

African Pygmy Goose *Nettapus auritus*

REPORT

THOUGH the activities of the Trust in the twelve months from 1st September, 1958 to 31st August, 1959, with which this Report is primarily concerned, included no dramatic new developments, interest in the work of the Trust and in the collections at Slimbridge and Peakirk was maintained in a gratifying way. The collections were visited by over 157,000 people, a record figure, but one giving no cause for complacency since the increase over the previous year was small although the summer weather of 1959 was as favourable as that of 1958 had been bad. We must continue to improve the attractions and amenities of the collections so that visitors will return and bring others. To make large numbers of people interested in ducks and geese and really care about their conservation is one of our major functions. We badly need new Members: an increase in Associates has been offset by a decline in Full Membership. The need is not solely a financial one. The understanding and support of Members is essential to the success of the Trust's activities in conservation.

This Report is grouped into five sections, of which the first (pp. 8-17) and fourth (pp. 158-167) are devoted to the Collections, Membership and the financial facts of our life. The breeding performance of the ornithic inhabitants of Slimbridge and Peakirk is an annual index which in 1959 again showed that we must not expect uninterrupted progress. Our satisfaction at the acquisition of new species, most notably a collection of Salvadori's Ducks brought back from New Guinea by the Curator, is tempered by the difficulties so often encountered in getting exotic birds adapted to life in captivity. Even such well-established geese as the Ne-Ne seem to be more accident-prone than their less valuable companions, and

the Slimbridge stock, though it has increased from 3 in 1950 to 99 in 1959, is still reproducing at a rate far below that to be expected from the numbers of eggs laid. New breeding records for the collection included the Laysan Teal, like the Ne-Ne a rare island form of which it is important to build up a 'reserve' population in captivity. The breeding success of the whole collection in 1959 was less than in 1958, despite the seemingly favourable weather and further improvements in artificial rearing technique. The difference was largely due to an unexplained drop in the number of eggs laid.

The organisation and work of the scientific staff is reviewed in Section II (pp. 18-30), which includes the traditional account of the numbers of wild geese at the New Grounds in the winter of 1958-59. The report on ringing includes notes by Miss E. A. Garden (p. 23), on her efforts to start duck ringing in Aberdeenshire: the marking of ducks in Scotland is badly needed, to correct the biased notions about migratory movements in Britain which have hitherto been very largely derived from ringing in southern England and Wales. Mr. W. A. Cook, the decoyman at Borough Fen, reports on his very encouraging results and on the improvements he has been making in the condition of the decoy (p. 21). Elsewhere (p. 118) he shows how the catches at Borough Fen have fluctuated in the course of 180 years. 1958-59 saw considerable activity in the study of the technique of aerial surveys, reviewed by Dr. S. K. Eltringham (p. 26). Two papers based on aerial surveys are printed here—an inspection of the breeding population of the north-west of Scotland (p. 103), and an investigation of the Shelduck population of Bridgewater Bay (p. 107). Mr. P. J. S. Olney's work (p. 29) on the food and feeding behaviour of wildfowl is now yielding valuable results. A sideline has been the demonstration that lead poisoning is a mortality factor to be thought of in Britain as well as North America and a review of its occurrence and effects is included (p. 123) to stimulate interest in this problem.

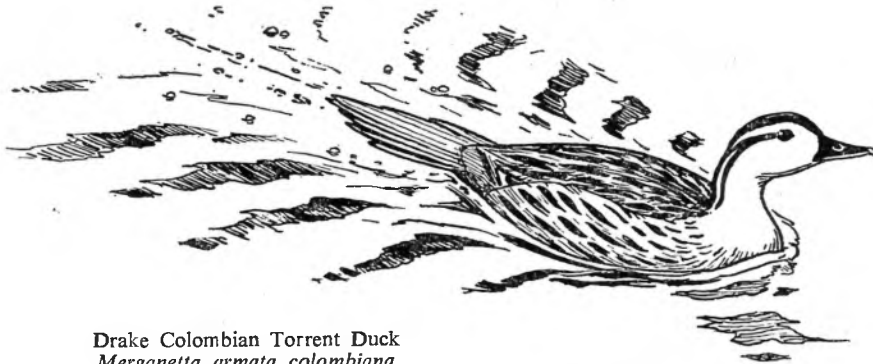
From January to March, 1959, the Hon. Director and Mrs. Scott, with Mr. Tony Soper, made a Darwin Centenary Expedition to the Galapagos Islands sponsored by the British Broadcasting Corporation and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Their journey took them to the West Indies and tropical America as well and though wildfowl represented only a tiny fraction of the naturalists' treasures they saw and photographed and recorded, Mr. and Mrs. Scott were able to see three species or forms new to them. Mr. Scott gives an account of his observations on the Masked Duck, the Colombian Torrent Duck and the Galapagos Pintail (p. 61).

The section 'Conservation and Research . . .' includes a number of papers by authors not members of the Trust staff. Dr. J. G. Harrison, a member of the Scientific Advisory Committee, writes on the removal of wildfowl viscera for research (p. 135), with Mr. Olney on an unusual accidental death of a Mallard (p. 150) and, with Dr. J. M. Harrison, on tuberculosis in wild ducks. Others who have previously written for the Report are Mr. P. J. K. Burton (on Brent Geese, p. 94 and on a visit to Denmark, p. 99) and Mr. N. G. Blurton Jones (on the threat postures of Canada Geese, p. 46). We are very glad to have five contributions from overseas. Dr. P. A. Johnsgard, who is working at Slimbridge in 1959 and 1960, provides a valuable summary of behavioural studies and their role

in solving the problems of evolution posed by the Anatidae (p. 31). Another American, Mr. F. V. Hebard, raises questions about the ubiquity of injury-feigning (p. 53) which we hope Members can help to answer. Mr. Salim Ali reviews the sad history of the Pink-headed Duck which seems to have become extinct within the last twenty-five years (p. 55). Mr. J. A. Eygenraam gives an account of the way in which the professional goose-netters of Holland have been converted to ringers and so made his organisation (ITBON) into our friendly rivals as goose-markers (p. 77). The fifth paper from overseas is a translation of a most valuable piece of research by Professor S. M. Uspenski on the status of the Brent Goose in the Soviet Union (p. 80) which demands wide circulation.

Mr. B. King, though not a member of the research staff, has been for so long so enthusiastic a contributor to our work that it is surprising he has not hitherto published papers in the report. His short notes on feeding behaviour (p. 154) will, we hope, encourage other Members to send us material for future Reports: and if his study of a Mallard population in Somerset (p. 137) helps to promote similar investigations elsewhere it may prevent British field ornithologists falling too far behind in research on breeding ducks.

Mr. Christopher Sellick, another enthusiast who has done much valuable work for the Trust, also makes his first appearance as an author with his lively account of a trip to Iceland which provided the Trust with a fine collection of Harlequins, Long-tailed Ducks and Scoters (p. 144).



Drake Colombian Torrent Duck
Merganetta armata colombiana