

ORYX

Vol. XVI No.2

October 1981

Notes and News

The World Conservation Strategy was launched in Britain and also world-wide in March 1980. Since then, despite some talk about high-level official meetings, the British Government has done precisely nothing. In desperation therefore a consortium of two Government-supported agencies – the Nature Conservancy Council and Countryside Commission – and one non-governmental organisation (ngo), WWF/UK, have come together to finance a British response. Seven reports on various aspects of the WCS as it affects Britain should be ready by the end of the year, and will then be discussed by groups of experts for another period of months, and launched at a conference in late 1982, or '83. ffPS and most other ngo-s, while happy to see something happen at last, are still unhappy that the Government is not more directly involved. They fear that a government that sweeps the recommendations of its own Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution under the carpet will not hesitate to ignore the results of the present exercise.

Britain and the WCS

The Wildlife and Countryside Bill emerged from the House of Commons as another typically untidy British compromise. Thanks to an emergency in the parliamentary time-table, the environment and agriculture ministers were forced to do a shotgun deal which, while an improvement on what was offered before, is still profoundly unsatisfactory to wildlife conservationists. The good points are that landowners must now notify the Nature Conservancy Council before taking any action that might affect an SSSI – such as draining, ploughing, felling, spraying or fertilising; marine reserves will now extend out to the limits of territorial waters, and commercial inshore fishing will be controlled within the reserves; the effect of upholding the Sandford amendment will be that farmers who take conservation measures will be more likely to qualify for grants; maps are to be produced showing the areas of moorland seriously at risk in national parks; bats are fully protected and farmers must restore footpaths within two weeks. One the other hand, SSSI

Compromise in the Countryside

protection is still lamentably weak, apart from the tripwire of notification, and there are no penalties for ignoring that. The Environmental Secretary still has no powers to stop a landowner acting if agreement with the NCC is not reached, and even when it is there is no guarantee that the NCC will have the funds either to compensate the landowner or buy him out. At least one naturalists' trust has been warned that it should be preparing to pick up the tab if a certain Grade I site comes on the market. A Government that took countryside preservation seriously would not allow such a weak bill to go through. The agriculture lobby is clearly still far more influential in the Cabinet than the environment lobby.

The Belgian Government's ratification of CITES closes one of the most serious gaps in the endangered species trade. It is also a triumph for WWF/Belgium, IUCN and the European Environmental Bureau, for Belgium's reluctance to join the treaty made nonsense of much of the efforts of other European countries to control wildlife imports. In 1980 an estimated \$30 million worth of CITES-listed animals and animal products passed through Belgium, including 50 tonnes of openly declared ivory (much more went unrecorded, being 'in transit'). It was also a centre for the fur, pet and zoo trades, freely importing primates and parrots of all kinds, spotted-cat furs, whale products, tortoiseshell. Now too the Netherlands and Luxembourg will also join, having been prevented by provisions in the Benelux treaty despite having completed ratification procedures. Only two EEC countries, Ireland and Greece, now remain outside CITES. Ireland's wildlife trade is negligible – although Ireland could be used now as a replacement for Belgium – but Greece has always been a major wildlife trading centre, and should be brought in, and likewise Spain, a prospective EEC member. After these only six key ratifications are needed for CITES to become virtually impregnable: Austria, Colombia, Mexico, Singapore, Sudan and Thailand.

Egypt plans to maintain Israel's fine record of protecting the wildlife of Sinai: this is the good news as the transfer of the peninsula from Israel to Egypt is affected – the last large strip along the Aqaba coast is due to be returned in April 1982. Before Israel won control of Sinai in 1967, the increasingly well-armed Bedouin in the region were able, despite conservation decrees, to hunt and fish freely, severely reducing Nubian ibex and dorcas gazelle, wiping out the Sinai leopard (which now exists only in a relict population near the Dead Sea), dynamiting the fish and thus some of the famous Red Sea reefs in the Gulf of Aqaba, and netting quail on the Mediterranean coast. After 1967 General Avraham Yoffe requisitioned large areas for his Israeli Nature Reserves Authority, and enforced strict laws against hunting endangered species, quail-netting, and commercial (as opposed to subsistence) fishing. Various inducements kept the Bedouin largely out of the reserves, and the wildlife recovered rapidly. Now, with the transfer to Egypt

**A Key
Ratification for
CITES**

**Egypt
Carries On
in Sinai**

approaching, several conservation organisations and agencies, notably the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the New York-based Holy Land Conservation Fund, have been helping the new Egyptian Wildlife Service to draw up a national conservation programme. Western-style conservation, with its listing of endangered species and gazettement of reserves, is now catching on in the Middle East, with aid and advice from IUCN/WWF. Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Oman have recently set up programmes that could be models for the rest of the region, and indeed all are drawing on the traditional Bedouin 'hema' system of jealously guarded, rationally exploited reserves, the system that protected their scant desert resources when most of Western Europe was still being civilised by Rome. If this spirit can be revived in Egypt, perhaps the Israeli experiment can even be improved upon, by putting the Bedouin back into the reserves as wardens of the wildlife – the technique already being used by Oman to reintroduce the Arabian oryx.

The Alaska Lands Conservation Act, signed by President Carter last December, is remarkable not only for the vast areas of wilderness and their wildlife that it conserves, but also for its contribution to saving the culture and way of life of the native people – Aleuts, Eskimos and Indians. Traditional hunting is to be allowed in seven national parks – snowmobiles and motorboats count as 'traditional' – because native culture would be destroyed if hunting were stopped. There is also a practical point. The value of the resources taken in hunting was put at between 30 and 50 million dollars a year, and, as one Congressman pointed out, 'If we substitute food stamps . . . even if they are adequate, even if we can get the food up there, we have destroyed their culture'. The fact that the people lived off the land for thousands of years and it is still of national park status is in itself a tribute to their use of it. It is particularly interesting that in all the arguments it was conservationists who supported the hunting, sport hunters who opposed it.

**People
as Well as
Wildlife**

It has long been an anomaly of British law that anybody, whether competent or not, can open and run a zoo. While this uncaring attitude of the authorities mainly concerns the welfare field, in that some small zoos have operated with standards far below the needs and comfort of their captives, conservationists have been affected too, for any practice that results in a needless drain on wild stocks must be bad. Most of the larger and some smaller zoos make a positive contribution to conservation by breeding stocks, but all too many smaller ones neither breed nor have adequate welfare standards. For many years the Zoo Federation, which shares our fFPS chairman, Lord Craigton, has been battling to bring zoos under legislative control. Now as we go to press the Zoos Licensing Bill needs only the Royal Assent to become law. In future local authorities will have powers to licence zoos and safari parks, and to carry out inspections to ensure that minimum

**Zoos
Controlled
At Last**

welfare standards are maintained. The welfare societies complain that the Bill's provisions are not stringent enough, but all agree that the new Act is much better than no act. This is of course the typical British method of toe-in-the-door legislation. When the principle of government intervention is first agreed, the degree of intervention is minimal. Soon it becomes apparent that the minimal is not good enough and pressure builds up for stronger measures. This is sure to happen again here.

Little news has come out of Burma about wildlife and its conservation, but now the Burmese Government is embarking on a three-year programme, with aid from UNDP/FAO which, among other things, will establish a Division of

**Conservation
Moves
in Burma**

Nature Conservation in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests. 'Prospects seem encouraging', says John Blower who has been appointed chief technical adviser to help in preparing legislation, starting an education centre near Rangoon, developing the Mt Popa National Park and making feasibility studies for other reserves and sanctuaries. Burma is still remarkably rich in forests and wildlife, more so than any of her neighbours, thanks to relatively low population and low exploitation of natural resources. Natural forest covers some 57 per cent of the country, and wildlife includes tiger, possibly still Sumatran rhino, elephant, clouded leopard, thamin, banteng, gaur, takin, musk deer and red panda. Moreover, wildlife is economically important, notably elephants. Timber is Burma's second largest export earner and depends on elephants – the cheapest and most effective 'loggers' in hill country and doing far less damage than machinery. To keep up the 3500 work force, 6000 elephants have to be captured for training every year.

The numbers of European otters have gone from bad to worse in recent years in most West European countries, but at the Species Survival Commission meetings in May Dr Sheila Macdonald produced a heart-warming report from

**Where Otters
Still
Flourish**

Portugal, where she and C.F. Mason had investigated the situation in August 1980. They found that otters were widespread in central Portugal. Of the 90 sites they investigated, 70 per cent had otter signs – spraints and secretions. Of the 27 sites with no signs, four were on major rivers, six had hydroelectric dams, or reservoirs with no shelter for otters, and at five pollution was sufficient to affect the fish and other otter food. The good numbers they attributed at least partly to the fact that agricultural chemicals are not much used in Portugal – at least not yet. But, they suggest that if (or when) Portugal joins the EEC, agricultural outputs are likely to be increased – at present Portugal produces only 25 per cent of the average for EEC countries – and pesticides are then likely to be much more widely and intensively used. Moreover the management of waterways will conform to EEC standards and land use may alter, all changes that could bode ill for the otters.

In the Amazon plain in Brazil at least a hundred species of fish are adapted to eating fruits and seeds, and depend on the flood-plain forests for their survival. As fish are a major protein food for Amazon people, the survival of these fish is vital for man too. If the forests go the fish go. Every year in June the rivers overflow, flooding 40,000 sq. miles of forest until November. The fish go in with the floods, swim about among the tree trunks, and even wait under trees for fruit or seeds to drop. 'You hear a pop when the seed pod explodes, a plop when a seed hits the water and a gulp as a fish swallows it', says Dr Michael Goulding of the Brazilian Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas da Amazonia, which is researching on these fish, aided by WWF/IUCN. The fish have even adapted to their diet by developing molars to crunch nuts, and bloated stomachs in which they store up a fat reserve to see them through the dry months, December to May. All three types of Amazon rivers have these fish – blackwater (highly acidic and opaque), clearwater (poor in nutrients) and whitewater (turbid but rich in food), and many of the species are very abundant. Many start life in the rich whitewater river floodplains and then spend the rest of their lives in the blackwater and clearwater river floods, feeding on plant and animal matter.

The Fruit-eating Fish

Deep-sea mining is on us. What does this mean for the life in the sea? In the past five years international consortia have spent \$300m. testing and exploring for the rich harvest of manganese nodules lying on the seabed, especially in a 5-million sq-mile rectangle of the Pacific south of Hawaii. The football-sized nodules are sucked up by tubes lowered from ships. At the same time, of course, the tubes suck up large quantities of water and deep-sea organisms about which nothing is known, and also stir up a vast quantity of sediment. An extremely thorough environmental impact statement (EIS) by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has given the go-ahead for exploratory mining as likely to have 'little or no potentially harmful effects that must be closely monitored', but at the same time has identified several possible effects for investigation: the effect of stirring up sediment which could smother the deep-sea life; the effect on the fish larvae of returning the waste water at the surface; and most serious, whether the small bits of metal discharged in the waste water are taken up by the zooplankton and get into the oceanic food chain – and so into man. Safeguards are thought to be possible, for example a long discharge tube that would leave the sediment about halfway down. For the USA deep-sea mining for manganese, cobalt, nickel and copper may be less harmful on balance than further mining on land, especially as the Secretary of the Interior has announced his intention to exploit minerals in wilderness areas. But the Reagan administration's blatant determination to collar the deep-sea mining for the USA – one Republican statement said that 'insufficient attention (has been) paid to gaining early American access to it' – and the US disruption of the international conference on the Law of the Sea, threaten all proper controls, not only in deep-sea

Wildlife and Deep-Sea Mining

mining, but also fishing and waste dumping. Will the other 152 nations decide to forget the USA and formalise the treaty anyway?

How did elderly and highly respectable Victorian ladies and gentlemen succeed in devastating the environment of Ceylon, as they used to call Sri Lanka? It was in the middle of the last century that the British Government of

Those the day ordained in effect that the native forests of the
Devastating Tea highlands of Ceylon should be destroyed to make way for
Drinkers tea plantations. In the past twenty years their successors
 ruling Sri Lanka have carried the work along by reducing
 the forest area from 45 to 22 per cent of the land surface.

The net result of this ill-conceived 'development' has been soil erosion, dried-up streams and rivers and flooded lowlands, because the silt that should have been nourishing upland forests has instead blocked up lowland waterways. Although Sri Lanka now has 121,000 hectares of planted forests, mostly teak, eucalypts, mahogany, pine and casuarina, this has only been gained at the cost of destroying natural forests, of which only 14,000 sq km remain. Now however, the Sri Lanka State Timber Corporation is setting about remedying the faults of their, and our, predecessors. Although reforestation is not strictly one of their activities, they are devoting part of their profits each year to replanting critical areas that have been deforested, using, as far as possible native species, some of which have not so far been extensively planted. In particular they are planting up degraded tea lands, where the tea-drinkers have caused the loss of practically all the natural productivity, and only coarse, ungrazable grasses cover the nakedness of the land.

Senegal, says Dr Jacques Verschuren, has without doubt the best national parks in West Africa, and the Niokolo-Koba park, with nearly a million hectares of natural vegetation, deserves to be classed as one of the ten best in all

Senegal's doing well; there are now more than a thousand Lord
Disappearing Derby's eland compared with some 400 four years ago.
Elephants The exception is the elephant, and he and André Dupuy,
 Director of the National Parks, now report that poaching

is decimating the herds. With careful protection numbers had increased to nearly 500 in 1975, but the boom in ivory prices that year started a boom in poaching. This is very difficult to control with the park's enormously long boundaries and an international frontier on one side, and well-equipped poachers, with automatic firearms and sophisticated radiocontrol equipment. Poaching is for ivory; the four to six tons of meat per elephant is left to rot. Between May 1980 and May 1981 counts showed that numbers (already low) were down from 225 to 170, mostly females and young; not a single large tusker survived. A quarter of the population had been killed. Even elephants close to tourist camps have been harassed, and inevitably the survivors are very wild and shun the open savanna; their last refuge is the gallery forest. The park

The last tusker in Niokolo-Koba? This elephant has now been killed.
Jacques Verschuren



guards are engaged in a dangerous running battle, risking their lives; last year two Niokolo-Koba guards were awarded the newly created IUCN medal for courage defending wildlife. The Senegal authorities have appealed to the people to put an end to the poaching, and shortly the sale of ivory products is to be banned in Senegal. But if human greed cannot be controlled is it not time to stop all trade in ivory everywhere and give the elephants a chance?

*A full account of Senegal's parks by these two authors appeared in *Oryx*, July 1977, page 36.

'An extremely versatile, multi-purpose, self-generating heavy-duty machine of great strength, with the delicate sensitiveness of a ballet dancer . . . readily adaptable to all kinds of terrain and work conditions including the capability of

How to Live with the Elephants

working in four feet of water, requiring a minimum of maintenance, able to work efficiently on all grades of a limitless fuel that grows on trees, and with a phenomenal built-in memory': that recent description of the Asian elephant is by an anonymous Burmese author. And with the current oil situation (and prices) the Asian elephant as a working animal looks more attractive than ever, reinforcing throughout India and South-east Asia the people's very real cultural and historic ties with this versatile animal. But working elephants need a constant renewal of the supply from the wild; wild elephants need space, and this means conflict with ubiquitous man. Jeff McNeely and M.K. Sinha, in *Parks* magazine, discuss the problem and describe some typical Asian situations. In Assam, where every year in June the Brahmaputra floods the Kaziranga National Park, 1150 elephants migrate out to the hills, just at the time that the people living on the edge of the park are planting their rice – result: damage and even three or four villagers killed each year. In Sri Lanka elephants, forced into small inadequate pockets of forest, raid the surrounding farms at night – result: shootings, wounded, dangerous animals and again human deaths. And so on. What to do? The IUCN/SSC Asian Elephant Group is working on a sensible idea, that of managed elephant

ranges, by which the entire range of a population would be managed for the elephants, but allowing some human activity. Sometimes the core of the range would be a national park or reserve, and the rest of it, the buffer zone, would be managed to maintain the elephants but with controlled human use; or the range might involve two or more reserves or protected areas connected by forested corridors to allow the elephants to migrate, or a water catchment area round a dam, where, if human use were uncontrolled, the result would be a silted-up reservoir. As elephants generally prefer disturbed habitats, this would still allow a wide range of human activities, including selective logging, traditional subsistence hunting, livestock grazing and even slash-and-burn farming at a sustained yield level – provided it was all carefully controlled. The result could be beneficial to both man and beast, and enormously beneficial to the environment.

Tourists flock in increasing numbers to watch the gray whales on their breeding grounds off the 800-mile long Baja California peninsula in Mexico, and the disturbance is such that it could drive the whales to less suitable areas to breed. Exploratory drilling for natural gas and oil, and commercial development round the lagoons are other disturbing factors. Gray whales, which were nearly exterminated by 19th century whalers, but recovered after this whaling was banned, perform the longest whale migration – a 10,000-mile tour from the Arctic to Mexico and back. They enter the breeding lagoons in December through a narrow channel only seven metres deep; this is believed to act as a barrier to predatory sharks in pursuit of the new-born calves. The Mexican Government has refused Japanese requests to take gray whales in the lagoons and has recently closed the lagoons to commercial tour boats. But the only safe protection is a national park for the whales, and WWF is doing research to this end now.

**Tourism
Threatens the
Gray Whales**

Two reports in a recent issue of *Birds* show the immense value of properly planned conservation research: one on the threat to the roseate tern in its African winter quarters, the other on the management of reedbeds in Britain.

**Research
Gives
Results**

Fewer than 1000 pairs of roseate terns now nest in Britain and Ireland, three-quarters of them in RSPB reserves, and these represent the whole European stock, apart from a handful in Brittany. Fifteen years ago there were 3500 pairs. The weak point in the bird's annual cycle lies not so much in Europe as its winter quarters in Africa, especially Ghana, where RSPB-financed research has shown that boys catch them, very easily, either to eat, or often just for sport. The birds are not, however, regarded as an important food resource, and the RSPB's research project should enable educational measures to be taken to stop this dangerous drain on the British and European roseate terns each winter. The reedbed survey showed that there are still 109 reedbeds of five acres or more in England and Wales, of which no

fewer than 40 are already nature reserves. These are the sole breeding places of the bittern, marsh harrier, bearded tit and Savi's warbler. Reed-warblers too, though not rare, are virtually confined to reedbeds. Since reedbeds are a vulnerable habitat, liable to scrub up on drying out, or to be reclaimed for agriculture, and no new large reedbeds are likely to be allowed to form in future, everything depends on preserving those we have. Now that we know both the scale of the problem and how to manage reedbeds, there is no excuse for losing more of the 109 we still have.

Bats in Britain

The Wildlife and Countryside Bill gives bats greater protection than the laws of any other nation. Bats may not be killed, injured or taken without license, and the places they occupy may not be damaged. It is illegal to move any bat colony without prior notification to the Nature Conservancy Council, allowing reasonable time for NCC to advise on whether the colony should be moved and if so how. The only exception is a bat colony in the living area of a dwelling house. But as 80 per cent of bats live in the roofs (which are not part of the living area) of houses, all these will now be protected.

Tobogganing Panda

Dr George Schaller, the WWF representative on the team that is investigating the giant panda situation in the wild at the request of the Chinese Government, reports that four-fifths of the Wolong reserve, which was selected for study as the least disturbed of the 10 panda reserves, is unsuitable for pandas. Wenchuan, where most early foreign expeditions obtained giant pandas for zoos and museums, no longer has any sizeable populations because most of the forests there have been cut for timber.

In the expedition's early weeks the problem was to live-trap some pandas and attach radio collars, not an easy proposition when even a glimpse of one was a major event. In March, however, two were finally trapped, sedated and collared, and one of the first discoveries was that they are extremely active at night. Their reaction to humans was also interesting. One adult female in a trap put on an initial display of plaintive howling and general despair, but when the door was finally opened she declined to leave for half an hour, and in the next two weeks returned to the trap three times and had to be released. Dr Schaller describes coming on the tracks of another panda:

'A subadult panda has travelled down a snow slope and I follow its tracks. Wherever there is a small clearing, without bamboo or brush, the panda toboggans downhill on its chest and belly, no doubt delighted with its winter sport. Howard (Quigley, of NYZS), who traced a different section of the animal's route, found a place where it had glissaded down, then walked back uphill to repeat its solitary game.'

WWF Office in Madagascar

WWF has set up an office in Tananarive, and appointed Barthélemy Vaohita, formerly Inspector of Primary Education in Madagascar, in charge with responsibility for drawing up projects in consultation with the Government. The basic programme includes an educational one aimed at teachers in the training colleges. WWF has pledged \$100,000 to start the conservation programme, which is fully endorsed by the Madagascar Government.

Acronyms – For acronyms used in this issue of *Oryx* see page 124.

Tanzania Needs More Protected Forest

Tanzania has preserved large areas of grassland and woodland but is short on forest, said the Minister for Natural Resources and Tourism, the Hon. S.A. Ole Saibull speaking to the 4th East African Wildlife Symposium, the Proceedings of which have been published recently. Only two per cent of the country is forested, and these forests are vital. Moreover, they are unique in their large numbers of endemic species, many of which may prove valuable to mankind. 'We must conserve them now . . . We cannot bring them back'. Unfortunately they occur in areas where population is dense and so pressure on them is intense. What to conserve? It was urgent, said the Minister, for Tanzania to find out what was there, 'even though identifying plants and insects may be less exciting than counting elephants'. He suggested that Tanzania should create a new category of 'conservation estate', of Strict National Nature Reserves, to include all areas of biological or natural importance.

New Parks for Cameroon

Cameroon has announced plans for three new national parks covering 4000 square miles of rain forest, each of a distinctive type and equal in total to 10 per cent of the world's present protected rain forests. Together they will provide sanctuary for 26 primates, half the species in all Africa. The 350-sq-mile Korup NP, a coastal area on the Nigerian border, will protect several rare and endangered mammals, including drill *Mandrillus leucophaeus*, Preuss's red colobus *Colobus badius preussi* and L'Hoest's guenon *Cercopithecus lhoesti*, as well as forest elephant *Loxodonta africana cyclotis* and the endemic Cameroon rockfowl *Picathartes oreas*. The Dja is a medium-altitude Congo-type humid forest harbouring lowland gorillas *Gorilla g. gorilla*, and the Pangar-Djerem is mainly humid evergreen forest but also contains tracts of semi-deciduous forest and acacia and broadleaf savanna. Oil prospecting is a major threat to Cameroon's forests because the access roads that the companies cut open areas to settlement and slash-and-burn farming. Park status will probably not prevent prospecting, since oil is an important source of Cameroon's revenue and helps to make such an ambitious conservation programme possible, but will prevent any other use of the roads.

Grévy's Zebra in Kenya

Numbers of Grévy's zebra *Equus grevyi* in Kenya are now put at about 7000 by KREMU (Kenya Rangeland Monitoring Unit). This revised estimate does not necessarily reflect a change in numbers but rather a better coverage in the census transect flights, although numbers may have increased in the Samburu district. Poaching is negligible but competition with domestic stock is severe. Nothing is known about the migration routes or the dry-season ranges of the Grévy's, and research, which fFPS will help to support, is urgently needed. One problem in the Samburu district is that the Uaso Nyero, which formerly flowed year-round, now dries up in the dry season, the result of forest destruction in the catchment area. The animals translocated a few years ago from Samburu to Tsavo West National Park, where they had never been recorded, have not become established. One wandered into Tanzania and was shot.

Story of an Introduction

In 1970-72, 38 roan antelope *Hippotragus equinus* were taken from the Ithanga Hills, near Nairobi, where their habitat was about to be destroyed for farmland, and released in the Shimba Hills Reserve near the coast where roan had never occurred. The reserve was considered suitable because the congeneric sable antelope *H. niger* did occur there. By 1973 only eight roan survived – tick infections had accounted for some, and others had wandered out of the reserve. Numbers then rose to 22 in 1978 but dropped to 18 in 1980. The animals were in poor condition and recent troubles in the herd have ended in it dispersing. (See *Oryx*, June 1978, page 213).