

ORYX

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Notes and News

The five-year ban on all trading in the furs of five endangered species – tiger, clouded leopard, snow leopard, giant and La Plata otter – and the three-year ban on leopard and cheetah, agreed between IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and the International Fur Trade Federation (see *Oryx*, December 1970, page 343) are due to come into effect on September 1, 1971. All members of the IFTF who accept the ruling will receive a plaque

**Fur Trade
Co-operates
for Wildlife**

for display on their premises with the words: 'This establishment supports the principles of conservation and deals only in those skins authorised for fur purposes by the IFTF in association with the World Wildlife Fund, and pledges itself not to handle the skins of endangered species other than existing stocks duly approved by the IFTF'. A letter accompanying the plaque and listing the species involved will be signed by representatives of the IFTF, IUCN and WWF. For this the trader will pay \$100 into a fund to support research into the status of endangered fur-bearing species, with a view to working out management plans so that they may eventually be harvested on a sustained-yield basis.

The Report of the Waterhouse Committee on Rabies underlines the grave consequences that would ensue for British wildlife if rabies were to appear among wildlife in Britain. Rabies has been steadily advancing

**If Rabies
Came
to Britain**

westwards across Europe since the end of World War 2, has already reached eastern France, and in the opinion of the Committee will inevitably reach the Channel coast by the 1980s. All mammals, including man, are believed to be susceptible to rabies, and the human death is a particularly horrible one. If rabies were found in a wild animal in Britain, a wholesale slaughter of wildlife within a radius of 12 miles of the outbreak would be inevitable, and a less vigorous control, enough to prevent infiltration from outside, would be necessary up to a radius of 24 miles. The Committee regretfully concludes that there might be no alternative to using poison, unselective as it is. Although foxes are the main likely carriers, the only ways of confining control measures to foxes are direct shooting and

gassing of known earths, both likely to be ineffective in an emergency. If rabies were to become established in Britain, it would be a disaster for man, domestic stock and wildlife alike. Conservationists must therefore not flinch from the sternest measures if need be. Prevention is much better than cure, so that all will welcome the tightening of the rules for importing mammals also recommended by the Committee. With very few exceptions, they urge that all imported mammals should be quarantined for at least six months, and that the present quarantine regulations should also be stiffened and made more effective.

Oxford University this year bestowed an honorary doctor's degree on John Owen, recently retired, after ten most fruitful years, as Director of Tanzania's National Parks. In the Birthday Honours in June, Dr Joe Eggeing, lately Director of the Nature Conservancy in Scotland, received the CBE; Max Nicholson, Convenor of the CT section of the International Biological Programme, and Robert Boote, the CVO, and Cyril Littlewood, Director of the Wildlife Youth Service, the MBE. Jeffery Boswall, of the BBC Natural History Unit was presented by the Emperor in person with the Haile Selassie I Gold Medal for his series of six colour films on Ethiopian wildlife made for the BBC. The President of India has awarded the title of Padmashri to our FPS correspondent, Dr Robin Banerjee, for his work for India's wildlife.

The FPS Council in April decided to make a grant of £250 to SANCCOB (South African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds) for their rescue work for the jackass penguin. This South African penguin is not in the *Red Data Book* – yet; but it is in some danger of having to go in. For the closing of the Suez Canal and the consequent diversion of shipping round the Cape of Good Hope has led to some 650 oil tankers going round the Cape *every month*, and oil pollution has become a serious threat. The penguins are particularly vulnerable to oil spills because they spend much of their time on the surface of the sea. Last November, at the height of the breeding season, a 29,000-ton tanker in ballast went aground off Robben Island, only 50 km away from Dassen Island, one of the main breeding colonies. John Cooper, Research Officer of Sanccob, who, with WWF support, is studying the effects of oil pollution on this penguin, describes in the *Marine Pollution Bulletin* how birds were brought in completely covered with crude oil sludge from the ruptured tanks. However, of those treated by Sanccob, 37 per cent were successfully cleaned and returned to the sea. This is a much higher rate of success than is usually achieved in such programmes, and this he attributed partly to the methods used but mainly to the

penguin's hardiness. The origin of the jackass penguin's name – it is also called the black-footed and the spectacled penguin – according to John Sparks and Tony Soper in their book *Penguins*, occurs in what is possibly the earliest written reference to any penguin – an anonymous sailor's account of Vasco da Gama's voyage to India in 1499 which tells of birds 'as large as ganders and with a cry resembling the braying of asses' off the South African coast.

All marine turtles are still in danger of extinction, and the greatest single threat to all species continues to be the uncontrolled taking of their eggs, in the view of IUCN's Marine Turtle Group, which had its second meeting last March. The Group, which consists of specialists from all parts of the world, recognised that the European turtle-soup market posed no threat to the survival of turtles – the largest soup manufacturer in Britain consumes only 2000 turtles a year – but that the growing turtle-steak market in the USA could be serious. Under the new Endangered Species Act, however, the USA forbids the import of Kemp's ridley, hawksbill and leatherback turtles, and could presumably add other species if necessary. In Japan, too, there is a growing market for turtle products. In Mexico turtles are heavily exploited – a study by a Group member showed that the *known* take in Mexico was greater than the estimated total for all the rest of the world together. The Group decided that mapping of turtle nesting beaches, particularly in Australia, Africa, Indonesia and South America, and research into captive breeding techniques were two of the top priorities for the next two years.

All crocodylians – alligators, caimans, crocodiles and gavials – face extinction if the present rate at which they are being depleted is not arrested. Depletion is greater than their reproduction capacity. This was the conclusion of the new IUCN Crocodile Group, a small group of specialists from all over the world, which met for the first time in March this year in New York. The only exception is the American alligator, which is making some recovery under careful management. Breeding and restocking programmes were considered urgent for two rapidly disappearing African species, the slender-snouted and the dwarf crocodiles, and it is also urgent to build up captive breeding stocks of the Cuban, Morelet's and the Orinoco crocodiles and the gavial *Gavialis gangeticus*. Mr Uthai Yangprapakorn, who runs a highly successful crocodile farm in Thailand (of which we hope soon to publish an account in *Oryx*) offered to do this – his stocks already include some Siamese crocodiles which are virtually extinct in the wild. The Group recommended strict control of the taking of crocodile eggs for rearing stations (as distinct from farms where eggs are laid by breeding females), the establishment of crocodile

**Not Soup
but the
Egg Thieves**

**Crocodyles
Face
Extinction**

sanctuaries in key areas, and management of wild populations. In Louisiana, in the USA, a managed crocodile industry is considered to be the only way to persuade local farmers to preserve alligator habitat on their land, and the State considers the industry so important it spends \$100,000 a year on alligator research. But such is the world outlook for crocodiles that the Group felt there was a strong case for calling a moratorium on all trade in crocodile hides until governments could produce plans for cropping on a sustained yield basis.

Green turtles on the Turkish Mediterranean coast have decreased, are decreasing, and seem inevitably bound to go on decreasing, is the conclusion of Lt Col A. I. G. Ramsay, who spent a fortnight travelling along the coast last year searching for turtles on behalf of the FPS. Tourism is the big new factor – ‘the last unspoiled Mediterranean beaches’ have been opened up by a new coastal road, developers are in and tourists follow, with inevitable disturbance of the nesting beaches. Turtles and their eggs appear to be quite unprotected, and local people who can recognise the tell-tale track left by a nesting turtle can (and do) quickly dig up the eggs, which can only bring destruction to the turtle populations if it is not stopped.

**Turtles
in
Turkey**

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The giant sable *Hippotragus niger variani*, the last big African antelope to be discovered by the west, is in serious danger, for the reason that afflicts wildlife the world over – invasion (and destruction) of its habitat by man. This is the finding of Richard Estes, who spent a year studying it for the National Geographic Society. The giant sable was discovered in 1909, when the trans-African Benguela railway was being cut through north-central Angola. By 1913, when the engineer for the railway, H. F. Varian, sent the first specimen to the Natural History Museum in London, the magnificent ringed horns of the sable bull had become one of the most prized trophies, and Varian appealed to the Portuguese government to close the area to hunting. Since the mid-20s it has been totally protected apart from a very few special licences, but such was the demand for the horns that a visitor in 1933 wrote, ‘the Portuguese residents kill them wholesale . . . I was offered any number of heads that I cared to buy and I heard several Portuguese brag of killing ten sable in a month’. Severe penalties for poaching were then imposed and the sable appeared to be saved – only to face another even more serious threat – the destruction of its habitat. Numbers today are estimated to be between one and two thousand, confined to two areas: a 4000-square-mile area of woodland plateau, the Luando Natural Integral Reserve, created in 1957, and a much smaller area near Malange that was made a reserve in 1963. This is in the *miomba*, an infertile

**Giant Sable
Under
Threat**

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band of wooded savanna across south-central Africa that supports little other wildlife and, hitherto, few people. The giant sable need a lot of space: it takes 60 acres of prime habitat to support one animal even in the wet season. But today the human invasion is intensifying. The Luando Reserve now has a human population of over 16,000 Songo, a very poor tribe, and numbers are increasing rapidly. Every year they cut and burn woodland, reducing the area of browse for the sable, and when they abandon one clearing to make another the ground is not taken over by pasture grasses suitable for the sable but becomes choked with weeds and scrub. If nothing is done, says Dr Estes, 'it is a foregone conclusion that suitable habitat will ultimately cease to exist and so will the giant sable'.

Four new national parks have been created in the Congo Republic in addition to the three existing ones – the Albert, Garamba and the Upemba parks. The new ones are the Salonga, which will be the largest forest park in the world covering over three million hectares (the size of Belgium) and the only reserve for the pygmy chimpanzee; the Kahuzi-Biega, 60,000 hectares, enclosing these two extinct volcanoes where there are some 300 mountain gorillas; the Maiko, 600,000 hectares in the Ituri Forest, also with mountain gorillas, large numbers of okapi, the rare Congo peacock (first described in 1936) and bongo; and Kundelunga, 120,000 hectares in eastern Katanga with the highest waterfall in Africa and many ungulates including sable antelope. The seven parks together will cover a total area of nearly 65,000 square kilometres, but so vast is the Congo that even this only represents 2.7 per cent of the whole country. For comparison, Kenya's seven parks covering 23,324 square kilometres represent four per cent of the whole country. Zambia, which has this year declared 16 new parks, has now set aside 59,000 square kilometres, representing about eight per cent of the country.

Twenty eggs of the Hood tortoise have hatched at the Charles Darwin Research Station in the Galapagos, a significant addition to the population of this highly endangered island race. Only seven tortoises have been seen on Hood Island in recent years, due to poaching and the feral goats that compete for the tortoise's food, so three females and a male were taken to the Station as a breeding unit. If the goats can be reduced and the poaching controlled it should be possible to restock the island in due course. By a law promulgated last November, Ecuador has prohibited all trade of any kind in Galapagos tortoises, even if they have been living in captivity on the mainland. Any Galapagos tortoise that leaves Ecuador does so illegally. A combined lecture hall, library and museum is to be built at

**Four Large
New Parks
in the Congo**

**Tortoise-
Breeding in
Galapagos**

the Station to be called the Van Straelen Memorial Hall after the Belgian conservationist who was largely responsible for its establishment in 1964.

An enquiry into the status of the black wildebeest *Connochaetes gnou*, which became extinct in the wild in South Africa early this century, shows that while numbers are not large they have increased and the animal's survival is assured. The estimated total in 1970 was 3120 (compared with 1048 in 1945 and 1808 in 1965), of which 1241 are in 10 major national parks and provincial reserves, 28 in zoos and the rest widely scattered on private farms and reserves throughout the animal's former range, a few in herds exceeding 100, but mostly in herds of 10-20. Summarising the report in *Biological Conservation*, Wolfgang von Richter, of the Mammal Research Unit in Pretoria, suggests that the policy of distributing the animals in small numbers to any interested landowner is not good, as few small groups ever become established; only proper breeding herds should be distributed and to places where they can be properly managed.

**Black
Wildebeest
Increase**

For years the Odendaal Commission's report has been hanging over the Etosha National Park in South West Africa, threatening the destruction of what could be the finest national park in the world, according to the ecologist, K. L. Tinley, who was commissioned by the Wild Life Society of South Africa to examine the problem and make recommendations. The unique feature of Etosha is a vast saltpan desert covering 3200 square miles, with huge flocks of flamingo, and around it herds of gemsbok, springbok, plains zebra, giraffe, and red hartebeest. In the neighbouring Kaokoveld the last black rhinos in South Africa and the largest population of the seriously reduced mountain zebras are to be found — Tinley saw over 1000 of the latter in 1967. He points out that desert, mountain and saline areas are better utilised by the wildlife, whereas perennial savanna grasslands and good soils are more efficiently used by man; the Commission's report ignored this, apportioning some desert and mountain areas to the Himba Herero pastoralists and the grasslands of western Etosha to the wildlife, excluding, in the process, almost all the endemic flora and fauna from the national park as well as cutting the migration routes of the large ungulates. Tinley's recommendations are based on the most rational and productive use of the different types of land, preserving the unique natural features of Etosha and the Kaokoveld and at the same time providing better living for the people. It involves the establishment of the Kaokoveld National Park, connected by a narrow corridor to the Etosha park, and the Kunene National Park to include the Namib Desert, which has a remarkable wildlife interest, and also the

**Common Sense
for the
Etosha Park**

transfer of most of the present western Etosha National Park to the Himba Herero people. Whether the government will accept these recommendations is not known. Almost every international conservation body, including IUCN, WWF and the FPS, is pressing for a solution that is so obviously rational and to which so far we have not heard of any single rational objection either in principle or detail.

The Philippines Park and Wildlife Office has three research teams on Mindanao working on the monkey-eating eagle, whose population is now estimated to be down to about 40 birds. As well as their research, they are trying to ensure that the local people know about and observe last year's presidential decree making it a punishable offence to wound, take, sell, exchange, export, possess or kill a monkey-eating eagle. The Office has also produced and distributed two popular leaflets, one on the eagle and one on the other highly endangered species in the Philippines, the tamaraw. Three research teams are working on this small wild ox, now confined to the west side of Mindoro with something over 100 animals in three separate areas, and here too the people are being told of the importance of protecting the animals and discouraged from acting as guides to hunters.

**Telling the
People in the
Philippines**

Ten western states in the USA now classify the cougar, puma or mountain lion, as an official game animal, thus giving it much needed protection, and California is considering a closed season to allow the population to increase – all signs of the new attitude to predators. A research ecologist, Maurice G. Hornocker, who has spent six years studying cougars in a 200-square-mile area of central Idaho, has come to the clear conclusion, which could be foreseen, that these big cats are a benefit to the elk and mule deer populations on which they prey. During that time he captured (by a combination of dogs to tree the lions and drugs to immobilise them), marked and released 51 different animals; 36 were recaptured, one of them 20 times. He found that the lion population was stable with no more than 10 adults as winter residents in the study area. Of the rest 29 were kittens and 12 were transient adults; the kittens all moved out at about 18 months old. The deer and elk, however, increased each year and overgrazed the key winter forage plants; not the lions but the winter food supply was the most important factor controlling their numbers, but the lions reduced their rate of increase and also kept the deer and elk moving, distributing them more evenly and reducing local pressure on the vegetation. Like most predators, the lions preyed largely on the young and the old deer, not because they selected them but because they are the easier prey.

**Cougar a
Beneficial
Predator**

The settlement of Alaska's native land claims, unresolved since Alaska became the 49th state in 1958, is likely to reduce the wildlife refuges in Alaska by ten per cent of their area. As the chairman of the Alaska Conservation Association says, it is not who owns the land that counts but what he does with it, but there are grave fears that development in these excised areas might take forms quite inimical to the wildlife in the refuge. This is particularly the case on Kodiak Island, where about a quarter of the refuge that protects the Kodiak bear would be handed over. This could destroy the ecosystem of this vast wilderness area completely. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine the huge bears being welcome neighbours for any kind of development at all on this land. Certainly stock grazing, one of the most likely uses, would very soon lead to demands for controlling the bears.

**Land Claims
and the
Kodiak Bears**

FPS Annual General Meeting

Over three hundred members and friends attended the Society's AGM on June 9th, at which Lord Craigton took the chair in the unavoidable absence of our President, Lord Willington. All the officers were re-elected, and the three proposed new members of Council approved: Dr Michael Crawford, Lt Col J. P. Grant of Rothiemurchus MBE and Major W. N. Scott, in place of the three members who retire by rotation: Lt Col C. L. Boyle OBE, the Earl of Cranbrook and Mr G. K. Whitehead, who were warmly thanked by the Chairman for their services. Lord Craigton also thanked the staff for splendid work during Conservation Year, and proposed a vote of thanks to the Zoological Society of London who generously provide the Society with offices and allow the use of their rooms for the Society's meetings.

Following the business meeting, Mr Ian Player, Chief Conservator of Natal, gave an excellent short talk on the wilderness leadership scheme, illustrated by a splendid film, and after the wine and cheese supper the film *It's a Long Way from Umfolozi*, describing the capture and transport of the white rhinos to Whipsnade, was shown by courtesy of Mr Aubrey Buxton and Anglia TV, and introduced by Mr Colin Rawlins. Members were able to walk in the zoo gardens, which were open to Fellows, by courtesy of the Zoological Society.

The Society will hold two meetings in London in the autumn. For details see page 90.

Lethal to Turtles

Plastic bags have become a serious danger to turtles off the Florida coast. Bags thrown overboard by careless lunchers are eaten by turtles, perhaps in mistake for jelly-fish, and several turtles have been found dead from indigestion with the bags in their stomachs. This happened also on a large scale with banana-stem bags off the United Fruit Company docks at Golfito, on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica.



BANNED BY THE FUR TRADE. The giant or Brazilian otter *Pteronura brasiliensis*, one of the five highly endangered species on whose skins the International Fur Trade Federation has agreed, jointly with the International Union for Conservation of Nature, to a voluntary five-year trading ban, see page 91. **Nicole Duplaix**



CHEETAH FAMILY, by Norman Myers. The International Fur Trade Federation has agreed to a three-year ban on trading in the skins of this handsome cat to give conservationists time to find out how serious its position is.