

# The Fauna Preservation Society

NOVEMBER, 1956

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## EDITORIAL NOTES

*International Meetings.*—The sixth meeting of the European Continental Section of the International Committee for Bird Preservation was held in Beetsterzwaag, Holland, in June last. It was followed by the 5th General Assembly of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources at Edinburgh. Both were attended by the Secretary, as a representative of the Society. This issue of *Oryx* tells something of the work done in Edinburgh. The next will give more information about these conferences.

*The University of London* will in 1957 again be holding a course for its Certificate of Proficiency in Natural History. The course is open to any person interested in the study of living things in their natural habitats. For further information, apply immediately to the Secretary, Natural History Certificate Course, Department of Extra-Mural Studies, University of London, Senate House, London, W.C. 1.

*Oil Pollution.*—From 8th September, 1956, British ships were forbidden to discharge persistent waste oil in the areas prohibited at the 1954 international conference on oil pollution. Britain leads the world in this matter but the Act itself will do little to improve the present situation, for British shipowners have for long voluntarily carried out its clauses. If the United States, Panama, and Liberia, who between them control 14 million tons of shipping, were to take action, then, as Mr. James Callaghan, M.P., chairman of the Co-ordinating Advisory Committee on Oil Pollution of the Sea says, the position would improve out of all knowledge.

This committee, on which our Society is represented by the Secretary, has been encouraged by a generous gift from a lady in Hampshire. Her money will be used to stir up opinion in America and to show that the oil menace can be conquered if Congress will take action.

The Committee will agitate unceasingly until it is illegal for any ship to dump oil in any waters.

*Great Britain.*—The Nature Conservancy has established five new nature reserves in Scotland, two in England and one in Wales, also an addition to an Anglesey reserve.

*The Isle of May*, 140 acres, in the Firth of Forth, where a bird observatory and field station were set up in 1947, is one of the most famous bird places in the world—218 species, seabirds and migrants, have been recorded.

In the ninth century the island was the headquarters of St. Adrian, who became the first bishop of St. Andrews. In the twelfth century a priory was established but was later despoiled by English invaders. In 1635 a beacon was erected and used for 150 years, sometimes burning as much as three tons of coal a night. The foundations of the modern lighthouse were laid in 1816.

*North Rona and Sula Sgeir.*—These two uninhabited islands, of 300 acres and 20 acres, lie 50 miles from Cape Wrath and are the most north-westerly islands of Great Britain.

North Rona is the chief home of the Atlantic Grey Seal, the rarest of all seals.

Both islands are famous for their sea birds, especially Leach's storm petrel and the gannet. A special order has been made to allow the traditional harvesting of young gannets by the men of Ness to continue, outside the close season.

These islands were made widely known by Dr. F. F. Darling in his books *A Naturalist on Rona*, *Natural History in the Highlands and Islands* and *Island Years*.

*Silverflowe*, 472 acres, in Kirkeudbrightshire, embraces a series of seven undrained, raised bogs, which are thus safeguarded for scientific research.

*Rassal Ashwood*, 202 acres, contains the most northerly ash wood in Great Britain. Its appearance is remarkable. The limestone has been weathered into slabs which have been covered with soil and turf to form closely packed hummocks; among them grow the trees.

*Inchnadamph*, 3,200 acres, in Sutherland, lies in a tract of great geological and physiographical interest at the western front of an area of disturbed Durness limestone of Cambrian age. The limestone is partially covered by low willow scrub of a kind which is rare in Scotland. The clints, fissured limestone pavements, have a rich woodland flora, including the globe flower.

The reserve includes the Karst type of limestone country with sink-holes, underground streams and caves. The famous Allt nan Uamh bone caves contain Paleolithic cave earths with a fauna of Pleistocene mammals and traces of early man.

*Glen Diomhan*, a steep-sided post-glacial gorge in the Island of Arran, is noteworthy for two whitebeams, which are confined to Arran, *Sorbus arranensis* and *S. pseudofennica*.

For further information about the above reserves apply to the Nature Conservancy, 12 Hope Terrace, Edinburgh 9.

*Morden Bog*, in Dorset, is the most interesting remnant of the great heaths which once stretched from Dorchester to Wareham. It shares many features with the heaths of Purbeck and the New Forest, including a rare grasshopper, *Chorthippus vagans*, and an ant, *Formica transcaucasia*, which nests in Sphagnum bog. A digging predatory wasp, *Pompilus rufus*, and the ant *Formica nigricans*, found there also, are not known to occur elsewhere in Britain. Access by permit only. Apply: The Regional Office for the South-West, The Nature Conservancy, Furzebrook Research Station, Wareham, Dorset.

*Winterton Dunes*, 260 acres, in Norfolk, shows an exceptional range of coastal habitats, each with distinctive plant and animal communities. Starting on the seaward side, first comes shingle and embryo dunes, then yellow and grey dunes; next various kinds of wet slacks or depressions, then dry grass and heather heath and, finally, a bog formation with *Molina* and Sphagnum.

For further information apply to the Regional Office for East Anglia, The Nature Conservancy, 6 Upper King Street, Norwich.

*Coed Rheidol*, in Cardiganshire, 18 acres, consists of sessile oak woodlands, occupying a ravine of great depth and high humidity—in the gorge area about 60 inches of rain a year. These woods are rich in ferns. The Welsh poppy and films ferns, *Hymenophyllum*, are characteristic. This reserve shows woodlands and plants as they once were all over Wales.

*Newborough Warren* and *Ynys Llanddwyn*, in Anglesey. The present declaration of 478 acres brings this reserve up to 1,256 acres. Birds which nest among the mobile dunes include gulls and terns, curlews, oystercatchers, shelducks and stock doves. A pair of Montagu's harriers raised a brood this year.

For further information on this and *Coed Rheidol* reserve apply to the Nature Conservancy, University College of North Wales, Bangor, Caernarvon.

*Natal*.—At the Edinburgh meeting of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature we had the great pleasure of hearing about the progress of nature protection in Natal from Colonel J. Vincent, Director of Wild Life Conservation.

Since 1952, when a list of Natal reserves and parks was given in *Oryx*, 15 square miles have been added to Giant's Castle game reserve and 5 square miles to False Bay nature reserve.

Two new reserves have been formed—Dhlinza Forest, three-quarters of a square mile adjacent to the township of Eshowe, in Zululand, and Loteni, 5 square miles, 14 miles south of Giant's Castle. Mkuzi, the second largest reserve in Natal, which has been under control of the Veterinary Department in connection with tsetse fly operations, has reverted to the National Parks Board.

The status of the oribi is much improved. Many landowners and farmers have combined to save it from extermination in Natal; one farmer has proudly reported that he has sixty oribis on his property.

*Southern Rhodesia.*—Among visitors we have welcomed this autumn were Mr. Seatherton Abbott, until recently secretary of the Southern Rhodesia National Hunters and Game Preservation Association and now a branch secretary. Mr. Abbott attended a meeting of Council and gave a short account of the work of his Association, mentioning particularly its efforts to persuade the Government to change the game slaughter policy.

*New South Wales.*—The Fauna Protection Panel is conducting a survey to discover the distribution of the echidna, or spiny anteater, *Tachyglossus aculeatus*, and the southern whip-tailed wallaby, or pretty-face, *Wallabia elegans*.

The echidna is not thought to be uncommon, but there are fears for the survival of the pretty-face, so called because of its white cheek mark. As a result of this survey the Panel will decide how the future of these animals can best be assured.

The last issue of "Bulletin for Rangers" comments on the wisdom of the aborigines of Australia who depended on game for their existence. They had game laws which took the form of taboos and were designed to prevent the elimination of their food supply. When the white man killed kangaroos and emus indiscriminately, much suffering was caused among the native population. The aborigines retaliated by killing sheep and cattle and a great deal of bad feeling was engendered.

*The Gorilla.*—We publish in this number an article by Mr. John Blower, of the Uganda Game Department, on the gorilla in the Birunga volcanoes, Uganda. In our next issue Mr. E. W. March writes on the gorilla in Nigeria.

An article by Captain C. R. S. Pitman on the gorillas of the Kayonza forest, Uganda (see map, p. 289) was contained in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London*, 1935. This confirms both the docility of gorillas and Mr. Blower's opinion that those in the Birunga volcanoes make their beds on the ground merely because the trees there are not strong enough to

bear the animals' weight. The highest bed seen by Captain Pitman was nearly 50 feet above the ground, the lowest 6 feet.

The gorilla's food in the two districts is different also, for the Kayonza forest is at a lower level, where neither the bamboo nor the giant docks, parsleys and celery are found. The gorilla there confines his diet to a mixture of leaves, berries, ferns, the tender fronds of tree-ferns, parts of wild banana stems and leaves, and fibrous bark peeled off a variety of shrubs in the undergrowth.

In 1930, when the area of the Birunga volcanoes lying in Uganda was made a gorilla sanctuary, it was a forest reserve also; so not only were the gorillas themselves safe but, equally important, their habitat was protected. Now, half the gorilla sanctuary has been opened to settlement and, moreover, permission has been given for limited collection of forest products in the remaining part. Are we unduly gloomy if we wonder whether the gorilla will long remain on the Uganda side of the Birunga volcanoes? Fortunately on the Belgian side of the border the area is a closed part of the Parc National Albert, giving complete protection to the gorilla and its habitat. That a national park should be declared on the Uganda side also was suggested in 1930 by Major R. W. G. Hingston, during his visit to Uganda on behalf of our society. It was reinforced in 1931 by Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell, who said, when addressing the British Association, that in the whole sphere of zoology there was nothing more important than that these gorillas should be preserved undisturbed. Sir Peter mentioned that for several years both the Zoological Society and our society had been pressing for a national park in the area and pointed out that if settlers were to invade the area, not only would protection for the gorillas inevitably cease, but the sanctity of the Parc National Albert itself would be threatened. He also said that the Belgian Government had made a formal request that this national park should be created, that the Foreign Office had concurred and that the Governor of Uganda saw no objection.

But it was not done.

Would it not be timely now for further consideration to be given also to preserving the gorillas' habitat in the Kayonza forest? Although this is still the "impenetrable forest" where Wambutte pigmies and gorillas live on terms of mutual toleration, it can hardly be expected to remain "undeveloped" unless special measures are taken.

*Crocodiles.*—The following note on the food of baby crocodiles comes from Mr. C. T. Astley Maberly, the South African naturalist and contributor to *African Wild Life* :—

“ I once kept a pair of young crocodiles for six years and observed an interesting point which says at least one good word for the usually much condemned croc !

“ When they were very small, only a few inches long, they used regularly to scoop mosquito larvae against the edge of their small pond and then literally ‘ lash ’ them into their mouths with their tails ! Such activities going on in many a swampy backwater may play their part in the battle against mosquitoes.”

*Mr. J. I. Menzies.*—We congratulate Mr. Ian Menzies on his appointment as an education officer, Sierra Leone. We shall miss his help here, for nearly every map in previous numbers of *Oryx* was largely his handiwork.