

THE SOCIETY

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting was held on 31st March, 1962, at the Museum. Lord Cottesloe was elected to the office of President to succeed Sir Alan Barlow, who had guided the Society so successfully in the post-war period. The Society is fortunate in having a man of Lord Cottesloe's gifts and experience as its new President. Later the same day Mr. Rouse lectured on recently discovered wall paintings.

Sir Alan, later in the year, made his term of office even more memorable by making a gift of £500 to the Society to enable some archaeological work to be undertaken in the County; it was not possible to arrange any work in the current year, but plans are well advanced for a "dig" at the hill fort on Ivinghoe Beacon to be conducted by Professor S. S. Frere, F.S.A., in late September 1963.

OUTINGS

Three were arranged and were all well attended. The first was Dorton House and Wotton House on 19th May: at the latter house Mrs. Brunners' recent work of restoration, including the reinstatement of some of Sir John Soane's work, was admired. On 21st July at Great Marlow a series of visits were made including Remnantz, The Old Parsonage, Marlow Place, the Parish Church and Pugin's Roman Catholic Church. Finally on 15th September 60 members were privileged to see Boughton House, Kettering, one of the seats of the Duke of Buccleuch; the magnificent contents of this splendid mansion made a profound impression on those members privileged to attend.

CENTENARY

Mr. Gowing's researches showed that the Society first put its collections on permanent view in 1862; and so to mark the Centenary of the Museum the Society held a reception there on 28th September. Lord Cottesloe welcomed over a hundred members and guests and formally opened an exhibition, "Map-making in Buckinghamshire", which had been organised by the Curator and Mrs. Elvey (who has been appointed Assistant Hon. Archivist of the Society).

NATURAL HISTORY SECTION

In 1962 members of the Natural History Section, through taking an active interest in the wild life of the county, have assisted in compiling records for several national societies.

The programme for the year has been interesting and varied. An ornithological course was held at Missenden Abbey Educational College in April. William Condry was the resident lecturer, and his theme "Birds in Wales". Also in April a visit was made to the Bristol Zoo. Mr. Greed, the director of the Zoo, with his head keeper escorted the party. Great interest was shown in the animal hospital which is not open to the general public.

Lodge Hill was visited in May after a long interval. We saw the diminishing juniper, early orchids and meadow saxifrage and the interesting fungus, the earth star. The weather was at its worst, the gale making it difficult to stand up.

In June Cockshoot Wood was visited for the first time. Herb Paris, Ground Nut, and five different orchids, including the fly orchid, were seen; also the yellow pimpernel,

The first experimental Nature Trail in the Country was arranged by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Naturalists' Trust on Coombe Hill on 26th and 27th May. It was one of the coldest and wettest week-ends of the summer. However, a number of people attended. On 12th August this was repeated on a warm sunny day and at least 700 people came and toiled to the top. Members of our committee acted as wardens on both these occasions. Our members were invited to a Rural Studies Conference in Aylesbury at the High School. Professor Alan Gemmel and Mr. J. W. Hill were among the speakers. A new R.S.P.B. film, *Birds in a Hampshire Garden*, was shown.

On a beautiful day in early October the Tunnel Cement Co. at Pitstone allowed us to see their works. The chief chemist and Dr. Bleakley led the party. Various fossils were on display in the reception hall. We were most grateful to the Cement Co. for their courtesy as this was an unusual and successful outing.

In early November a course on "Mosses, Lichens and Fungi" was held in Missenden Abbey. Dr. Warburg, of the Oxford Botanical Schools, talked on Mosses, Dr. Swinscow on Lichens, and Dr. Hora of Reading University, Dr. Roger Smith of Princes Risborough and Derek Reid from Kew told us about Fungi. All had slides. Two rare finds were made in Cockshoot wood, *Stereum sulphuratum*, a bracket fungus first recorded three or four years ago in Britain—prior to that only two or three reports of it from Europe. The other was *Neobulgaria pura* a supposedly rare gelatinous *Discomycete* recently added to the British List.

More people wished to attend this course than could be accommodated. Several requests have been received for another Fungus course. A new departure was a social evening at the Farmhouse School in December. For entertainment there were four ten-minute talks. Lady Barlow spoke on her recent visit to California, the Rev. C. N. White, vicar of Ellesborough, talked about the ghost on Coombe Hill, Mr. Philip Street showed slides on the training of animals for Bertram Mills circus and Mr. Geoffrey Glover showed slides of the natural history on Bardsey Island.

We are grateful to the headmistress for lending a room festively decorated and for bearing the brunt of arrangements for the supper. We also wish to thank Mrs. Clare for the loan of the Schoolroom for the Winter's lectures. The following observations have been given by Mrs. Susan Cowdy on birds and mammals in 1962.

Hard weather in January killed off many birds. Thousands flew westwards only to find conditions there as bad, with the result that wholesale deaths were reported from the West of England and Wales, Fieldfares and Redwings being particularly hard hit. A further spell of hard weather in the early spring caused many birds to desert their young noticeably the tit species, apparently unable to find sufficient food for both adults and young. The Arctic winter set in on Boxing Day when buried hawthorns were "alive" with members of the thrush family throughout the county.

An interesting field day was held in May, when a joint meeting was held with the Middle Thames Natural History Society, in order to survey the status of the Stone Curlew and the Woodlark (two of the declining species in our area). Members separated into groups along the Icknield Way and Chiltern Escarpment between Bledlow and Watlington. Only one of each species was seen. Twenty years ago the Woodlark would have been much in evidence, and at least six pairs of Stone Curlew noted. The decline is put down to the changes in the climate, and also to the changing face of the area which has been affected by forestry, farming and the virtual absence of rabbits which has allowed former open downland to turn into rank grass and scrub. Toxic chemicals may also have taken toll on the Stone Curlew, which are not averse to breeding in cornfields.

1962 was a Crossbill irruption year. It is thought that the birds come from Central

Europe due to a high population and a poor corn crop. An interesting feature is that the birds appeared in some cases in the same localities as the last irruption in 1958, notably at Ballinger in August, and in a larch coppice near Amersham station. The species was widely reported throughout the county and was seen feeding on white-beam berries at Dancers End, an unusual diet.

The Chearsley Furze Heronry only produced two nests, due to felling. The new heronry at Eythorp Park again increased, presumably made up of birds from the former colony. Herons also bred at Foxcote and Tyringham. Very few birds of prey were seen in Buckinghamshire. Even Kestrels were "rare birds". It has now been proved that many species of bird with a hooked beak are being killed off or becoming infertile through a secondary poisoning due to toxic chemicals. (See *Nature Conservancy Report, 1962*.) The largest influx of Woodcock for many years arrived from November until the onset of the cold weather after Christmas. The Curlew is now an established breeding species, keeping in line with other counties to which it has extended in its southward trend. The crow family continue to increase, probably due to the decrease in numbers of gamekeepers and hawks.

MAMMALS

Foxes and badgers continue to thrive. Stoats are now comparatively rare, and hedgehogs appear to be on the decrease. Grey squirrels are increasing again, causing damage to young trees. Rabbits appear in pockets, but myxomatosis also mysteriously reappears when numbers increase. The Muntjac or barking deer which escaped from Woburn Abbey about thirty years ago, are extending their range. The Glisglis or Edible Dormouse, released from Tring Park at about the same time, continue to live as feral animals in a triangle between Berkhamsted, Beaconsfield and Wendover, though numbers trapped by the Public Health Authorities are smaller. Mink is now living in the wild, having escaped from mink farms in the county. This animal is a real killer being able to swim as well as climb, and it is hoped will not be allowed to become another of our introduced mammals as in the case of the Grey Squirrel which has found a niche to the disadvantage of our natural fauna.

J.M.G.

APOLOGY

FOLLOWING the publication in the *Records*, XVII, 1, page 49, of "Pitstone Hill" by J. F. Dyer and A. J. Hales, Mr. Scott of The Tunnel Portland Cement Co. Ltd. wrote pointing out a serious error in the second paragraph of that article:

"I would like to point out that there is a mistake on page 49. The land belongs to 'Tunnel' and not 'Snowcem', which is a brand of cement made by our competitors. However, this Company will go no further than pointing out the error.

"We would also say that we are always pleased to give access to our lands, provided we are formally notified."

We are very sorry about this error and express our regrets to Mr. Scott and his Company.

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(as at 31st December, 1962)

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