

Conservation, Education and Research, 1966

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The Research and Educational Centre was graciously inaugurated by H.M. The Queen on St. George's Day, 23rd April. Her Majesty was accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh and the Duke and Duchess of Kent. The Royal party was welcomed by short speeches from our President, the Duke of Norfolk, and Mr. Scott, and then conducted on a tour of the new building and the grounds. (See Photograph Section pp. I and II.)

The international co-ordination of wildfowl conservation, and of the related research activities, was pressed forward through a series of conferences, at which the Trust was actively represented. In May the Second European Meeting on Wildfowl Conservation was convened at Noordwijk, Holland, to discuss progress on the conservation of internationally important wetlands. The meeting was particularly memorable as the first at which the U.S.S.R. threw its massive weight behind the European movement and indicated that further close co-operation was possible. In July the Executive Board of the International Wildfowl Research Bureau met at Slimbridge. The Bureau is the permanent body charged with the stimulation and co-ordination of wildfowl research, particularly in Europe but also in Africa and Asia. Two very full days of discussions by 21 delegates and observers from Belgium, Denmark, France, W. Germany, Ireland, Israel, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, S. Africa and the U.K. were presided over by the Bureau's Honorary Director, Dr. L. Hoffmann. (See Photograph Section p. III lower.) A complementary meeting under the auspices of the Bureau was held at Jablonna, Warsaw, in September. Here there were 28 participants from Czechoslovakia, Estonia, France, East and West Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Pakistan, Poland, Roumania, the U.K. and the U.S.S.R. One particular outcome was a detailed plan for a mid-January international wildfowl count to include many countries besides those which have regular counts as in Britain. The Co-ordinator of the Duck Working Group responsible is Mr. Atkinson-Willes. Two other world meetings took place in England in July, the International Council for Bird Preservation in Cambridge, followed by the International Ornithological Congress in Oxford. From the latter 400 delegates descended on Slimbridge in one hectic

day which fortunately was fine. Many other overseas ornithologists visited us before and after these meetings. (See Photograph Section p. X upper.)

As in the previous year, the Trust did all it could to help the improving conservation situation in Ireland. The Minister of Lands and three of his senior advisers spent an instructive week-end at Slimbridge and also visited the joint W.A.G.B.I./W.T. experimental reserve at Sevenoaks. Mr. F. O'Gorman, newly appointed Wildlife Officer to the Ministry, also spent some time studying at Slimbridge and with our workers in the field. The first public meeting of the Irish Wildfowl Committee in Dublin was the occasion of a showing of our film *Wild Wings* and a liaison tour. The North Slob, Wexford, winter home of more than half the world's population of Greenland Whitefronts, was threatened by land improvement schemes. We supported the efforts of Irish conservationists to save a nucleus of wet grassland, by arousing international interest and providing data on the ecological requirements of the geese to all parties concerned. There is real hope of a satisfactory outcome. Assistance was also given in connection with the Northern Ireland National Trust's Strangford Lough Wildlife Conservation Scheme.

Research in Iceland was again supported. A substantial grant enabled Mr. S-A. Bengtson, Lund University, to make two more visits to Myvatn to study the populations (which have seriously declined) and the breeding biology of the ducks of this famous lake. A scheme of research was drawn up for a student expedition from Radley College to Central Iceland (p. 134). Mr. C. Savage's untiring efforts in S.W. Asia (p. 150) were assisted, though all the credit for the remarkable achievements there is due to him. A number of workers from overseas came to Slimbridge to study the Collection or to work with our reference material. They included Miss D. Kaltenhauser from Konrad Lorenz's institute at Seewiesen, near Munich; A. Tamisier from the Station Biologique Tour du Valat in the Camargue; L. Nilsson of Lund University, Sweden; R. Marriot of Monash University, Australia; and we were pleased to welcome back Professor Paul Johnsgard, of Lincoln University, Nebraska.

On the home front the Trust staff was involved in conservation activities through the Wildfowl Conservation Committee of the Nature Conservancy, by co-operation with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (to which a substantial grant was given to assist in an important purchase of a farm on the shores of Loch Leven) and by service in the Gloucestershire Naturalists' Trust. Plans were drawn up for the conservation of wetland areas, the multiple-use of reservoir facilities and for standardised observation hides. Detailed botanical surveys were carried out and management advice given by Dr. Pollard at a number of sites, notably the Sevenoaks reserve (p. 55), Abberton Reservoir, Tregaron Bog in Carmarthenshire, Fairburn Ings in Yorkshire and Loch Leven, Kinross. He also examined the problems of increased salinity and of erosion of the Dumbles.

To the conservation and research exhibition in the Wolfson Hall was added, in the entrance corridor, an introductory exhibition of nine wall panels—"This Man and This Earth". Conceived by Mr. Scott, this was executed by Mr. Kim Allen and seeks to offer a challenging, provocative statement of the vital importance of conservation and the constructive use of leisure in the world of to-day. The Trust had exhibition stands at the National Nature Week Observer Exhibition in Alexandra Palace, the Game Fair at Chatsworth, the Peterborough Show and (with a fine new set of exhibition panels) at the *Daily Mail's* Schoolboys' Exhibition, Olympia. The educational activities of the Trust were greatly increased following the appointment in September of a full-time Educational Officer, Mr. E. E. Jackson. It is now possible to offer improved facilities to visiting schools and other educational establishments and to step up the number of outside lectures.

Sir Landsborough Thomson, who has been Chairman of the Scientific Advisory Committee since its inception in 1954, retired in April. The Trust owes a great deal to his wise guidance through a tricky period of growth. He is succeeded by Professor G. M. Hughes of the Department of Zoology, Bristol, thereby strengthening further our ties with our neighbouring University. The opening of the Severn Bridge in September has brought Cardiff within easy reach and the Department of Zoology there has appointed Dr. Matthews an Honorary Lecturer. Other Universities with which we have less

formal ties through the provision of facilities and research material are Bath, Cambridge, Leicester, Liverpool, London and Oxford.

Mr. Boyd, based in Edinburgh, was joined in March by Mr. C. R. G. Campbell at Loch Leven, Kinross. In close collaboration with the Nature Conservancy, Scotland, they launched a long-desired investigation into the breeding biology of ducks (p. 36). Regular counts were made on the Loch throughout the year, feeding behaviour patterns investigated, a start made on ringing and the shooting bag analysed. An aerial survey was made in April in Ireland and West Scotland to cover the populations of Barnacle and Brent Geese. The Pinkfeet and Greylag Geese were subjected to the usual co-operative censuses in March and November. It was found that their numbers had increased yet again, to 76,000 and 60,000 respectively.

Besides the detailed preparations for the international mid-winter count, the regular British monthly counts were continued under the guidance of Mr. Atkinson-Willes and Mr. Beale. Long-term analyses of the accumulated data were brought nearer to completion. The country-wide check on the breeding distribution of ducks was also continued.

The ringing activities at our various outstations, the rocket netting of geese and the capture of flightless Canada Geese and Greylag Geese and of Mute Swans are reported separately (p. 17). Mr. Ogilvie has been engaged in an analysis of the results of the latter (p. 64) and Dr. C. D. T. Minton will be publishing a first paper on the detailed study he has been making in Staffordshire, grant-aided by the Trust, in the next Annual Report. Meanwhile, results obtained in a third study on Mute Swans carried out by Dr. C. M. Perrins in the Oxford area are printed (p. 74).

Several more Bewicks' Swans were ringed at Slimbridge and Mr. Scott's studies (based on the recognition of individuals by their face patterns) on the inter-relationships and behaviour of the greatly increased visiting flock, forged ahead. In this he was assisted by Mrs. Scott and Dafila Scott and by our visiting American worker, Miss Maya Scull.

Other behaviour studies included those on the orientation of Mallard (p. 88) in which the number of birds released in field tests now exceeds 10,000. Dr. Kear continued her work on behaviour in relation to feeding habits, largely through

the study of newly-hatched young birds. Ancillary investigations included those into depth perception (p. 122) and into vocalisation and its development in the individual. The breeding history of the Nenes was investigated with the aim of reducing the infertility problem.

Facilities for research into pathology were greatly improved by the reconstruction of the laboratory to give a separate post-mortem room. Dr. Beer continued the work of safeguarding the health of the Collection and was successful in curing a number of ailments. Our Council Member, Dr. G. W. Storey, again helped in the processing of histological prepara-

tions. The reference collections of skins, skulls, trachea, wings, etc. were further augmented and re-catalogued. They now contain over 1,300 items. Mrs. M. Bower became the laboratory assistant in October, while Miss E. Wright and Mr. P. Stanley gave most welcome assistance, as did a number of other student workers.

The grant from the Natural Environment Research Council, of which the Nature Conservancy is now part, provided essential support to the work of the Research Unit. In the year beginning April, 1966, it was raised to £16,500. For this we are extremely grateful.

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