

ORYX

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Notes and News

At its January meeting the FPS Council decided to recommend to members that the rules of the Society should be altered to include flora as well as fauna in our remit. This will be done at the Annual General Meeting on July 9. There are several good reasons for this change. In the modern world, it is increasingly unrealistic to suppose that fauna can be protected or conserved and flora ignored. Any habitat is an interwoven amalgam of plants and animals, neither of which can survive without the other, and increasingly wildlife conservation is seen to mean conservation of habitat and whole ecosystems, not just species. Most plants need insects to pollinate them – even if botanists are prone to regard the large fauna as merely the tiresome creatures that eat their plants. Moreover, the World Wildlife Fund and IUCN have both set the modern trend by catering for all wildlife, plant and animal. At present there is no society in the world that offers membership for those interested in international plant conservation. So FPS, which was the first international animal conservation society in the world, is now about to celebrate its 77th birthday by becoming also, we hope, the first international plant conservation society in the world.

**Fauna
Takes on
Flora**

The People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) has given £20,000 to the FPS Oryx 100% Fund for a project to save the black rhino in Africa, with a further £20,000 earmarked. Poaching in East Africa could exterminate the black rhino in a very short time, as Kes Hillman and Esmond Martin reported in the last *Oryx* (November, p131). Today there are fewer than 1500 black rhinos in Kenya, a reduction of 90 per cent in 10 years. Some individual figures highlight their desperate situation; in 1978, 25 were killed in Manyara National Park in Tanzania, leaving about 12, of which only three or four are breeding females – and rhinos are slow breeders;

**FPS
Operation
Rhino**

moreover, the harassment they are getting may prevent them breeding at all. Organised, large-scale commercial poaching is the cause, to supply the trade in rhino horn, now mainly for dagger handles in North Yemen; in 1976 the bulk of East African rhino horn exports went to this Arab country. In a careful analysis of the situation, PTES has identified the tasks to be tackled based on the recommendations of the SSC Rhino Specialist Group. Eight countries have been selected for priority action: Botswana, Cameroon, Kenya, Mozambique, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Java, Zambia. The first and most important task is to strengthen and equip the anti-poaching units and increase the numbers of guard posts, and also to get illegal settlers out of parks and reserves. Units modelled on criminal investigation departments will be set up to hunt down and prosecute all involved in illegal trade; international intelligence services are needed to assist both the CITES and TRAFFIC secretariats. Public education is a vital aspect, involving wildlife clubs (with their resuscitation, founding, helping and equipping) and more support will be given to the wildlife management schools at Mweka in Tanzania and its French-speaking counterpart at Garoua, Cameroon. Holiday courses for teachers have already proved their value; discontinued for lack of funds, they will be resumed and greatly expanded. And all the time research will be necessary to back up the work being done. Clearly £40,000 is a wonderfully good start – but an ambitious project like this will need far more. The FPS Gorilla Project has proved a resounding success. We look to FPS members to help equally generously with Operation Rhino.

Some 60,000 sq km of fertile farmlands are turned into desert every year (the size almost of Belgium and the Netherlands combined); at least 3000 sq km of first-grade farmland are converted to buildings and roads in developing countries alone; thousands of millions of tons of soil are lost every year through deforestation, overgrazing, and other bad land management – 6000m tons in India alone; and thousands of millions of the poorest people in the world are being driven, just to keep alive, to destroy the resources that could, if properly managed, support them, e.g. trees and dung burned for fuel. And so the horrifying statistics go on. With these levels of destruction around us, no one can believe that the World Conservation Strategy, officially launched on March 5 by IUCN, WWF and UNEP came a day too soon. Put simply the Strategy states the three main objectives as being to conserve habitats and resources, to save species from extinction (and so preserve genetic diversity), and to utilise species in their natural habitats for the welfare of mankind – spiritual as well as material. Both regional and national strategies are proposed to achieve these aims, and practical ways are suggested for achieving them, for example by helping small rural communities to conserve their resources and securing greater public participation in planning and decision-making. The people of the world have to save their resources to save themselves, and conservation has to be integrated with development.

A World Conservation Strategy

With little soil, no fresh water, no minerals, no natural anchorage, and a wicked surface of jagged coral, there has been little to attract man to Aldabra – thank heaven! – for that is its importance today. Aldabra is a unique undisturbed ecosystem – a rarity indeed in 1980 – that can be studied for our benefit, an atoll of superb wildlife interest, with giant tortoises (150,000 of them) as the only herbivores, at least six endemic birds, and insects, plants and reef fish to be explored. And it is surely small enough to be spared for science – and for our enjoyment. Since the British plan to build a military airstrip was withdrawn in 1966 (after worldwide protests), Britain's Royal Society has been organising and financing a programme of basic research, and about 100 scientists from seven countries have put in 58 man-years of work. This year the Royal hands over to the newly formed Seychelles Islands Foundation, whose Patron is the Seychelles President, together with a generous present of £25,000 a year for the next four years. Lesser sums are promised by the Smithsonian Institution and the French Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique Outre-Mer. But a lot more is needed – running costs are estimated at some £50,000 a year. The target is £500,000. FPS will be glad to forward any gifts for this worthwhile Appeal.

At the FPS meeting in London on January 17, Nick Carter, Director of the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES), handed a cheque for £12,000 to Dr A.H. Harcourt, Co-ordinator of the FPS Mountain Gorilla Project, which brings the total collected to more than the £50,000 first asked for. But, as Dr Harcourt pointed out, the Project's sights have now been raised and more money is needed. So far the Project has concentrated on the gorillas in Rwanda's Parc National des Volcans, where yet another gorilla was killed last December. But it is vitally important to extend it to the adjoining Zairois Parc de Virunga, where there are thought to be about 200 mountain gorillas and little protection – two adult gorillas were killed in January, and an infant taken to Rwanda to be sold. (It was confiscated and is now with Dian Fossey.) Eventually also the adjoining Ugandan reserve, where numbers are unknown and protection non-existent, must be brought in. In Rwanda Bill Weber, who went out for the Project last September, has made good progress in habituating a group of mountain gorillas to human beings. This is important because only tourism can satisfy the economic argument for preserving this national park in such a desperately poor and overpopulated country as Rwanda, and tourists will not come unless they can see mountain gorillas. It also takes the pressure off the gorilla groups being studied by Dian Fossey's Karisoke Research Station. Starting in early September last year Bill Weber or an assistant visited every day a group of 12 gorillas, known as Group 11, on the slopes of Mount Visoke. At first the gorillas either fled or became aggressive, but gradually they came to tolerate the humans, bluffing charges gave way to curiosity, and it was possible to bring in other humans. By early November fifteen groups of visitors had been taken as close as 5-15 metres to

**Gorilla
Project Tops
£50,000**

watch and photograph the gorillas. After this success Bill Weber hoped to be able to habituate a second gorilla group before the main tourist season brought too great a demand for one group to support. The argument that habituating gorillas to humans makes them more vulnerable to poachers is unfortunately valid, but Dr Harcourt points out that without tourism there is no future for the park or the gorillas anyhow, and the answer must lie in better protection.

That wildlife numbers have indeed been horribly diminished in Uganda is the unanimous verdict of four representatives of wildlife organisations after a visit last November, and the destruction of property in the Kabalega Falls National

**Rebuilding
in
Uganda**

Park was also appalling. Nevertheless, some wildlife survives – in their brief stay they saw hartebeest, oribi, waterbuck, elephant, giraffe, baboons and hyenas, over 700 hippos (it would have been 2000 a few months earlier) and several dozen crocodiles. Lions have been seen. Game wardens and rangers were anxious to get on with the rehabilitation, but with vehicles wrecked, buildings gutted, and equipment stolen, the task is tremendous. Some help is on the way, but the Minister of Tourism and Wildlife, for example, reckons that he needs 24 Landrovers, 6 lorries, 4 bulldozers/graders, and 2 launches – these are at the head of a long list. The Government's 5-year ban on hunting will help wildlife numbers to build up, and scientifically it is vitally important to get an inventory of what animals survive so that the chance to study how populations recover after a major population crash is not lost. Uganda's President, HE Godfrey Binaisa, with whom the delegation spent an hour, was particularly concerned about education and the possibilities for reviving the Wildlife Clubs as a means of enthusing and educating young people.

The combined culling and translocation plan for vicuña in the Pampa Galeras National Reserve in the Peruvian Andes has gone ahead with the backing of both IUCN and WWF. In the 15 years since the reserve was created vicuña

**Vicuña
Move to New
Reserve**

numbers have soared from about 1000 to over 40,000 – too many for 67,000 hectares – with predictable effects on the grazing, and exacerbated by a series of droughts. Archie Mossman, investigating in June on behalf of IUCN, reported that, except in one tiny spot, he 'saw no place in the entire reserve that was not in very bad condition – and its condition declining'. Some vicuña will be transported to Huancavelica and also to the new Aguada Blanca Nature Reserve, created by presidential decree last August, where 367,000 hectares of mountains, pampas and lagoons will support a much larger vicuña population than Pampa Galeras. Under the La Paz agreement of 1969, signed by the five nations with vicuña – Peru, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia and Ecuador – all trade in vicuña parts and products was forbidden. At the meeting last September to renew the Convention, the five Governments agreed to continue to prohibit internal and external trade in vicuña products and manufactures until 1989, but where numbers increase so

as to permit the production of meat and cloth this will be acceptable under strict government control, in the case of cloth using a patented and clearly identifiable previously agreed weave. To achieve this Peru is asking the parties of CITES to transfer the Pampa Galeras vicuña population from Appendix I (all trade forbidden) to Appendix II (limited trade under strict government control).

In the UK, financial difficulties were the reason why members of the Council for Nature, at their last meeting on October 4, 1979, reluctantly decided to close the organisation down at the end of the year. Most of its functions, including its youth work, are being taken over by the Council for Environmental Conservation (CoEnCo), but some will be exercised by the Conservation Liaison Committee of the Society for the Promotion of Nature Conservation (SPNC). Their relative functions have to be

**End of
Council for
Nature**

decided, but FPS is already a member of the CLC and is expected to join CoEnCo's proposed new wildlife conservation committee: the journal *habitat* will continue to be published by CoEnCo. The Council for Nature was founded in 1958 at two meetings held in London, and FPS was a founder member. It is a significant sign of the times, reflecting the stresses of inflation on all voluntary bodies, that the members were not collectively willing to finance it; for many years the Council had been substantially dependent on generous grants from WWF(UK). CoEnCo is a national coalition of UK non-governmental organisations focussing on major environmental problems, such as pollution, opencast coal mining and aircraft noise. The Council for Nature was already a member of CoEnCo, and in fact the new situation seems likely to differ from the old mainly in the disappearance of the separate office maintained by the Council for Nature.

Elephants in the Indian sub-continent – they occur in India, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh – probably number between 10,000 and 15,000, according to the Asian Elephant Group's census. And the bulk of these (well over 8000) are

**Bringing
the Elephants
Together**

in India's three southern states, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. But there is considerable fragmentation of the populations, with small groups isolated in small pockets of forest, and for them there is no future. So, at a meeting last September of the Asian Elephant Group in Bangalore there was considerable disappointment that no official announcement was made about the plan, known to be supported in all three State governments, to bring together in one large reserve four existing sanctuary areas, Bandipur and Nagarhole in Karnataka, Mudumalai in Tamil Nadu and Wynad in Kerala. This, with a total area of over 2000 sq km, would bring scattered groups together, and provide an excellent natural spacious habitat for both elephants and of course other wildlife. The meeting urged the authorities to implement the plan and to concentrate on preserving elephant habitat and preventing further damage to the best elephant areas. The other aspect on

which the meeting concentrated was the importance of ending forestry operations in these sanctuaries, both to preserve the forests and stop disturbance. It was of some help that representatives of the central Indian Government confirmed that the States would normally be compensated for revenue lost in this way, and the Indian Government's firm intention to protect the elephants and their habitat was reiterated. Since the meeting Mrs Gandhi has become Prime Minister, and her interest in and support for wildlife conservation are well known.

China is almost the only country in the world to have increased its forests in recent decades. Compared with 30 years ago China has 66 per cent more forest today. Sir Peter Scott pointed this out on his return from China as leader of an IUCN/WWF mission last October. He described the agreement the mission signed with China during the visit as 'a historic development in world conservation'. 'China means business', he said. 'Senior government officials went out of their way to demonstrate their country's wish to be part of the world conservation movement.' While the Chinese want IUCN and WWF help in developing their resources, they in turn have technical knowledge to help the west. China will join IUCN and adhere to CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) and a WWF/China six-man joint committee has been set up to translate the agreement into action.

**China
Increases her
Forests**

The only known specimen of the *Kokia cookea* tree, native to Molokai in the Hawaiian islands, consists of a branch grafted to a *K. kauaiensis* tree (itself rare and endangered) in the neighbouring island of Oahu's Waimea Arboretum and Botanical Garden. On June 7 1979, for the first time, these branches produced blossoms, and eventually fruit and seeds, and Waimea's staff and the State Division of Forestry are now trying to get the seeds to germinate – another episode in the botanical cliffhanger of the century.

**New Hope
for
Singular Tree**

The tree was rare when it was discovered in the late 1800s, and by the time it was rediscovered in 1915, by Dr Joseph Rock and George Cooke, only one remained, old and dying. Cooke planted some seeds – among the last the tree was to produce – in the garden of his Molokai home; three of these sprouted and one survived, to begin producing seeds of its own in 1933. These were sown year after year in various places on Molokai and Oahu, but none ever germinated, and when Cooke's tree died in the 1950s the species was believed extinct. But in 1970 Tim Cooke, George's son, was clearing undergrowth near the family home when he found a small but mature *Kokia cookea* that had germinated and grown without any outside help. Seeds were planted, cuttings taken, flowers hand-pollinated, air-layers made, and tissue cultures sent for 'cloning' at the Institute of Breeding Research in Tokyo. Grafting was tried throughout 1975 and 1976, and in September 1976 – two years before the parent tree was destroyed in a fire – one scion, grafted to a *K. kauaiensis*,

finally took. Now that these branches have produced seeds, botanists have one more chance to re-establish the tree on Molokai. *Kokia cookea* may well be the world's rarest plant, but thanks to Waimea's attentions it is at least not the most endangered. That one is probably nameless, somewhere in Amazonia, where it is reckoned that a species a day – usually a plant – is extinguished by deforestation.

Some light was thrown on what is happening in Spain at the WEBS (Western European Bird Societies) meeting in Hertfordshire last October. First the good deeds of the Spanish Government were illuminated. It has enlarged the Doñana National Park and provided it with a legal status, has created the Natural Park of Monfrague, and has signed both CITES and the Bonn Convention on migratory species. The Generalitat of Catalonia has also made it clear that it intends to protect the important marshes of the Bahía de Rosas. But some of the deficiencies of the Spanish conservation scene were shown up too. The killing of insectivorous birds, illegal hunting of birds of prey and the use of poisoned eggs and other poisoned baits still go on almost unchecked. Moreover, there is continuing felling of oaks and replanting with eucalyptus, especially in Andalucía and Extremadura, where many rare large birds of prey are particularly affected; some of the important Balearic wetlands, such as the salinas of Ibiza, as well as the Ebro delta on the mainland, are threatened with destruction; and many petrol tanker routes are so close to the coast that oil spills contaminate both marine and coastal bird populations.

**Protection
Pros and Cons
in Spain**

A rabbit that is fast disappearing as a result of 20th century man's ruthless demands is the small tailless volcano rabbit, also called the Mexican pygmy rabbit, *Romerolagus diazi*. It was known to survive only in the subalpine zones (above 2800m) on three Mexican volcanoes, Popocatepetl, Iztaccihuatl and Ajusco, until 1977 when a small number were found on a fourth, Toluca; these, however, may now have died out as a result of being hunted for both food and sport. Hunting is one of the main reasons for the decline of all the populations, but clearing (for cultivation) of the zacatón grass on which the rabbit depends for both food and shelter is another. Unfortunately, too, although the rabbits make elaborate burrows, the young are born in surface nests in hollows or under tree stumps, and are thus easy prey to both hunting dogs and man. Moreover much zacatón is uprooted because the tough roots make good brooms and brushes; herdsman also burn it regularly to induce new shoots for their cattle. And the last straw for the rabbits could well be the tourism development that is threatened on both Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl. The scientific interest of this rabbit is considerable, for it is one of many endemics in the area where the Nearctic and the Neotropics, the two main geographical regions of the American continent, converge. Moreover, a living fossil itself, it is now known to be host to two 'living fossil' parasite species,

**A
Disappearing
Rabbit**

both new to science. Dr Humberto Granados, in a paper recounting this situation, which he read at the first meeting of the newly formed SSC Lagomorph Group, urges the need for the Mexican Ministry of Agriculture and Mexican scientific bodies, as well as international organisations, to initiate research on this little-known animal and take effective measures to protect it. Well guarded reserves are the only hope, and meanwhile captive breeding operations, such as Gerald Durrell's in Jersey, we hope will be an important back-up.

The Saimaa seal population in south-east Finland is still estimated at no more than about 100 animals. It seems that the same causes are keeping numbers down as brought the population down to about 40 in 1958: serious pollution (with toxic chemicals) in the southern part of Lake Saimaa; disturbance on the ice by fishermen in the breeding season, and shooting, also by fishermen, despite the full legal protection given by the Government in 1955.

**New Look
at
Saimaa Seals**

Thanks to this protection numbers increased slightly – to 80-100 in 1966 and 120 in 1973. The Saimaa seal *Phoca hispida saimensis* is confined, as its name suggests, to the freshwater Saimaa lake system in south-east Finland. Like the Baikal seal further east it is a post-glacial relict, cut off from the Baltic and White Seas for some 8000 years, and of considerable scientific interest. Little is known about its ecology. However, a new Saimaa Seal Group, formed by WWF Finland, offers hope of a better future for the seals. The group, which has been making counts, plans to study the effects on the seals of the pollution in the lake, and other human-induced factors, including disturbance. The members also plan an information campaign, for without local support the future of the seals is bleak.

Eight of a party of ten chimpanzees exported from Sierra Leone in December 1978 and confiscated by customs officers at Schiphol airport (Amsterdam) as endangered exotic animals, were returned to Africa five months later, thanks

**Ordeal
of the
Chimpanzees**

to WWF and others in Holland. (Two had died in the European winter.) They were taken to the Abuko Nature Reserve in the Gambia, where under Eddie Brewer's watchful eye they could be re-educated for life in the forest. One, more experienced, was taken to an advanced training station on an island where there was already a group of chimps that had been successfully rehabilitated in the Niokola Koba National Park in Senegal, but had had to be taken away because the park's resident chimpanzees began to attack them. (Which shows some of the difficulties of this work.) Even if these rescued animals cannot be restored to the wild, at least they have been saved from a life in cages, but even more important, such confiscations make it clear to all dealers in wildlife that the law is being and will increasingly be enforced. Coupled with the captive breeding programmes that more and more zoos and other institutions are embarking on, perhaps this cruel traffic will become unnecessary in every way. The sort of cruelty which such journeys

involve is illustrated by the route scheduled for these chimpanzees: in one of the coldest European winters they were being sent from Sierra Leone in West Africa via Copenhagen to zoos and circuses in Spain and Mexico, but Denmark as a party to CITES refused entry permits – surely the shippers should have known? – and they were sent instead to Amsterdam where they were blocked by a different law, which was upheld in the courts (another delay).

The nets strung along coasts to protect bathers from sharks, particularly in Australia and South Africa, have long been a sore point with conservationists, who claim that they also affect other large fish, turtles and marine mammals, and disrupt the inshore ecology by eliminating large predators from the food chain. Now it appears that in Natal, whose coast is almost entirely fenced off by shark nets – even in marine reserves – there may be a shark increase. Fishermen complain of a decline in commercial catches, particularly shad, coincident with a rise in immature dusky sharks *Carcharhinus obscurus*, which are small enough to get through the nets and then grow up unmolested on the safe side. Rudy van der Else, a marine biologist at Durban's Oceanographic Research Institute (ORI), points out that in the past 11 years, the time it takes for a dusky shark to mature, some 13,700 large sharks, which would otherwise have eaten many young duskies, have been netted off Natal, and for the early 1980s he predicts a marked increase in mature duskies, as well as a general shark increase, on both sides of the nets, of 2.8 million since 1966. Officials from the Natal Anti-Shark Measures Board defend their nets and deny that duskies are increasing or shad decreasing, claiming that the sharks' long migrations make nonsense of local statistics, but the State Shad Commission has dismissed the Board's view and reported unanimously on the side of fishermen, conservationists, the ORI and anglers – including big-shark anglers, who for lack of game have disbanded their own organisation, the 1000 Club (though now that the duskies are coming of age they might want to re-form). This is yet another example of the unforeseen damage that can result from inadequately researched measures.

The issue of marine turtle farming is still one that is strongly and hotly debated, and this was true of the turtle meeting convened by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Washington last October, when 300 people from 40 countries worldwide, including China, discussed turtle conservation. Feeling was strongly against farming, reports Sue Wells of TRAFFIC. The Cayman Turtle Farm had taken no eggs from the wild since March 1978, but it had taken the farm 15 years (when wild eggs were collected annually) to become self-sufficient. Moreover there is a near certainty that farms encourage and expand the market for turtle products. The USA has banned imports of all turtle products both from farmed and wild stock. The Conference produced a conservation strategy for turtles and a mammoth list of 93 action projects. It also urged strongly that all marine turtle-trading nations

**Shark Nets
Cause
Fish Decrease**

**Turtles
and
Trade**

not members of CITES – they include Japan, Mexico, Singapore and Thailand – should join immediately and without reservations, and that France and Italy should withdraw their reservations (which permit their turtle leather industries to continue). The abstentions from CITES are understandable when you learn that there is an increasing trade in tortoiseshell between South Asian countries, notably Indonesia and the Philippines, and Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong. That there are huge gaps in our knowledge of the turtles was unanimously agreed, and also that many previous assumptions are not valid even for all populations of one species. Some management techniques were questioned. For example the practice of removing eggs from a nest to incubate them artificially to ensure greater safety and hatching success could, it seems, be most damaging. According to Dr Nicholas Mrosovsky, the temperature at which the eggs are incubated affects the sex of the hatchlings, and much more needs to be known about the sex ratio in wild populations and the temperature of incubating eggs in the wild. One delegate suggested that if all eggs were to be hatched artificially we could unknowingly produce a male-only population!

Ecuador has announced an ambitious programme of new national parks and reserves, to add to its one major and highly successful national park in the Galapagos Islands, reports our FPS Consultant, Fernando I. Ortiz-Crespo.

New Parks The new ones are all on the mainland: four national parks,
in two natural reserves, and two national recreation areas.
Ecuador The parks are Sangay, a 5400-m volcano on the eastern
 flanks of the Andes; Cotopaxi, the dominating snow-
 capped peak (5806m) south-east of Quito; Yasuni, in the

Amazonian plain south of the Napo river; and Machalilla, on the Pacific coast north of Guayaquil. The Sangay park, an area of spectacular mountains and jungles, with two active volcanoes (Sangay and Tungurahua) and a snow-covered caldera, Mt Altar, descends through mist-shrouded foothills to the Amazon lowlands where woolly tapirs and spectacled bears still roam. One of the ecological reserves, Cotacachi-Cayapas, also ranges from high mountain to lowland plain, from the summit of the 4900-m Mount Cotacachi to near sea-level, and, being almost on the equator, embraces an amazingly diverse range of plants and animals. The danger with such an ambitious programme is that unless sufficient funds can be found to manage, equip and protect these areas they will be, like so many other protected areas in Latin America (and elsewhere), ‘paper parks’, where squatters move in, poaching becomes widespread, and trees are destroyed for firewood. Ecuador is the most densely populated Latin American country, with a population growth of 3.3 per cent, and ‘why should land be preserved for animals when people are starved of it?’ is an obvious cry. It is considerably easier to defend and protect a group of islands like the Galapagos, which Ecuador has done superbly, and perhaps easier too, Ecuadorians fear, to get international support such as Galapagos has enjoyed. Much international help, both in money and expertise, will certainly be needed to establish these new reserved areas properly.