

EDITORIAL

In contrast to most groups of plants, lichens have suffered neglect in Great Britain for several decades. Few botanists in this country have studied them in any detail; under the pressure of other interests most workers have had to be content, when describing vegetation in the field, to list a few of the more conspicuous lichens or to refer somewhat bleakly to "Cladonia spp." Some have had the assistance of such experienced lichenologists as A.E. Wade or F.A. Sowter, now helping this Society, or W. Watson, who is living in retirement. Yet for its area Britain is exceptionally rich in species, and an account of the vegetation, especially of mountains, moorland, or coast, is apt to seem incomplete if it omits them.

In order to encourage the study and conservation of these plants the British Lichen Society was founded on February 1, 1958, by the unanimous vote of 24 people who met at the British Museum (Natural History), London, by invitation of T.D.V. Swinscow. At that meeting the officers, council members, and referees whose names appear opposite were elected, and the meeting also adopted a set of rules for the Society. The present number of members listed on a later page is 74, so that the Society has a flourishing start. At the foundation meeting the decision was also taken to publish a periodical, to be called "The Lichenologist".

In introducing the first issue of the periodical, it may be appropriate to comment on the Society's two main purposes as set out in the rules. In fulfilling the first of them - to encourage the study of lichens - "The Lichenologist" has a useful part to play. Owing to the fact that modern literature on the taxonomy of species occurring in Britain is scanty, several of the articles that follow are written to help botanists determine specimens they find here. It is hoped to publish in subsequent issues further articles of the same nature. Thus "The Lichenologist" will for a time include more material of an avowedly instructive intention than is customary in botanical periodicals to-day. This is a reflection of the state of lichenology in this country, as well as an attempt to remedy its defects. Reports on the distribution and ecology of lichens in Britain, about which relatively little is known at present, will also be welcome; this is an aspect of lichenology to which amateurs in particular can readily contribute by recording exact observations.

The second main purpose of the Society is to encourage the conservation of lichens, and it is clearly important that the first aim, the study of them, should not conflict with this. The danger of excessive collecting is worth bearing in mind, for lichens grow so slowly that their extension rarely exceeds a few millimetres a year. To uproot a 20-year-old shrub from the hedgerow is an obvious act of vandalism, the more discreditable if it is a rare species. By the same criteria the heedless collecting of a lichen stands condemned.