



FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The first Annual General Meeting of the Severn Wildfowl Trust was held at the Livingstone Hall, Broadway, London, S.W.1, on Tuesday, 27th January, 1948.

The Director, Mr. Peter Scott, was in the Chair.

1. (a) The Chairman read the following Report of the Council for the year 1947, and proposed the adoption of the Report and Accounts :—

REPORT OF COUNCIL 1947

(This Report contains a statement of the Trust's aims, but it is mainly concerned with the development of the amenities at the New Grounds and the works of all kinds which have been undertaken there. It forms a short summary of the Trust's first year. A fuller account of the ornithological achievements is contained in the Bird Report beginning on p. 13.)

The Trust was inaugurated in November, 1946, and during its first year it has grown in a spectacular manner. It has had wide publicity in the press (including an article in *The Times*), on the wireless and in a number of lectures delivered by the Director in many parts of the country. It staged an exhibition of photographs and models at the Bath and West Agricultural Show and another at Bristol. But above all it has greatly developed the amenities at the New Grounds. As a result the membership stands at 854 Full Members and 248 Associates.¹ It has also received support from a number of associations and other bodies, both local and national, and has been accepted as established for educational purposes and therefore free from income tax by the Commissioners of Inland Revenue.

The work of the Trust is in part educational and in part scientific. The educational aspect is reflected in the new proposals for Corporate Membership which you will see farther down on the agenda. The scientific studies are mainly in the field of pure ornithology—of learning about little-known birds in order to add to knowledge. But there is a practical aspect of the Trust's scientific work, and that is to provide data which will help to arrest the decline in the world's wildfowl. This is a matter of the greatest pertinence to all those interested in these birds—either from a sporting, scientific, aesthetic, economic or even a gastronomic point of view.

¹Membership at April 1st, 1948, was 1,131 Full Members, 379 Associates.

The work at the New Grounds falls into three spheres ; the study of the winter flocks of wild geese ; the catching of ducks in the decoy for ringing ; and the study of the comparative collection of tame waterfowl. Detailed accounts of this work and the very satisfactory results already obtained appear in the Bird Report. Meanwhile your Council would like to present some account of the way in which the New Grounds have been developed in order to achieve these ends.

The Wild Geese

For watching the wild geese on the Dumbles—an expanse of grass-covered saltmarsh which is their winter feeding-ground—it has been necessary to build eight observation huts and to modify four pillboxes. All these are spaced along the seawall behind which an unobserved approach to the geese can be made. The pillboxes have been fitted with special shutters, which are also incorporated in the newly built thatched huts. These shutters are adjustable, so that if the geese are within ten yards, as is often the case, the observation slit can be narrowed to prevent the geese from detecting the observers. The huts are fitted with seats, foot rests, and elbow rests for convenience when using binoculars.

From these huts many hundreds of ornithologists have been able to watch the wild geese at close range. Ten of the 13 sub-species of geese on the British List were to be seen at one time or another on the New Grounds during the winter of 1946-47, including three examples of the very rare Lesser Whitefronted Goose.

A number of other birds were also seen on the Dumbles or the adjacent mudflats including Peregrine, Merlin, Raven, Iceland Gull, Common Scoter, Goldeneye, Goosander, Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew Sandpiper, and many others.

A large binocular telescope was installed in a special observation post built as a second storey on top of the central pillbox. It commands a remarkable view of the whole marsh and hundreds of visitors have used the telescope, which magnifies 42 times and appears to bring the geese to within a few yards even when they are at the far edge of the marsh.

The Decoy

The duck decoy had not been used since 1929 although certain repairs had been made in 1937. Further extensive repairs were therefore necessary before it could be put into working order. Two of the four pipes were complete by the late autumn of 1946, but there was no "lead" of ducks and only six birds were caught during that season. These—three Mallards, two Teal, and one Garganey Teal—were ringed and released. Only one of these has been returned so far—a Mallard which had gone no farther than Cheltenham. During the summer some trees which were too high and a great deal of dead underbrush were removed and a third pipe was dug out and equipped with nets and screens. There was still no satisfactory "lead" in the autumn, but such ducks as used the decoy could often be caught and by the end of December, 109 birds had been taken, of six species—Mallard, Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler, Pintail and Garganey. A few of these were recaptures, but 96 birds were ringed and released of which five have so far been recovered. Three Mallards were recovered locally and two Shovelers were shot, one on the Wexford Slob in Ireland, and one in the Gulf of Morbihan in France.

Rings issued by the British Trust for Ornithology have been used, and the work is part of the researches sponsored by the International Wildfowl Enquiry Committee.

There are two observation huts overlooking the decoy from which it is possible to watch the ducks at very close range, sometimes about ten feet. But in order not to risk disturbing the decoy, visitors have not been admitted during the catching season.

It is proposed, if funds permit, and labour is available, to open the fourth pipe during the coming summer, and also to rear a large stock of free-flying call-ducks in order to establish the all-important "lead."

The Collection

The Trust's collection of tame waterfowl is almost certainly the most representative of its kind in the world. It consists, at present, of more than 400 birds of 67 species of swans, geese and ducks. These are for the most part exceptionally tame, so much so that care must be taken to avoid treading them underfoot at feeding time. Large numbers feed freely from the hand. During the summer the collection was considerably smaller, but in spite of that ten species of geese nested and a satisfactory number of young birds was reared. In addition some eggs were received from Iceland by which means such rare ducks as Barrow's Goldeneye, Scaup and Redbreasted Merganser were added to the collection.

The accommodation for the birds consists, at present, of about 17 acres of low-lying rushy fields, surrounding the decoy. This area is encircled by a perimeter of fox-proof fencing eight feet high, buried in the ground and turned outwards at the top. Within this perimeter a number of pens have been made in which ponds have been dug with bulldozer and dragline; these are fed by a rhine (pronounced reen) which is the local name for a ditch—or, in this case, the sluggish stream which waters the area. In these excellent conditions the Council looks forward to an even more successful breeding season this summer, from which it is hoped to improve the collection by exchange and to derive a small income from the sale of surplus young birds—particularly to the United States and other hard-currency countries.

The feeding of the birds has been a considerable problem, although many of them live mainly upon grass. Because the collection is open to the public, however, an allocation of coupons for feeding stuffs has been made.

The fish-eating ducks live on eels and rabbit, but the problem of rearing the young birds was acute. A maggots factory was required, while three newly hatched Redbreasted Mergansers disposed of 600 sticklebacks a day.

The Headquarters

The establishment of the Trust's Headquarters at the New Grounds has been a slow and rather costly business. Two disused cottages were taken over and have at last been made habitable. They accommodate the Director, the Assistant Curator, and one of the wardens with his family. Water and telephone have been laid on from the village half a mile away—a complicated procedure involving a diver to pass them across the bed of the canal.

In winter the paths become very muddy owing to the clayey nature of the soil, and ashes and gravel have had to be laid in the neighbourhood of the buildings, the pens and the decoy. In the latter, sawdust has been laid on top of the ashes for silent walking.

These are some of the problems which have been met by the Trust, and the interest in its activities which has been aroused not only in its own district but throughout the country is shown by the very large number of visitors who have come to the New Grounds during the past year. It was common during the summer for between one and two hundred people to spend an hour or two in the Trust's enclosures on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. But for the cessation of the basic petrol ration these numbers would probably have persisted during the winter because of the wide interest in the wild geese. As it is, scarcely a weekend passes without a visit from some party arriving in one or more motor coaches. It is not possible to keep an accurate tally of the exact number of visitors to the New Grounds but not less than 2,500 people have been there to see the birds during the past year.

Your Council regards this evidence of the interest which has already been aroused as most encouraging for the future. In fact, we believe the Trust's activities, in accordance with the " Objects " defined in its rules, have already promoted considerable " knowledge of and interest in wildfowl."

(b) After the Chairman had read the above Report Sir Percy Lister seconded the proposal for the adoption of the Report and Accounts.

(c) The Secretary drew attention to the great advantage of convenancing money to the Trust. This virtually doubled the contribution, when tax had been reclaimed by the Trust, at no extra cost to the contributor.

The adoption of the Report and the Accounts was then carried unanimously.

2. (a) The following elected Councillor retired under Rule 13 (1) :

K. Miller Jones, Esq.

(b) The following co-opted Councillors retired under Rule 13 (1) :

Miss P. Barclay Smith.

E. M. Nicholson, Esq.

C. W. Mackworth Praed, Esq.

B. W. Tucker, Esq.

3. The following were re-elected to fill the vacancies :

Miss P. Barclay Smith.

K. Miller Jones, Esq.

E. M. Nicholson, Esq.

C. W. Mackworth Praed, Esq.

B. W. Tucker, Esq.

4. The motion for the election of the following Officers for 1947-48 was unanimously carried :—

President : Field-Marshal the Rt. Hon. the Viscount Alanbrooke,
K.G., G.C.B., O.M., D.S.O.

Vice-Presidents : The Rt. Hon. the Lord Dulverton of Batsford,
Sir Percy Lister. [O.B.E., J.P.]

Director : Peter Scott, Esq., M.B.E., D.S.C.

Treasurer : Sir Archibald Jamieson, K.B.E.

Secretary : Michael Bratby, Esq.

5. Messrs. W. B. Keen and Co. were appointed as Auditors for the ensuing year.

6. The Resolutions for the following alterations to the Rules of the Trust which had been recommended by the Council, were carried :—

(1) THAT Rule 4 be altered by inserting at the end thereof :

“ Members shall mean Ordinary Members and Life Members but not Corporate Members or Parish Members except in Rules 3, 5 and 6 (2) (3).

(2) THAT Rule 5 be altered-by inserting at the end thereof :

“ (5) (a) There shall be the following classes of Members :

(1) Ordinary Members.

(2) Life Members.

(3) Corporate Members.

(4) Parish Members.

“(b) The Council shall have power to elect as Life Members persons whose association with the Trust may be considered advantageous or who have contributed a sum of not less than 50 guineas to the Trust. Life Members shall be entitled to all the privileges of Membership during their life and shall be exempt from payment of any subscription.

“(c) The Council shall have power to elect as Corporate Members such Schools, Youth Clubs and Teachers’ Training Colleges as it may from time to time approve for this privilege. The Council shall also have power to elect as Parish Members such persons residing in the Parish of Slimbridge as it may from time to time approve for this privilege. The subscriptions payable by Corporate Members and Parish Members and the privileges to which they are respectively entitled shall be determined by the Council from time to time.”

- (3) THAT Rule 6 (1) be altered by deleting the second sentence thereof :
- (4) THAT Rule 6 (2) be altered by deleting “ on the 1st of November, on which day the Financial Year shall commence,” and by substituting “ on the anniversary of the date of election.”
- (5) THAT Rule 7 (1) be altered by deleting “ December, 1947,” and substituting “ January, 1948,” and by deleting “ in the month of December ” and substituting “ in the month of January.”
- (6) THAT Rule 16 (2) be altered by deleting “ until the Annual General Meeting held in 1947 ” and by substituting “ until the First Annual General Meeting.”

At the close of the Meeting a vote of thanks and an expression of appreciation of the Director’s work were proposed and adopted.

The proceedings then terminated.

