

TROPICAL FORESTRY AND WILD LIFE

Summary of a lecture given on 17th July, 1951, to the Fauna Preservation Society by Mr. F. W. CHAMPION, O.B.E., late Indian Forest Service

On 17th July, 1951, the Society had the great pleasure of hearing a talk by Mr. F. W. Champion upon the relation, in tropical forests, between scientific forestry and wild life preservation. Mr. Champion during his twenty-five years as a forest officer in India, became famous for his knowledge of the jungle animals. He was a pioneer of wild life photography in India and his books *The Jungle in Sunlight and Shadow* and *With Camera in Tiger Land* will be well known to members of our Society. After leaving India in 1947 Mr. Champion took up a post in the forest service of Tanganyika Territory, where he is still serving.

Mr. Champion spoke first of the apparent conflict in interest between foresters and those whose wish it is to preserve wild life. For the resolution of this conflict there were two requisites, firstly some understanding by animal lovers who are not foresters, of the effect of animals on forest management and secondly sympathy by foresters for the animals in their forests.

Mr. Champion explained how great the damage done by animals in forests might be. Elephants sometimes pushed over valuable young trees in order to eat a little bark, or uprooted whole bamboo clumps. The African elephant was on the whole less destructive to forests than the Indian elephant, partly because he lived more outside them but also because he seemed to be more easily controlled by fencing. The Indian elephant regarded a fence as an insult which could not be tolerated. This was a very serious matter because where deer populations were high, game-proof fences were essential to secure natural regeneration of the forest.

Enlarging on the question of natural regeneration and referring to the sal forests of Northern India, Mr. Champion said that for a long time it had not been understood why, in the United Provinces, there was so little regeneration of the sal forest whereas in nearby Nepal there was no such difficulty. Eventually it was discovered that the chief cause of the failure of natural regeneration in the United Provinces lay in an excessive deer population, for deer nibbled and browsed the young trees. In Nepal the tiger was protected and the deer population small.

To prevent devastating hot weather fires, early burning of the undergrowth was a valuable expedient but it must be really

early and controlled. If it was done too late it could be most destructive to breeding birds and young animals. Fire lines also had to be burnt; the new grass which appeared afterwards was most valuable food for deer at a time when green grass was very scarce elsewhere. Following the deer came the carnivores.

The problem of natural regeneration of the sal forests, Mr. Champion said, had largely been solved by early control burning, by the judicious use of game-proof fences and by reasonable protection of the carnivores, tiger and leopard. The selective felling of trees within forests did not disturb the animals as much as might be expected. Deer would browse at night on the foliage of freshly felled trees; tiger tracks could often be seen in the morning along roads full of human activity during the day. Clear felling, that is the felling of all trees in a certain area, as opposed to selective felling, had not been much practised in India.

There were other animals which did damage besides elephants and deer. Porcupines would destroy whole rows of young trees. In India as a result of religious protection monkeys were often in grossly excessive numbers; in Africa baboons could be extremely destructive.

Turning to certain aspects of modern methods of forestry, Mr. Champion deplored the growing tendency to clear away the mixed tropical forest which nature had provided and to replace it by pure plantations of exotic conifers, because, so it was alleged, the latter grew faster. This was being done in Kenya on a large scale. The new conifers were liked neither by animals nor plants. Natural regeneration of the valuable native species caused far less disturbance to the wild life which had evolved within the forest.

Regarding the question of the responsibility for the administration of the forests and the animals that lived in them, Mr. Champion pointed out that in India, where the animals were found mostly inside the forests, the responsibility for both trees and animals rested with the Forest Department. This system worked excellently and when the Europeans left in 1947 there was a superb forest estate containing a large population of wild animals. In East Africa there were separate Forest and Game Departments and in Kenya, a National Parks Department also. Although Africa differed from India in that most of the large wild animals lived outside the forests, some forest reserves were also game reserves and difficulties in administration were bound to occur. Forests also occurred within national parks. There were about 300,000 acres of potentially valuable forest in

the Serengeti National Park in Tanganyika and it was rather a serious step to forbid forest workers or scientific forest management in such a vast area, as had been suggested in some quarters. The best solution was that one authority with a knowledge of both game and forestry problems should control both the forests and the animals that lived in them.

Having thus shown the causes of possible conflict in the management of wild animals and forests, Mr. Champion said that the difficulties could be surmounted by "give and take" on both sides. Wild animal lovers must appreciate that foresters have a duty to their forests and that some control of the animals which damage them was necessary. Foresters for their part must forgive some damage by animals to the forests and not, on seeing a little local damage, imagine that the whole forest had been similarly treated. A good forester did his best to strike a fair balance between his trees and the wild creatures that hoped to find sanctuary among them.

After his lecture which members and their friends keenly appreciated, Mr. Champion showed his coloured film of tigers in the Indian jungle. The film is one of the most interesting that has ever been shown to our Society.
