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1970 – EUROPEAN CONSERVATION YEAR

David Thomas

THIS year, 1970, is European Conservation Year. The 'New Scientist' of 16 April 1970 contained a series of articles by some of Europe's leading ecologists which contain much that is relevant to Australian conditions. In many respects, practical conservation is more advanced in Europe which is hardly surprising when one considers that in western and central Europe natural landscape in which the vegetation is undisturbed by Man no longer exists .

Dr. Frank Fraser Darling, in the first article, pleads for a world wide approach to conservation. Action taken to protect the Siberian breeding grounds of waders would be doomed to failure if their wintering grounds were destroyed. Animals do not respect political boundaries, whether national or state, and there is a need for a co-ordinated approach. This is as necessary in Australia as elsewhere. Similarly with pollution, pollutants introduced into rivers and oceans and into the atmosphere may become dispersed over wide areas. The discovery of chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticide residues in creatures that never leave the Antarctic bears testimony to this.

But, if we want conservation and environmental cleanliness, each one of us will have to pay for it. Industries that have been established, even welcomed for the material prosperity they bring, have been allowed to discharge their waste products for many years. Many of these wastes were thought to be innocuous to man and to wildlife. It is only recently that many of their components have been found to be toxic and it is only recently that ecology has emerged as a discipline in its own right and has produced trained personnel capable of assessing the effects of these waste products on natural systems. The cost of cleaning up the effluents from long-established practices may be so high that the cost of the product must be raised to cover increased production costs. Attempts are still being made to stop the Gordon River Scheme and the flooding of Lake Pedder. There is no doubt that the Scheme could still be abandoned, but the cost to Tasmania would be crippling. Many millions of dollars have been invested in the not unreasonable hope that Tasmania, and Tasmanians, will receive a not inconsiderable return on the capital invested. A small State like Tasmania cannot write-off this amount, nor should it be expected to, and still maintain the standard of services demanded by its inhabitants.

Pollution is by no means confined to industry. The provision of plants capable of treating all sewerage must inevitably lead to increased rates or the cutting back of development and other essential services.

Prof. V. Westhoff, professor of botany at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, discusses new criteria for nature reserves which have a direct bearing on the establishment of a wood-chip industry in Tasmania. He points out that the most important new concept that has emerged in the past 30 years is that Man is part of the eco-system and that his impact need not be undesirable or even harmful. The idea that nature preservation means keeping Man out is no longer recognised as being valid. The wood-chip industry will be based on dry sclerophyll forest in eastern Tasmania. These, with a long history of burning by aboriginals and grazing and selective logging since European settlement, can not be considered to be natural habitats. They are in fact

subnatural, even seminatural in places. The flora and fauna are largely native and spontaneous, but the vegetation has been changed to some extent by human influence. The vegetation is closely related to the potential natural vegetation for it belongs to the same formation type as the original, and has much the same physiognomy. Under natural conditions dry sclerophyll forest is a stable ecosystem with high diversity and a fine-grained pattern. In creating and maintaining a subnatural landscape Man has reinforced this tendency. Grazing and limited logging has reduced the grain-size and increased the diversity of plants and animals. If managed with these considerations in mind there is no reason to suppose that the wood-chip industry will be an ecological disaster. It would be prudent to exclude an area, such as the Tooms Lake Fauna Reserve, from the wood-chip concession to serve as a scientific reference. But such an area should be carefully managed to maintain the diversity, or even increase it, and this would mean the continuation of light grazing, logging and perhaps even carefully controlled burning-off. Prof. Westhoff's ideas, which have a sound theoretical base, indicate that Man's activities need not be excluded from nature reserves and national parks: "nature conservation itself has one main end: preserving the stability of the ecosystems where such is required and thus maintaining the diversity of the biotic communities, which is necessary for preserving all organisms living on Earth. "

Dr. Norman Moore contributes an article "Pesticides know no frontiers" which again emphasises the need for global co-operation. Under the title "Saving Europe's wetlands" Dr. Luc Hoffman describes the progress made by Project MAR. (MAR. being the first three letters of words in several languages - marsh, marais, marisma - denoting wetlands). The project can justly be said to have had some success but, as Dr. Hoffman admits, this is only a beginning. The ecology and breeding biology of Australian ducks are better known than they are for ducks in other parts of the world through the work of Dr. H. J. Frith and his colleagues of the CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research. Yet the future of several species is precarious as their breeding grounds are destroyed or rendered unsuitable. In a country where there is a surplus of primary products, as in Australia, the benefit of further reclamation of wetlands should be compared with the real and potential benefits which could be derived if the area were left alone: from wetland crops, pasture, shooting, fishing and tourism. The money spent on reclamation may even be better used in upgrading existing cleared land. The development of wetlands, for whatever purpose, should include provision for the needs of wildfowl and many artificial wetlands could be made attractive to them. The problem is urgent, the solutions are known, is it too late to hope that an Australian equivalent to Project MAR can bring the necessary action on a national scale?

The final contribution is by Dr. Jan. Cerowsky and deals with conservation in East Europe. Conservation is an important topic in communist countries where the problems are basically the same as those met elsewhere. Great emphasis is placed on education, both of the public and of the ecologists necessary to ensure that conservation is on a sound scientific base. It is interesting to learn that the "classics of Marxism-Leninism" consider that short-term solutions are also short-sighted and that, at a stage of the Civil War when the Communists were facing defeat, Lenin himself started a nature reserve which is still in existence 50 years later.

I acknowledge my debt to the contributors to the 'New Scientist' cited for stimulating me to apply their ideas to Australian and Tasmanian conditions. At the same time, I must emphasise that the views expressed are my own and not necessarily those of the Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club.

DOMINICAN GULLS BREEDING IN TASMANIA

L. E. Wall

THE first record of breeding by this bird in Tasmania was published in Tasmanian Naturalist, No. 17, May 1969. This described the finding of a nest at South Bruny Island by T. O. Wolfe in August 1963.

The Dominican Gull has increased quite rapidly and steadily since its first sighting in Tasmania in 1955, and is now well distributed along the South and East coasts, but evidence of successful breeding, although strongly suspected for a number of years, has been difficult to establish. One of its chief haunts is in the vicinity of the Sorell Abattoirs, but it was not until this year that breeding activity there could be proved.

Mr. J. M. Boyes, of Midway Point, told me at the end of January that he had found a pair of these gulls nesting on Barren Island, in Pittwater, only a couple of miles from Sorell. On 4 February I visited the island and found an almost fully-fledged young bird, unable to fly, hiding among rocks on the point nearest to the causeway. Two birds, presumed to be the parents, were circling the island in an agitated manner, but would not alight and I was unable to photograph them at close quarters. One of these was in fully adult plumage, and had an injured leg which trailed during flight, but the other had not quite shed its last immature plumage and had some brown on the outer tail feathers. This indicates that it was three years old, the full plumage not being attained until the age of four years.

C. S. I. R. O. GROUND PARROT SURVEY –

Mr. J. Forshaw is carrying out a survey of the Ground Parrot, Pezopurus wallicus, and would be grateful for reports of any sightings. Reports should preferably be entered on special forms which provide space for entries under the following headings: Locality, date, time, observers, weather, site covered and survey procedure, number of Ground Parrots seen, vegetation (community, height, density and species), fire history, other habitat influences (e. g. grazing).

Forms can be obtained from the Editor, 9 Lallaby Road, Moonah, 7009.

STRAW-NECKED IBIS AT SEYMOUR –

On receipt of a request to identify a strange bird on a farm at Seymour, East Coast, I visited the area on July 19th, 1970. The bird had been at the farm for a week and was feeding in the drainage from pig styes and the cow yard, and had not left the farm since appearing. The bird was easily identified as a Straw-necked Ibis, a somewhat rare visitor to Tasmania from the Mainland where it is a very widespread species.

– J. R. Napier

TASMANIAN FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB –

The Club meets on the third Thursday of each month (December and January excepted) in the Royal Society Room at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Argyle Street, Hobart. Meetings start at 7. 45 p. m. Visitors are welcome.

The Tasmanian Naturalist is published quarterly as a supplement to the monthly Bulletin. Contributions covering any aspect of Tasmanian natural history are required and should be sent to the Editor, 9 Lallaby Road, Moonah, Tasmania. 7009.

MINOR AMENDMENTS TO "ORCHIDS OF AUSTRALIA"

Pat Palmer

Purchasers of "Orchids of Australia" by W. H. Nicholls, may care to record the following notes to bring their books up to date

THELYMITRA retecta has been found not only in northern Tasmania, but also from the south (Blackman's Bay, Arve Road, Judbury) and from the West Coast (near Rosebery).

THELYMITRA media (not included in "Native Orchids of Tasmania", by Firth) has beencollected from several southern Tasmanian localities.

THELYMITRA chasmogama has been collected from near Hobart.

THELYMITRA mucida – possible recording (to be checked and confirmed).

THELYMITRA pauciflora var. holmesii has been recorded from Railton by the late John Firth, and also from Bruny Island.

THELYMITRA flexuosa has been recorded from southern, as well as northern Tasmania.

THELYMITRA rubra has been recorded from southern, as well as northern, Tasmania.

THELYMITRA cyanea recorded from southern and western Tasmania, as well as from north.

CALOCHILUS imberbis is shown as recorded in northern and eastern Tasmania - this is barely correct, as officially this orchid has been found only in southern Tasmania (Channel district), with one northern find not yet confirmed.

DIURIS sulphurea is found in all parts of Tasmania (not only northern and eastern districts).

DIURIS palustris – found in southern, as well as northern and eastern, Tasmania.

DIURIS maculata – common in all parts of State (not only north and east).

PRASOPHYLLUM patens var. robustum – a variety not included in Firth's "Native Orchids of Tasmania"; according to text, this plant is apparently confined to Tasmania.

PRASOPHYLLUM brainei has been recorded from Bruny Island and northern Tasmania, as well as from eastern Tasmania.

PRASOPHYLLUM rufum is stated to be abundant on the Melaleuca grasslands near Hobart, Tasmania - this possibly should read "Melaleuca swamplands", but there would still appear to be a lot of confusion between P. rufum and P. nigricans and careful checking of Tasmanian collections must be made.

PRASOPHYLLUM buftonianum has not been included in Nicholls, possibly because it has been collected only once, and was described from dried material.

CALEANA major has been collected from many southern localities, as well as from northern and eastern Tasmania.

ACIANTHUS caudatus has been collected from many parts of this State (not only from eastern Tasmania).

ACIANTHUS reniformis has been collected from widespread parts of Tasmania, including north and south.

CALADENIA praecox has been listed as being found in Tasmania, although not recorded by Firth. This plant is very similar to C. cucullata and obviously could be confused with it - collections of these plants should be carefully checked.

CALADENIA clavigera has been collected from southern, as well as north-eastern and eastern Tasmania.

CALADENIA patersonii is common throughout Tasmania (not restricted to northern and eastern Tasmania).

CALADENIA echidnachila - the type species was collected in southern Tasmania (Lenah Valley).

CALADENIA dilatata – also recorded from southern Tasmania (as well as north and east).

CALADENIA dilatata var. concinna was included in Firth, "Native Orchids of Tasmania", p. 59 (in note) – omitted from list of publications in Nicholls.

CALADENIA longii – there now appears to be doubt that this plant was a valid species but more likely was a seasonal freak. No collections have been made since the original. Omitted from Nicholls.

CALADENIA atkinsonii – as for C. longii.

CRYPTOSTYLIS subulata – has not been included in Nicholls. As an illustration by Nicholls was in existence, having been used as advertising material for the publication by Georgian House, so this appears to be an error of omission.

(To be concluded)

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