

Fairfield Osborn—a Tribute

Frank Fraser Darling

The death of Fairfield Osborn in September 1969 at the age of 82, took from us one of our vice-presidents and a much-loved colourful character. Fairfield Osborn was the son of Henry Fairfield Osborn, the palaeontologist and evolutionist who was also president of the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Our Fairfield did not follow science professionally, but his knowledge of animals was deep and his love of them compassionate. He graduated from Princeton and then spent a year at Cambridge, where the late Sir Charles Darwin and Professor A. V. Hill were his close friends. Then came the First War and Fairfield was in France with an American artillery regiment. He knew western America well and supplemented profoundly his early interest in conservation by such travel. After all, Fairfield was at the White House Conference on Conservation in 1908, in Theodore Roosevelt's administration. This, of course, was a landmark.

Considering his father's fame and work in the American Museum of Natural History, it is not surprising that Fairfield should take great interest in exhibition technique. Also, he was something of a natural showman. He became president of the New York Zoological Society and during his long tenure revolutionized the exhibition and care of animals. He assembled a fine staff and greatly encouraged them. The scientific side of the Society's activities was given special attention and this was crowned in 1966 by the opening of the Osborn Research Laboratory at the Aquarium at Coney Island.

Fairfield Osborn's shrewd farsightedness led him to write *Our Plundered Planet* published in 1948. The impact of this book was tremendous; as a continuing best-seller it was translated into sixteen languages. Fairfield was always conscious of the need for a greater intellectual basis and content for the subject of conservation and to this end founded the Conservation Foundation in 1948. This was when my own association with him began, although I did not become a permanent member of his staff until 1959. The Foundation was always reaching out and looking deep and has established a unique place for itself as a scientific institution, widely trusted for its impartiality in a subject which often carries too much emotion. How vivid in memory are those Tuesday morning staff meetings when Fairfield would preside unobtrusively, shrewdly drawing us out into talk which was so often productive of an idea. He was always ready to back ideas with effective action. I remember him as a great democrat in these in-house meetings, yet coming forward as our leader at just the right moment. He was always a giver of opportunity.

It gave Fairfield Osborn much personal satisfaction to be made a Vice-President of the Fauna Preservation Society and to be the guest of the Zoology Section of the British Association at its Cambridge meeting in 1964.

Fairfield Osborn married Marjorie, daughter of Frederick Lamond, the musician, in St. Margaret's, Westminster, in 1914. It was typical

of him to arrange a commemorative service in the same church on the fiftieth anniversary in 1964, where many of his friends gathered to do honour to Fairfield and Marjorie. During the Benediction a golden September leaf floated through a window and slowly fell on to the altar. Nature had paid her respect.

Was Strasbourg Worthwhile?

Bruce Campbell

The value of the Council of Europe conference at Strasbourg on the future of the environment should be both immediate and long-term. The conference was the official 'opening' of ECV 1970. Strong speeches by Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, Prince Philip, Prince Albert of Liège and M. Duhamel, the French Minister of Agriculture, emphasised the urgency of the situation that had brought together delegations from the 17 member nations, most of them led by ministers, observers from ten other countries, and representatives of some fifty international organisations.

The declaration at the end of the conference and the report of the proceedings—the fruit of over twelve hours hard drafting—have involved governments in an agreement to co-ordinate effort at all levels, and this includes the very important sphere of local authorities who, in Britain, have been so slow to take up their responsibilities under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949. Let us hope that we shall now see some action. The Strasbourg Declaration will enable conservationists throughout Europe to put pressure on the politicians who, to do them credit, seem to be genuinely concerned.

The conference discussed as its themes four forms of impact on the natural environment: urban conglomerations, industry, agriculture and forestry, and leisure. These were presented by rapporteurs who had been studying papers submitted by the member nations and by many organisations, including UNESCO, FAO, WHO, IUCN, ICBP, the International Wildfowl Research Bureau, the World Wildlife Fund and the International Council for Hunting and Shooting, whose remarkable conservationist attitude bore tribute to years of patient persuasion by Miss Phyllis Barclay-Smith and others.

Some delegates felt that the discussions were concerned with too wide issues and that not enough was heard of wildlife conservation and its needs. But an answer to the central problem, that of the population explosion and its effects, can only be found—if indeed it exists—at the highest planning level, and it seems reasonable to concentrate on this as top priority.

Two aspects which particularly interested the British delegation, youth and voluntary effort, were also not emphasised, though the final report gave both a pat on the back. But it would have been salutary to hear what the young people of Europe really think about their elders' efforts to save the environment for them. Most gratifying to the FPS was Prince Bernhard's news of the £250,000 gift to the World Wildlife Fund to set up an endowment fund in the name of our Chairman, Peter Scott.