

Boycotts

Your thoughtful Editorial on 'boycotts' (July 1984) was timely. I wish to pick up your point that a fundamental problem with them is 'that they rarely strike at the root of the problem'. It is obvious that this is so in the case to which the Editorial was mainly directed—saving rain forest. But where the problem is that a government, an organisation or an enterprise is seeking short-term economic gain or other immediate objective (such as a complacent electorate) that is contrary to the long-term needs of conservation, rational management or ethical progress, a well-planned and focussed boycott can be effective. Thus an array of industries aggressively pursuing short-term gain, and a government that is backing them, may respond best to actions that also affect such gains. That is why the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) mounted a boycott of Canadian fisheries products, with considerable success, in protest against the continuation of the commercial killing of seals when the government agency responsible for sealing and fishing refused to give any attention to widespread doubts both about the management of this activity and its humaneness.

The shame is that organisations whose members are concerned about the future of our planet and our species are with increasing frequency finding that boycotts may be their only remaining means of action. They recognise that innocents will be hurt by them; they also see that there are both predictable and unpredictable side-effects of all our actions, and our inactions.

The commonest cause of the prolonged frustration that leads to boycotts is the immense and unyielding power of the global market. Jack Westoby's observation, which you quote, is most appropriate if it is understood to blame both those governments that permit the multinationals and other enterprises to operate in destructive ways within their countries and those that permit and facilitate such operations, under their jurisdictions, within other countries or in the commons, such as the ocean. This is why, although attention is now focussed with respect to whaling on Norway, eventually the central target for boycotts and other citizens' actions will be Japan. The Japanese whaling/fishing/food industry, helped and

protected by the Japan Fisheries Agency, with the complicity of other agencies of government, has financed and facilitated outlaw whaling, evasion of International Whaling Commission regulations, and bribery of weak governments.

Japan has announced that it will continue commercial whaling even after the moratorium is in effect, from 1986, and its industry has also started to catch sperm whales despite the fact that quotas for this species are already all set to zero. Years of strenuous efforts to persuade a change in behaviour, to exert legitimate pressures from other governments, to offer compromises such as the current three-year delay in the implementation of the moratorium have been to little avail. Since Japan controls virtually the entire world market in whale products it is practically certain that citizens' action through the withholding of their purchasing powers will intensify in the coming 12 months. There will be no lack of people now looking for the vulnerable points in the Japanese external economy, to be needled until that Government, and the industries it is supporting, are made to understand that people everywhere really do care about wildlife trade in general and whales in particular.

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What can we do?

'“The elderly batchelors in Rome” are nearly as great a menace to the world as nuclear warfare.’ There lies much truth. The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) is the core organisation working for population limitation (and freedom for women in reproduction).

Most of the rest of our problems stem from this: it is our own excessive numbers and use of resources which inhibit any real rise in the quality of life, except for the fortunate minority in some western lands.

Our own species squeezes out animals and plants, hence FFPS, WWF and IUCN etc. Our own species causes the deforestation, the over-fishing, the erosion, the probable greenhouse effect and many other forms of pollution. Our

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increasing numbers and technical advance produce much of the unemployment. To increase quality of life the individual in effect occupies more space and uses more finite resources and so compounds the population pressure. Increased numbers may well have repercussions in excessive aggression between individuals and between nations.

We all work away in separate pressure groups, following our personal special interests, trying to relieve the situation.

Should we seek greater effectiveness by any organisational expedients? Education in these matters is of course essential but the time factor is so long in comparison with the rapidity of population increase.

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Hermit ibis in Turkey

During a visit to Turkey (mainly in pursuit of orchids) in May 1983, we made a pilgrimage to the hermit ibis *Geronticus eremita* at Bireçik. We were so impressed with what we found, and the most recent report that I remember in *Oryx* was so gloomy, that I thought that you might be interested, even though Bireçik is so easy of access that I expect it is often visited now.

The whole area of the nesting cliff is securely fenced and there is an obviously very keen Turkish warden/guardian. We counted 44 adult birds, including those in a completely enclosed 'aviary', but the real figure could be higher as there was a succession of birds flying to and from the colony. As the warden spoke no English, most of our questions had to go unanswered, but we gained the impression that the purpose of the 'aviary' was to hold back a number of the birds from migration. I did not count the young, but on 25 May there were birds that could not have been far from flying as well as nests that still contained eggs.

At least half the nests were on wooden shelves erected against the cliff face, and the birds appeared happy on these. Some were covered with netting; as far as I could see the birds could

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get out at the sides, and judging by the number of rocks lying on top of the netting this is probably for protection from natural rock-fall. Judging from a quick visit it does look as though the colony is in good heart and has recovered from its 'low' of some years ago.

In spite of ever more intensive agriculture there is a wealth of natural history interest in Turkey, and still surprisingly little known. Much more work is still required on the distribution map for birds. And there are still new orchids to be found, at least at subspecific level. I was checking up on a probably new taxon I found in 1976, and found an additional one this time. The big development since our last long journey there in 1976 is the rapid and extensive reforestation. Somebody in the Government must have this very much at heart. And in some areas there are nesting boxes by the hundred. As far as we could ascertain this has been organised by the Government, not by a voluntary body. I should so much like to know more about this.

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In June 1978 *Oryx* (XIV, 3; 210) it was reported that the number of hermit ibis in the colony near Bireçik had fallen to 34, from 1300 in 1953. The species is endangered and there is only one breeding colony in Turkey and 15 more scattered in Morocco.

Editor

Visiting Taman Negara

I have recently spent two weeks in Taman Negara in Malaysia. It is a really superb area, not least because entry is only via a two-and-a-half-hour river trip. There are several trails and hides, although some trails are poorly maintained and time and elephants succeed in blocking them. Rubbish control is poor, unfortunately. Opportunities for seeing birds and mammals, however, are excellent.

It is best to spend at least seven days in the Park to allow for at least two or three days spent away from Park Headquarters. A permit costs M\$1.00

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