

# ORYX

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## Notes and News

The Royal Society has expressed its strong opposition, as have many other conservation bodies including the FPS, to the proposal to establish an air base on the island of Aldabra, which it describes as "essentially the only island in the Indian Ocean still largely unaffected by man." As Roger Gaymer showed in an article on Aldabra in the last issue of ORYX, December 1966, the island, which is a coral atoll, offers unique possibilities for scientific investigation which could not be undertaken elsewhere, and an airbase would certainly mean the extermination of at least one bird, the flightless rail, and probably others, and decimation of the giant tortoises. The Royal Society is sending a scientific expedition to the atoll this summer.

### **Royal Society Opposes Aldabra Plan**

The eleventh-hour attempt to save the rarest of the Madagascar lemurs, the aye-aye, thought last year to number fewer than a dozen animals, is having remarkable success, thanks to the efforts of Dr.

### **Hope for the Aye-Aye in Madagascar**

Jean Jacques Petter and his assistant, M. Peyriras. Last year the Malagasy Government declared a small island, Nossi Mangabé, as a reserve—photographs of it were published in ORYX last August—and Dr. Petter and M. Peyriras have succeeded in transferring nine aye-ayes to the island where they appear to have settled happily; it has even been possible to film them, among other activities, making a nest. Dr. Petter has recently returned to Madagascar for a two-months' stay, but we hope to publish a full account of the operation in ORYX later this year. If the aye-aye can indeed be saved it will be a most dramatic example of how much can be achieved by determined people even in apparently hopeless circumstances. Perhaps the success of the project so far will persuade the Malagasy government to protect other unique species on the mainland, and to consider, as the resolution passed at the IUCN meeting in Lucerne last summer requested them to do, making a similar island reserve off the west coast for the preservation of the equally interesting fauna and flora of western Madagascar. The FPS

has allotted £1000 from the Revolving Fund to this Madagascar project which we consider one of the most hopeful and encouraging omens for the future.

A second female oryx calf was born in the captive World Herd at Phoenix, Arizona, on January 11. The parents are two of the animals presented to the World Wildlife Fund by the municipality of Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, and the calf therefore belongs

**Second Female  
Calf in  
Oryx Herd**

to WWF. Unfortunately, the male calf born last August, which had never thrived, died a few days before this second female was born, so that the total of the herd remains at 16, of which seven belong to the FPS. The FPS has also heard from HH Sheikh Jassim Bin Hamad Althani, of Qatar, that two male and two female calves have been born in his captive herd, a photograph of which appeared in ORYX last August, and more births are expected.

“On a journey from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria last year, a distance of something like 3000 miles, our party of six capable field observers saw fewer than a dozen live kangaroos, but over 100 carcasses or other remains beside the road,” writes Graham Pizzey from Australia. His journey, crossing the continent from south to north, spanned the two main kangaroo-shooting states: New South Wales where the only control is that

**Why  
Kangaroos are  
Not Seen**

the state government requires shooters to be licensed, and Queensland where there is not even that amount of control. In the financial year 1965-66 Australia exported more than 10 million pounds weight of kangaroo meat and probably sold a similar quantity, mainly for pet food, on the home market. Not surprisingly conservationists think that the kangaroo meat trade has got out of hand and are urging that kangaroo culling should be restricted to government shooters and done on a scientific basis; it would then be possible to thin out numbers where the animals are damaging pastures and stock, leaving them in peace where they are uncommon, and put a stop to abuses such as the shooting of kangaroos along roadsides which has effectively denied most Australians a sight of wild kangaroos over the last eight years. Field studies on the red kangaroo carried out over the past five or six years by CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation) indicate that the population of red kangaroos in south-west New South Wales may have declined by as much as 75 per cent. in the four-year drought that ended late in 1966; they have also nailed a number of popular fallacies. One is that kangaroos are not migratory as farmers often claim—they say that kangaroos can smell green grass miles away and move in immediately after rain; they are in fact surprisingly local: one old male was shot coming to the waterhole at which he had been marked with a reflective collar for field identification five years before.

The destruction of trees by elephants which is such a severe problem in Uganda's Murchison Falls park and Kenya's Tsavo, has now become a serious one in the Serengeti, in Tanzania, as well. Elephants

### **Elephants Damaging the Serengeti**

first invaded the park, coming from both north and south, in 1958; a count last year showed that there were 2,200. Damage to the vegetation started in 1962, and in 1964 Dr. P. E. Glover discovered that in the northern part of the park destruction was going on faster than regeneration. Counts of the acacias *A. xanthophloeia* on six miles of the Seronera River valley, where 836 trees have been destroyed in four years, suggested that the present generation of large trees would all be destroyed in four or five years. One tree recently pushed over by an elephant has been re-erected with a small winch and is propped upright until its roots get a new hold, and it is hoped that with a more powerful winch it will be possible to save more. In his half-yearly report the director of the Serengeti Research Institute, Dr. Hugh Lamprey, says that the situation has become urgent and may call for management decisions within two years. Work is being done now on measuring elephant population trends and determining the rates of tree destruction in different areas.

The main factor responsible for the elephant damage in the Tsavo National Park in Kenya is man's interference in the form of artificial water supplies, is the conclusion of Sylvia K. Sikes who has been studying elephant problems in East Africa. The

### **The Cure for Damage in the Tsavo?**

beginning of the story goes back to the building of the Mombasa-Nairobi railway, when artificial surface water had to be supplied. This attracted the water-dependent larger animals, especially elephants—a full grown adult male elephant needs between 20 and 30 gallons a day. Once the railway was built the development of the country brought human encroachment on the elephants' migration routes and their dry season refuges, with the result that they took up "dry season" residence, coming to drink at night and leaving silently before dawn so that they were rarely seen, and the situation was severely aggravated when the Kenya National Park authorities provided permanent artificial water-holes in the Tsavo. The elephants now stayed all the time in an area where the vegetation was not good enough for their needs. The damage to the habitat was the inevitable result. To remedy the situation now, the first essential, says Miss Sikes—and most other workers would agree with her—is the control of fire, "the most devastating single influence in the area"; in addition, she says, the artificial water supplies should be completely closed in the dry season to drive the elephants from the park, coupled with selective cropping outside the park boundaries. Drastic measures, as Miss Sikes agrees. More important, are they practicable?

The Meru game reserve in northern Kenya, to the east of Mt. Kenya, has been declared a national park; the government received a donation of £5000 from the Zoological Society of Frankfurt immediately on its declaration. This is Kenya's sixth national park,

**Sixth  
National Park  
in Kenya**

and covers some 336 square miles. It was set aside as a game reserve in 1959 by the Meru County Council, which was the first non-government body in Kenya to recognise the necessity for wildlife conservation. Last year six white rhinos, brought from South Africa, were released in the park and are reported to have settled down well. The Game Department has drawn up plans for removing black rhinos from areas where they are not wanted, such as the neighbourhood of settlements, or where there is not enough water for them, to the parks or other areas where they will be safe. For their first transfer operations they received a grant of £1000 from the East African Wildlife Society to hire a helicopter, and three black rhinos were drug-darted and transferred, two from the Nyeri Forest and one from near Ngong. The helicopter is invaluable for the job because it greatly shortens the time needed to search for the animals.

Only fifteen years ago there were serious doubts whether the animals in the Luangwa South Game Reserve, in Zambia, would ever recover from the over-hunting and poaching that had decimated their numbers.

**Cropping for  
Meat  
in Zambia**

To-day, says the latest *Zambian Game and Fisheries Annual Report*, as a result of effective protection, waterbuck, kudu, buffalo, elephant and hippo are all so abundant that overgrazing is severely damaging the vegetation, and the problem is to reduce their numbers. It was to cope with this situation that Zambia initiated the game cropping scheme, described in *ORYX*, April, 1966, which is now working very successfully, and bringing supplies of good much-needed meat to the towns. The selected animals are killed with a Cap-Chur humane killer which brings instant death without disturbing the herds, transported to a central abattoir and the meat deep-frozen for sale. This means that the cropping is done on a scientific basis, the herds benefit, and game conservation can be seen to be making a direct contribution to human welfare. Unfortunately the story is less happy for other animals in Zambia, and some horrifying figures are quoted for both red and black lechwe. As a result of commercial poaching, the black lechwe, which is found only in Zambia, has been reduced from 150,000 in 1934 to 4,000 to-day, and the red lechwe from 250,000 to 24,000. Even more serious is the fact that the indiscriminate methods of poachers, who kill pregnant females or calves without hesitation, means that some herds of red lechwe are now 90 per cent. male, so that their value as breeding herds is much less than appears and may be dangerously low. Combined exercises by police and game department over the past three years to

curb the poaching especially of the red lechwe have had some success. Because the lechwe live in swamps, aircraft are almost essential—the last exercise employed seven and a helicopter—and it was for this that the FPS last year donated half the cost of an aeroplane from the Revolving Fund—the other half came from the Dulverton Trust through the World Wildlife Fund.

Last summer the 500 square miles of the Gir Forest, in north-west India, was gazetted as the Gir Wild Life Sanctuary, with a superintendent in charge. The number of lions in the Gir at the last census

**Gir Forest  
Becomes  
a Sanctuary**

in 1963 was estimated to be 285, and the Indian Wild Life Board is now pressing for another census to be done, and also for the sanctuary to be upgraded to a national park. Mr. E. P. Gee reports that a system started in 1963 of paying compensation to villagers for domestic stock killed by lions seems to be having success. Now, when the killing of a domestic buffalo, bullock or cow within 200 yards of the village has been verified, about half the value of the dead animal is paid to the owner in cash. Since this system began the poisoning of carcasses with rat poison to destroy the lions has stopped.

Keoladeo Ghana, 7000 acres of marsh and open woodland, is one of the finest waterbird sanctuaries in India, and also harbours larger animals, including blackbuck, nilgai, chital, sambar, hog deer and leopard. Only a morning's drive from Delhi, and 36

**How to  
Destroy a  
Sanctuary**

miles from Agra and the Taj Mahal, it could be a major tourist attraction—if it can survive. Four scientists, who have been studying the reserve over the past two years, George B. Schaller, J. Juan Spillett, Joel E. Cohen and Rames C. De, describe their findings in the *IUCN Bulletin* and point out the dangers. Most serious is the severe over-grazing and trampling as a result of the large numbers of domestic livestock, especially buffalos, allowed in the reserve. Villagers not only poach the deer, but remove grass and water plants (which they dry for livestock fodder), burn charcoal and collect firewood; 36 wood collectors are permitted to remove dead wood, but growing trees are felled, and in one evening alone 15 illegal loads of wood were seen leaving the sanctuary. The problems of conserving Keoladeo Ghana are very much the problems of reserves all over India, and they cry out for a firm decision to stop this wasting away of great national assets before it is too late. Quite apart from the intrinsic value of her wildlife, India is one of the few countries left in south-east Asia with sufficient wild animals to attract tourists in large numbers. India's problems are immense, but it is in her long-term interest to find other means of satisfying local villagers' needs for firewood and fodder and concentrate on building up this great asset in the few areas left to it.

There is encouraging news of progress in establishing the Awash national park, in Ethiopia, some 200 kilometres east of Addis Ababa.

**A New National  
Park  
in Ethiopia**

This is a small park of about 800 square kilometres with what the Senior Game Warden, Mr. John Blower, calls "a worthwhile nucleus population of several major game species." They include about 2000 oryx, Soemmering gazelle, greater and lesser kudu, ostrich, Chanler's reedbeek, klipspringer, leopard, cheetah, and Grevy's zebra, and it is hoped to introduce Swayne's hartebeest, Somali wild ass and genenuk. The warden's house and other buildings have been completed, and an airstrip and 150 kms. of access tracks prepared. A major problem has been to move the Danakil and other nomadic pastoralists and their livestock out of the park area, but following a visit by the Emperor to the park the process of removal, and re-settlement elsewhere, was begun. The Game Department is also doing surveys in the Omo and in the Gambella area near the Sudan border, where last year the Nile lechwe (Mrs. Gray's kob) was found for the first time; it will then be possible to decide which of these shall be declared a national park and which a game reserve. Work has also begun in the proposed Simien national park, the primary purpose of which is to protect the walia ibex, with the arrival of a former member of the US National Parks Service to act as Warden. At the end of the year Dr. Bernhard Nievergelt, of Switzerland, an authority on the European ibex, will start a 12-month study of the walia financed by a grant for the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research.

The Hong Kong Government has recognised the need to set aside areas for conservation in its steadily dwindling open countryside and has appointed a Provisional Council for the Use and Conservation of

**Hong Kong  
Plans for  
Conservation**

the Countryside, with the Director of Agriculture and Fisheries, Mr. E. H. Nichols, as chairman. The interests of wildlife are represented on the Council by Professor J. G. Phillips, Professor of Zoology, and Professor L. B. Thrower, Professor of Botany in the University. Hong Kong was included in Dr. and Mrs. Lee Talbot's south-east Asia tour in 1965, and a Council such as this was one of their recommendations. As Professor Phillips and Dr. Marshall showed in an article in *ORYX*, August 1965, there are still surprisingly large unspoiled areas in Hong Kong and some interesting wildlife, but with building creeping outwards and increasing numbers of people making for the open spaces every week-end and for holidays, the need to demarcate certain areas for conservation is urgent.

The Bermuda government has established a Museum and Conservation Division in the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, with Mr. David Wingate at its head. One of its functions will be to set aside areas for nature reserves, forest reserves and natural recreational parks, with the aim of preserving a complete sample of Bermuda's flora, fauna, geological formations and natural scenery. The division will also take over the conservation programme for the Bermuda petrel, the cahow, which has been Mr. Wingate's particular care since its rediscovery in 1951, and of which there are still fewer than a hundred birds. The Natural History Museum is also to be expanded and given greater educational emphasis.

### **Nature Reserves in Bermuda**

The last remaining sizeable island in the Aleutians, the chain of islands that strings out from the tip of Alaska towards Russia, whose ecology has not been destroyed by either military operations or rats; a key island in the plan to restore the rare and endangered Aleutian Canada goose; the nesting place of large colonies of seabirds, and scheduled for protection under the Wilderness Act—these are the claims of Agattu to be left alone. But Agattu is wanted by the military for a nuclear detonation experiment. The Alaska Conservation Society, the National Audubon Society and others have gone into battle to stop the island being transferred to the Department of Defence. Recently President Johnson instructed Mr. Stewart Udall to begin a nationwide inventory of America's islands and their recreational, historical, scenic and natural values. If those of great natural value can be scheduled to remain so perhaps it will obviate collisions such as this one over Agattu. It is impossible to believe that an island like this has to be sacrificed for a nuclear detonation experiment.

### **Battle for an Aleutian Island**

Relentlessly hunted by man since the first days of white settlement, wolves have been exterminated in 39 of the 49 states in the USA. Today the only substantial timber wolf populations are in Alaska and northern Minnesota, with scattered remnants in Wisconsin, Michigan and possibly Montana, all in danger of extinction except for a small pack of about 20 animals on Isle Royale National Park in Lake Superior. The smaller red wolf, which formerly ranged all over the southern USA, is restricted to four or five states and appears to be gradually being replaced by the coyote. Richard Aulerich, writing in the *National Parks Magazine*, suggests that, as the wolf has now been forced into the most remote regions and is seldom a threat to domestic livestock, while in many areas deer and antelope have increased to the point of destroying their habitat, a

### **A Plan to Save the Wolves**



carefully managed wolf population could be an aid in the control of big game, and they might be reintroduced into certain national parks. The story of the wolves on Isle Royale, where they have been the principal factor in keeping a herd of moose in balance with their habitat, suggests that this is perfectly feasible.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game has started a study in the Bering Straits to develop methods of marking polar bears in order to collect information on their life history and ecology, especially seasonal movements and population fluctuations.

**Finding Facts**  
**About**  
**Polar Bears**

The study involves the use of planes to locate the bears and a helicopter to drug-dart them; numbered metal tags are fixed to one ear (for identification in case of recapture), and a coloured nylon marker on the other ear with a nylon collar round the bear's neck for identification in the field. This study is Alaska's response to the decision at the international polar bear conference in September, 1965, that each nation taking part should undertake research on its own territory. In the USA the Conservation Foundation has initiated a two-year study of polar bears with particular emphasis on the political, economic and social issues involved in their conservation, and the Canadian Wildlife Service is also making a survey of bears on the islands on the east side of Hudson Bay. The Survival Service Commission of IUCN is the co-ordinating body for all this research.

A new fauna protection law passed by the Brazilian Congress makes all wildlife the property of the State, except animals bred in captivity under licence. The Association for the Protection of Flora and Fauna

**New Protection**  
**Law**  
**in Brazil**

regards this as a most important step in conservation, enabling the Government to protect any wild animal or plant even on private land. The Act establishes a National Fauna Council to advise the Government. It forbids the shooting of animals larger than rabbits with .22 rifles, and all hunting with poisons, or from cars or planes is prohibited. The sale or export of live wild animals (other than those bred in captivity) is forbidden, although the export of skins and hides will be permitted despite representations from the Association. Brazil is an enormous country, and the difficulty will be to enforce the law, but at least it should be possible in the populous areas. "Not a perfect law," says the Association, "but a very important step for the protection of Brazilian fauna." In the state of Sao Paulo, an agreement has been reached, after much discussion, between the State government, the conservationists and the steel companies, who use much charcoal, not to cut virgin forests of more than 50 hectares in the valley of Paraiba, between Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, where such forests have been seriously depleted.



The Florida Audubon Society reckons that 50,000 alligators were poached in Florida last year. The American alligator is now a seriously endangered species—thanks largely to the trade for shoes, handbags,

**Poaching  
Threat to the  
Alligator**

belts, wallets, and other luxury articles. It is another case of the leopard and the fur coats. Because there is a fashion demand buyers will pay high prices, which in turn makes poaching enormously worthwhile. The remedy usually suggested—to persuade people not to buy the genuine skin goods but only “the excellent imitations”—is nearly useless, for no imitation ever is “excellent” to those to whom fashion is important, not even if it is indistinguishable. The problem of fashion in animal skins and furs is one that conservationists have not managed to solve. Much the most hopeful way would be if the animals required could be farmed, thus satisfying the demand and bringing the price down at the same time, so that for poachers the game was not worth the candle.

A new estimate of the world's grey seal population by E. A. Smith, published in the *Journal of Zoology*, gives a figure of 52,500, of which nearly two-thirds, 34,200 (65.1 per cent.) are in British waters, as are

**Grey Seal  
Numbers  
in the World**

the two largest single populations: 8400 in the Orkneys and 8200 on North Rona. Grey seals are divided into three main, quite separate populations—in the north-east Atlantic, the north-west Atlantic and the Baltic—with differently timed breeding cycles: March and April in north-east Canada and the Baltic, September to December in Great Britain. Grey seals are not protected in Canada, the Faeroes and Sweden, in all of which the Government pays bounties for dead seals; in Russia, Norway and Iceland, they are fully protected, and in Great Britain and elsewhere they are protected in the breeding season, although some controversial control has been carried out in recent years in the Farnes and the Orkneys. In Britain, where the grey seal has been protected since 1914, numbers increase steadily. But with a world population of 52,500 the grey seal is a rare species compared with most other seals, although it is abundant in certain areas of its restricted range.

Evidence of the increasing contamination of the countryside in Ireland by pesticides has mounted, and, as in Britain, the peregrine population has dropped disastrously—from about 170 pairs in 1948, and more in the early 1950's, to 70 pairs in 1962. This spring the Irish Society for the Protection of Birds is

**Pesticide  
Poisoning in  
Ireland**

undertaking a peregrine census. In Britain the serious decline—from 650 breeding pairs at the end of the war to 82 in 1961—was largely the result of toxic chemicals, and since 1963, with the voluntary ban on the use of organo-chlorines in spring seed dressings, the decline has at least halted.

In Ireland of 26 corpses examined, 21 contained organo-chlorine residues, mainly dieldrin—they included a foxhound, eleven pheasants, a kestrel, two thrushes, three pigeons, a bullfinch, four salmon and three trout, and in each case death was attributed to the poisoning. In addition, duck, peregrine and sea bird eggs showed traces of several organochlorine insecticides, including dieldrin, lindane, aldrin and DDT.

In Scotland everywhere except on Deeside golden eagles are raising very few young, although there has been no obvious decline in the number of adults. This is believed to be the result of toxic insecticides, residues of which have been found in both birds and eggs. The reason for Deeside being unaffected, suggests Adam Watson in the 1966 report of the Grouse and Moorland Ecology Unit, is that they feed mostly on grouse and hardly ever eat dead sheep, as eagles in the west of Scotland do, thus getting the insecticides from the sheep dips.

### **Effect of Poisons on Golden Eagles**

## **The Revolving Fund**

### **ELEPHANTS IN CEYLON, LEMURS IN MADAGASCAR, CRESTED IBIS IN JAPAN**

**A**T its meeting on January 3 Council agreed the following grants from the Revolving Fund: £1750 towards the Ceylon elephant survey, and £1000 each towards the projects to save the endangered fauna of Madagascar and the Japanese crested ibis. All three are World Wildlife Fund projects, certified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as scientifically valid, and given the highest priority by the World Wildlife Fund Trustees. The grant to the Ceylon Wild Life Society is for the purchase of two land rovers for the Ceylon National Parks, which will be made available to the team of American scientists who are making an ecological survey of the Ceylon elephant. Fewer than 1500 elephants remain in Ceylon, and numbers are rapidly diminishing as the habitat available to them steadily shrinks.

The unique fauna of Madagascar is the most seriously threatened of any of the world's specialised local faunas, the aye-aye, for instance, being down to something of the order of a dozen individuals. Here again the main danger is steady and continuous destruction of habitat. The grant goes towards enabling Dr. J-J. Petter, the leading expert on the Madagascan fauna and its conservation, to embark on a general conservation programme for this gravely endangered fauna. A note on the successful start that he has already made is on page 3.

The Japanese crested ibis is the rarest bird species in the world