

## FPS—75 YEARS

In December this year FPS, founded in 1903, celebrates its 75th birthday. This will be marked by the publication of a small book describing the part played by FPS in wildlife conservation, at home and overseas, since 1903, written by the Hon. Secretary, Richard Fitter, illustrated by the Chairman, Sir Peter Scott, and published by Collins. Its title, *The Penitent Butchers*, was the nickname given to the founders of the Society, and which they repudiated in a pained note in the 1908 issue of the *Journal*, deploring the idea that 'we are men who, having . . . taken their fill of big-game slaughter . . . being smitten with remorse . . . think to condone our earlier bloodthirstiness'. Other events celebrating the occasion include an enlarged issue of *Oryx*, an exhibition in the London Zoo, and special visits to six other zoos and wildlife collections: Edinburgh, Mole Hall, Great Witchingham, Howletts, Slimbridge and Marwell. Details are on page 288.

## Another Disastrous Whaling Decision

*Richard Fitter*

The special meeting of the International Whaling Commission in Tokyo last December produced a *débâcle* for the cause of whale conservation. At the previous meeting at Canberra, in June last year, the quotas for North Pacific sperm whales were fixed at 700 females and nil males; at Tokyo these were raised to 5105 males and 1339 females, a total of 6444, or some nine times the previous quota. How did the IWC's Scientific Committee come to this extraordinary conclusion?

Apparently it was the result of a paper presented by a Japanese scientist, based on an analysis of the log-books of Japanese whalers in the North Pacific during 1958–65. This affected one particular parameter out of many used to build up the highly artificial calculation of North Pacific sperm whale stocks. Hitherto this parameter, relating to the efficiency of Asdic in improving the sperm whale catch per unit time, had been based on similar data for the southern oceans. The new paper reduced this particular parameter from a value around 100 to one around 5, and the rest followed automatically by applying the formula of the new management plan agreed two years ago.

Three questions may reasonably be asked: (1) Why had the Scientific Committee relied for so long on processed data from the southern oceans, when raw data for the North Pacific was in fact available? (2) Is its judgment in other matters equally questionable? (3) If a change in one parameter, using data which have been lying unused for many years, can result in multiplying one quota by nine, what reliance is to be placed on all the other quotas, fixed in the same seemingly haphazard way? This suggests that the new management procedure adopted two years ago is proving unsatisfactory. The changes that occur when a threshold is crossed are too great and too sudden.

Nothing has highlighted the unsatisfactory nature of the data used by the Scientific Committee more than this decision. It is essential that at future meetings sufficient independent scientists are present for the unsound practices of the Scientific Committee to be properly challenged. It is accepted that

quotas have to be fixed on the basis of inadequate data, but this is a reason for being cautious and conservative, not for consistently fixing them too high, as has been done, so that stock after stock has to be withdrawn from exploitation. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and the headlong fall of the stocks of the great whales is proof that this pudding has been overcooked.

The only achievement of the Tokyo special meeting was to curb slightly the excessive demands of the United States on behalf of its Inuit (Eskimo) citizens to be allowed to overexploit the Bering Sea stock of bowhead whales, probably the world's rarest great whale apart from the almost extinct North Atlantic right whale. The numbers being talked about were trivial, but still excessive when the putatively correct quota, as recommended at Canberra, was nil. In the event a catch of 12 landed or 18 struck whales was agreed to, approximately half of what the US had asked for. One problem is the inefficiency of Inuit whaling, for more whales are struck than landed. Regrettably the US has shown that when the chips are down it is little better than Japan or Russia. By persuading the main Commission to overrule a decision of the Scientific Committee that was agreed to be soundly based, the US jeopardised the whole future of whale conservation. Apparently nobody can accept that, if an endangered stock is to survive, let alone increase, none at all must be harvested. Certainly there were intense domestic political pressures in the US, but what good can it do the Inuit to drive a seriously endangered whale still nearer to extinction? Their cultural heritage will soon be gone for ever.

## Successful Start for the Seaweed Eaters

*Peter Jewell*

The Orkney sheep are a rare breed of unimproved island livestock that have caused much concern to conservationists. Their stronghold is the island of North Ronaldsay, where they have gained renown by subsisting almost exclusively on seaweed. The islanders protect them and they form an integral part of the local economy. But to retain the whole population on one island was not sound conservation policy, and in 1971, the Fauna Preservation Society decided to back the search for an island that would support a second and independent flock. In 1973 an organisation to promote the preservation of rare domestic animal breeds was launched as the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST), which took on the responsibility for the Orkney project (see *Oryx*, XII: 516, Nov. 1974). FPS sends an observer to the Council. In 1974 the Trust was able to buy the island of Linga Holm, near Stronsay, and also a flock of 178 sheep from North Ronaldsay to put on it. That autumn this foundation flock, comprising 7 rams, 114 ewes and 57 lambs, was released on the island. They have been permitted to reproduce and multiply without hindrance or artificial selection, and the flock has run as a semi-feral, random-breeding unit.

In 1977 a working party, of which I was a member, visited the island to shear, dip and cull the sheep, and took the opportunity to count and assess the status of the flock. A full account of our activities by Lawrence Alderson, the Technical Consultant to the RBST, appeared in the Trust's journal *Ark* (September 1977, IV: 198–301).