

Changes in Wildlife Management and Control Recommended

MAN is probably the greatest predator the world has ever known. In the comparatively short period since he became the dominant mammal he has perpetrated almost unbelievable damage among other species, and the instinct to hunt and kill is still part of his character.

The urge to produce better weapons with which to wage war against his own kind has furnished him with the means to destroy lesser species utterly. Fortunately while some people have devoted their time and skill to the production of more destructive weapons, others have studied the intricacies, the wonder, and the beauty of nature. They have acquired understanding and have learned that widespread destruction of other species ultimately brings retribution in one form or another. Perhaps more important is that intelligent, thoughtful men now believe that other species in their own lands have a right to exist and to a place to live in.

The Wildlife Act 1953 imposed on sportsmen licensed to kill animals the responsibility for ensuring the protection of all absolutely protected wildlife. Notwithstanding that we have in our own Society many law-abiding citizens who, though following their instinct to hunt and kill, would never think of killing protected wildlife, we questioned the wisdom of an enactment which required an organisation consisting almost exclusively of those licensed to hunt and kill to be responsible for the safeguarding of protected species. Under the Act the first function of acclimatisation societies—and the first purpose for which the societies may spend money—is the protection of protected species. This was because the societies were to receive a large share in proceeds of the sale of licences to hunt and fish, licence fees being paid for the privilege of taking game or fish from public or private lands, rivers, streams, and lakes. It should be quite clear that licence fees are paid for the privilege of taking game or fish and are in no sense contributions to the funds of any particular society. Because this is so, and because the societies were to receive a large share of licence fee proceeds, it was considered equitable that in return they should accept the responsibility of ensuring the care of absolutely protected species.

In theory the plan seemed reasonable: in practice over 15 years it has proved to be a dismal failure. We therefore joined with a large number of others in requesting the Deputy Prime Minister to authorise an independent investigation into the whole of wildlife control. We made submissions to the Commission appointed; we urged that it should recommend the Government to end the present system and replace it with one which would be of greater benefit to all concerned. Our views found general support and the Commission recommended that acclimatisation societies should be relieved of their statutory responsibilities, that they should become fish and game societies, and that they should receive certain subsidies and grants.

In all the Commission prepared 32 recommendations for Government consideration, and these included one that there should be a National Wildlife Service under a Minister in Charge of Wildlife and a National Wildlife Commission of three permanent members.

Acceptance of the Commission's recommendations by the Government would end the present fragmented, haphazard system and be beneficial to sportsmen as well as to protected wildlife.
