the coral reefs. Research, Dr Ray emphasises, is vital; our ignorance is immense – the complete life history of not one East African marine fish is known – and he rightly insists that, from the beginning, the planning and development of tourist facilities, for which there is immense scope, must be co-ordinated with conservation of the habitat and the wildlife, with precise boundaries delineated for particular uses – fishing, diving, goggling, research, complete sanctuaries, and so on. ‘The sea is limitless’, is a constant cry. It is not, says Dr Ray. ‘Already many species are almost gone and many inshore environments are overfished or filled, or lie stagnant, polluted and barren.’ This is a senseless loss of productivity, and to recover it, as well as for aesthetic, scientific and recreational reasons, marine parks are the answer.

Quote from the *Guardian*, March 26th: ‘Geoffrey Rippon, Ted Heath’s rising shadow Defence Minister, was cantering through party policy . . . and came at length to Aldabra. Britain, he said, had finally found a staging post in the Indian Ocean, when presto, “with the aid of Soviet funds all the wildlife conservationists came out and said that the British would kill the turtles”.’ Which should give conservationists to think in view of the fact that Mr Rippon may well be the minister in charge in a few years’ time and his party has promised to revive the British presence east of Suez; Aldabra might again be required for defence reasons. The point is hardly affected by the fact that, when challenged by the reporter to produce evidence for the allegation, Mr Rippon replied, ‘I withdraw it. I didn’t know there were any Press present’. The Royal Society has announced that it intends to build a small research station on Aldabra this year, thanks to a capital grant of £26,000 from a parliamentary grant-in-aid. For the past 18 months scientists sent out by the Society have been working on this Indian Ocean atoll.

The American journal *Natural History* quotes this interesting story related by Gordon Harrison, Programme Officer of the Ford Foundation; he in turn was quoting a biologist who had been a pest control officer in Borneo:

**That Killed  
the Cat**

**That Ate . . .**

A WHO mosquito control programme in Borneo involved spraying large quantities of DDT, which effectively got rid of the mosquitos. Soon after, however, the native houses began falling down, and it was found that they were being eaten by a caterpillar, which had not absorbed the DDT; but the wasps which normally preyed on it had been killed in large numbers. At the same time DDT was sprayed in the houses against house flies; this time the geckos which inhabited the houses ate the poisoned flies and died; the cats then ate the geckos and also died, and then rats invaded the houses. As they brought a potential risk of plague fresh cats had to be parachuted into the area to try to restore the balance.