

ORYX

Vol. X No. 1

May 1969

Notes and News

The Mammal Society's interim report on its otter survey, made at the request of the FPS and the Council for Nature shows, as was feared, that there has been a serious decrease in otters in much of southern and eastern England. The report is published in full in this issue of ORYX (p. 16). As a result of the findings the Masters of Otter Hounds Association has announced restrictions on hunting: for three seasons there will be no hunting at all in the East Riding and on north Humberside; in

Action on Otters

Lincolnshire and south-east England no kills (except of sick or injured otters) will be made, and 15 rivers will not be hunted at all. The FPS and the World Wildlife Fund (British National Appeal) have stated that this period of curtailed hunting should be used for further research, and particularly to settle certain contentious claims, such as that otter hunting helps to conserve otters by preventing indiscriminate killing. If this claim is true the cessation of hunting could lead to a further decrease in otters; populations should therefore be monitored in areas where there is no hunting. On the practical side they suggest the creation of otter reserves on certain rivers; determined efforts to eliminate river pollution; legal protection for otters; further curtailment of hunting by agreement; curtailment of fashion use of skins; and educating young people to understand the otter's role as a predator. The Mammal Society proposes that a closer study of the causes of otter decline should be made and also recommends another survey in three to five years' time.

Progress is being made on the vicuña front at last. This attractive llama-like animal of the high mountains, now almost confined to Peru, is threatened largely by the illegal trade in its wool, all of which comes from poached animals smuggled into Bolivia and exported mainly to Britain and the USA, where it fetches enormously high prices. Last December, as announced in ORYX, Peru and Bolivia signed an agreement prohibiting all hunting and all trading in

Vicuña Wool Ban in Sight

vicuña, and the import and export of wool and skins for ten years, and the Peruvian government is believed to be about to promulgate a decree giving effect to the ban. Once this has been done there are strong hopes

that the British government, as the FPS and other bodies have been urging for some time, will take the necessary steps to ban the imports of all vicuña products. In the USA the Lacey Act already prohibits all imports of products illegally exported and this will automatically apply once the Peruvian law is passed.

'The world situation for the great marine turtles is tragic', are the opening words of a statement by specialists on sea turtles meeting at IUCN headquarters in Switzerland in March. The meeting was called by IUCN

**Programme
for
Sea Turtles**

and sponsored by WWF. Seven points for an urgent action programme to save the world's seven species of sea turtle were agreed: more incubation and hatching programmes; a study and analysis of turtle exploitation outside the breeding areas, which would give a basis for a plan to regulate commercial operations (soup, oil, meat, etc); an information programme to educate the public both in the countries where the turtles are exploited and where the products are consumed; more beach surveys where necessary; the establishment of special sanctuaries scientifically managed; the appointment of a full-time officer to work with the turtle group of SSC (Survival Service Commission of IUCN); and further specialists' meetings with commercial and other relevant interests participating. We shall publish an account of the turtle situation and the meeting by Tom Harrisson, who attended, in the next issue of ORYX.

The seladang, the wild cattle also called the Malayan gaur, is declining fast in Malaya. An estimated 706 animals in the peninsula in 1963 is believed to have shrunk to less than half (346) by 1968 – and that may be

**Malayan
Animals
in Danger**

optimistic – according to W. E. Stevens in a survey of three rare Malayan mammals (Sumatran rhino and elephant are the other two) published in the *Malayan Nature Journal* for December 1968. Moreover, two of the surviving seladang herds are threatened by two dams now being built in Perak and Kedah; 91 animals in Perak will lose their pasture and the mineral springs they use as salt licks when the flood plain is inundated. The Game Department has made new habitats for the herds in the national park and the Kerau reserve, and the only hope for their future seems to be in nature reserves, unless, as Dr Stevens suggests, seladang could be domesticated for meat production. This has never been tried, and it would require a research programme to discover whether it was feasible. For the Sumatran rhino there is even less room for optimism, with still only about 20 known animals in the whole peninsula (compared with 47 in 1963) in six different localities, the largest single concentrations being five in two places. It would take very little poaching to knock the species right out in Malaya. Elephants, the author thinks, are not in immediate danger, although numbers declined from an estimated 692 in 1963 to 486 in 1968. They are a problem because of the damage they do to crops. In Pahang 70 have been shot in eight years by the State game staffs; in the whole peninsula about 15 are shot every

year in the name of crop protection, and this practice is likely to increase as more lowland forest is cleared for agriculture. Their survival depends on forest and wildlife reserves, where, says Dr Stevens, they should be safe 'so long as they do not develop a taste for any exotic species that may be used in plantation forestry'.

In the Nilgiri Hills in southern India, some of the larger game animals have increased their numbers and others are holding their own – in contrast with general trends in some other parts of India. This is largely due, according to E. R. C. Davidar in a paper in the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*, to the activities of a sportsmen's association, the Nilgiri Wild Life Association, now 90 years old, of which the author is a former secretary. Founded in 1877 because overhunting threatened to wipe out the game, the association maintains a staff of game wardens who work closely with the Forest Department in the enforcement of the game laws and preventing poaching. Elephants, gaur and chital have increased in numbers, especially the elephants among which there seems to be a population explosion; sambar, which had become very scarce, are increasing; tigers are 'maintaining their strength'. Of the blackbuck, never numerous, the author states roundly that it has been lost because complete protection was imposed by the government without anything being done to enforce it, with the result that 'once the sportsmen lost interest even the few that were left vanished . . . victims to the crop protection gun'. The most interesting species is the Nilgiri tahr – a 'Red Book' species, of which only a few survived at the turn of the century. But a census in 1963 showed that they had increased to at least 300. Today the danger to the tahr comes from the Forest Department's plantings of blocks of introduced wattle and eucalyptus trees, even up to the edge of the cliffs which are the favourite feeding grounds of these sure-footed goat-like animals. One of the delights of John Willett's Indian film, which he showed at the FPS March meeting, and which was mostly taken on the 1968 FPS Indian tour, was some excellent shots of these rarely photographed animals.

There are still extensive ranges of forested mountains, unpopulated off-shore islands and tracts of wetlands to give South Korea first-rank national parks if the initiative could be taken, but there is not much large wildlife left, says Dr George C. Ruhle in his report to IUCN on National Parks and Reserves for the Republic of Korea, based on a survey he made in 1966. Little is known about the wildlife except that there is not much and that even that is decreasing; protection laws are inadequate and barely enforced. Tigers, which still survive in small numbers in North Korea (in the north-east corner) are extinct in the South; leopards are uncommon. He found little evidence of interest in conserving the wildlife, either among the people or officials. Poisoning is common, and the bird slaughter horrifying. Potassium cyanide for swans is 'cheaper, easier and "more elegant" than

Slaughter in South Korea

shooting'. An estimated three million small birds, mainly chestnut, black-faced and rustic buntings on migration, are killed illegally each year for eating. Labeled 'house sparrows', with feathers, heads and feet removed to prevent identification, they are shipped out in crates and sacks from the provinces to the cities for the popular 'sparrow bakes'. Stuffed birds, such as eagles and cranes, sell for up to \$300. Dr Ruhle found some signs of improvement. Police sergeants have been given special instruction in the wildlife laws and their enforcement, and a Wildlife Protection Committee now advises the Forestry Office which also makes an annual game survey. A privately organised Commission for Conservation of Nature promotes scientific research and conservation. But there seems little sign of any serious intention to create national parks or reserves.

The rare mountain, or woolly, tapir – a Red Book species – is being hunted with dog packs in the Andes by Ecuadorian animal dealers in order to capture live specimens for sale to zoos in Europe and the USA, according to the IUCN *Bulletin*. The ten or twelve mountain tapirs brought into Quito last year involved the killing of more than 60 others in the process of capture. The demand for these rare tapirs among zoos appears to be growing, and a number of zoos have acquired them recently. IUCN is taking the initiative to stop this trade by requesting both AAZPA and IUDZG (Association of American Zoological Parks and Aquariums and International Union of Directors of Zoological Gardens) to ban the purchase of mountain tapirs by their members.

**Assult
on Mountain
Tapirs**

In a statement on kangaroo conservation, the Australian Conservation Foundation supports Dr Frith's conclusions, quoted in *ORYX*, September 1968, that kangaroos must be used, and sheep and cattle numbers reduced, if the productivity of Australia's arid and semi-arid grazing lands is to be conserved. Kangaroos are much more efficient than sheep at converting vegetable food to animal protein, and much better adapted to the inland environment, for example in their ability to stand drought. But the statement, which is published in *Wildlife Service*, journal of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of New South Wales, emphasises that ways must be found of giving land-holders direct financial benefit from the kangaroo harvesting. The red kangaroo is widely regarded (and treated) as a pest, and the only way to save it from extinction is by use on a sustained yield basis, that is farming, though a proper survey would probably reveal that in some states it should be given complete protection for a year or two. For the grey kangaroo the need for a planned management policy for the inland races is 'becoming obvious and urgent', and all euros, other than those of north-west Australia, and wallaroos 'are in need of care' – which means adequate reserves and complete protection from commercial hunting. A management programme is needed for each species, which in turn calls for

**Kangaroos
for the
Arid Lands**

research to find out what culls can safely be taken while ensuring the maintenance of adequate breeding stocks. Unfortunately the fauna authorities in the states where there is large-scale commercial shooting of kangaroos do not have the necessary staff to do this, and the Foundation considers that strengthening of these departments is 'the most urgently needed step toward the achievement of kangaroo conservation', together with some form of direct control on the kangaroo industry.

A massive invasion last year of the Albert National Park in the Congo – by Rwanda pastoralists and their cattle, rebels against the government, dissident soldiers and Uganda poachers – resulted in a complete breakdown in the park authority and a terrible slaughter of animals, especially elephants and hippos, with the destruction of large areas of the mountain gorilla habitat which, it is feared, has reduced their numbers drastically. Twenty-two of the Congolese park

**Disaster
for
the Gorillas**

staff have been killed in defending the park. As the poachers were well armed and the park guards unarmed it is not surprising that patrolling was down to a minimum. These were the findings of Kai Curry-Lindahl after a visit to the park last summer on behalf of the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and Unesco. His report to President Mobutu urged a series of strong and urgent measures, most of which have not yet been executed. However, two large-scale operations by the park guards under the Chief Warden, Mr Anicet Mburanumwe, succeeded in removing the Rwandese settlers and their cattle from the gorilla habitats in the Virunga volcanoes. As a result of this and other anti-poaching operations the chief warden believes that within a few months effective control will be restored. Despite all the destruction the park remains territorially intact apart from one fishing village, from which, however, the government has now withdrawn the concession, though the evacuation has not yet taken place. As in so many other countries the crying need is for greater government support for the parks and strict enforcement of the law.

Four birds of paradise in New Guinea are threatened by overhunting, according to our FPS correspondent, Angus Hutton: the ribbon-tailed, the Princess Stephanie, the blue and the King of Saxony. The drain is no

**Sing-sings
and Birds of
Paradise**

longer in aid of European fashion, but from what Mr Hutton calls 'a massive export' of plumes to the tribes in the mountains for their ceremonial regalia for dances and sing-sings. Having shot out the birds in their own neighbourhood the Highlanders now buy the plumes from other areas. The stopping of tribal war means that they have time for more, bigger and better sing-sings; their thriving coffee and tea plantations mean that they have money to buy both the plumes and the guns; improved communications mean that they can go to other tribes to buy the plumes; the result is that even tribes which never use bird of paradise plumes now hunt the birds in order to sell them. (The law prohibits both the shooting and selling, but is openly flouted.)

A steady trickle of plumes goes out illicitly in tourists' baggage, which, while unlikely to have much effect on the species, does have a bad effect on the local people who see Europeans openly flouting the law. There is also considerable concern in New Guinea about the crocodiles, which support a sizeable industry and are decreasing thanks to over-exploitation. A protection Ordinance which came into force on January 1st this year makes it illegal to take crocodiles for the skin trade without a licence. We hope to publish a note on the crocodile situation by Dr Robert Bustard, who has studied it at first hand, in the next ORYX.

With 50 birds – 44 adults and 6 young – arriving at the wintering grounds, the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, last autumn, the whooping cranes have increased their numbers by two over the previous year to give the highest number recorded in recent years.

**Whooping
Cranes
up Again**

(The flock numbered 15 in 1941.) In addition there are now 18 birds in captivity, 12 of them at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, in Maryland, of which ten have been bred from eggs taken from

the nests of the wild flock in the last two springs. (The cranes lay two eggs but usually only rear one chick; only one egg is taken from each nest.) Three have survived of the five successfully hatched at Patuxent in 1967, and seven of the ten hatched in 1968. With only 50 birds in the wild the whooping crane is one of the world's rarest birds. It is hoped to build up a captive breeding flock so that some can be released to reinforce the wild flock.

Thanks to merciless hunting the tamarau in the Philippines – described by Tom Harrisson as being like a miniature water buffalo, but extremely swift-moving, nimble and dangerous when with calf – is one of the world's rarest and most endangered large animals; it survives only on Mindoro Island. Last year the FPS/WWF Revolving Fund financed a project to enable Tom Harrisson to return to the Philippines in January this year to re-examine

**Last Minute
Rescue in
Philippines**

the problem and take what steps he could in a desperate situation. As a result it looks as if some really effective action has at last been achieved. After a field survey using helicopters he estimated that there were about a hundred animals in three separate areas which could be effectively protected at once. Detailed discussions followed with the Director of Parks and Wildlife, Mr Jose Viado, and with local authorities and hunting interests, and General Charles Lindbergh flew to the Philippines specially to lend his support – his influence was decisive. An action plan was drawn up and presented to President Marcos who adopted it enthusiastically on the spot. Goodwill visits were then made to the three selected areas to get local support for protecting the tamarau, and long-term plans were worked out, with the result that before Tom Harrisson left in February a Philippines Wildlife Conservation Association had been constituted; for this thanks are largely due to Dr Sixto Roxas, President of Bancom Corporation, and Mr Manuel Elizalde, Cabinet Minister for National

Minorities. The tamarau is the Association's first project. On April 15th President Marcos flew into Mindoro and officially 'opened' the project at Mount Iglit, the central one of the three sites. The Deputy Director of Parks and Wildlife, Mr J. Alvarez, has been seconded to head the project on the ground. Special warden teams are on guard in each of the three areas, and two graduate biologists are doing ecological studies on Iglit where the existing sanctuary area of 8956 hectares is to be extended to at least five times that size. The Philippine Constabulary are assisting as well as a Special Forces unit. Because of the rugged terrain a light aircraft is likely to be needed, and it is desirable to establish radio links between the three areas. Tamarau numbers had got so low that it will be a long struggle to retrieve them, but at least there is now some hope.

New Red Book Species

SIXTEEN new species have been added to the IUCN* Red Data Book of Endangered species, two of them on pink sheets indicating that they are critically endangered. These are the Sinai leopard, about which all that is known is that it is very rare indeed, and the Amur leopard described as 'practically extinct in Manchuria and Sichote-Alin and now almost entirely restricted to North Korea' (about which nothing is known). However, in the latest IUCN Bulletin, the Russian scientist Dr A. G. Bannikov lists a number of places in the Soviet Far Eastern Territory where leopard can be found today, but concludes that 'there are in all probability no more than 10-15 individual animals in the entire region'.

The fourteen species which have been added on white sheets - indicating that they are not immediately threatened with extinction although so reduced in numbers and/or restricted in habitat that they could quickly disappear - are Perrier's sifaka, Indo-Chinese lar gibbon, giant anteater, Ebian and Wilson's palm squirrels, thin-spined porcupine, small-eared dog, Syrian brown bear, La Plata otter, three Madagascar endemics - Malagasy civet, falanouc and fossa (a civet) - marsh deer and Rio de Oro dama gazelle.

Revised sheets for other seriously endangered animals (on pink sheets) include the Bali and Javan tigers. The Bali tiger is believed to be extinct, but the Javan is reported as still occurring on the Blambangan peninsula, south of Malang, on the lower slopes of the Semeru volcano, along the Glidek river and in east Java, in the South Djember district; it is no longer in the Udjung Kulon reserve, as already reported by Dr Schenkel in *ORYX*, September, 1968. The Kashmir stag (the hanglu) continues to decline. The revised pink sheet quotes George Schaller's 1968 estimate of the numbers as about 50 animals in their main concentration, and also his comments: 'The main cause of decline is unquestionably poaching, which is very heavy. During my visit (October 1968) I twice saw military personnel shooting at stags in the Dachigam Sanctuary. The staff make no attempt to control the area or to prevent poaching. It is imperative that poaching be stopped if the hanglu is to be saved from extinction'.

*International Union for Conservation of Nature.