

SCIENTIFIC BOOKS

WILD NATURE

Our Heritage of Wild Nature. By A. G. TANSLEY, F.R.S., 74 pp. 26 photographs. Cambridge: at the University Press; New York: The Macmillan Company. 1945. \$2.50.

PLANS for rebuilding the war-torn, crowded island of Britain at first gave little consideration to the conservation of flora and fauna in natural areas. Cities, industry, commercial forestry, agriculture—all were making desperate, overwhelming demands.

This book pleads for organized conservation of wild life—before it is too late.

Some “planners” envision a Britain where every foot of ground will be blue-printed into towns and cities, tilled areas, forest plantations and intensively used playgrounds and resorts. This would mean the end of a rural landscape which, in its combination of wild forests, heaths and moorlands together with tillage and pasture, is distinctive and beautiful. Preservation of the wild and half-wild areas is necessary not only for their own sake, but as habitats for wild life. Conservation of many animal species, including the two native deer, the mice and voles, the rabbit and several carnivores, require lands on which agriculture or other interests are subordinate.

The types of vegetation and scenery of Britain and the alterations that have occurred in historic times are discussed briefly. Some biologically important types, such as oakwoods and alderwoods, are economically unprofitable. They, and their faunas, will therefore disappear unless the public acts. The sea-coast, a particularly interesting national asset, is being preempted for private use. The early establishment of national reserves is imperative.

Professor Tansley traces the history of the nature reserve movement in Britain. A considerable number of protected areas exist, but there has been little co-ordination of effort. A national program is required. The Nature Reserves Investigation Committee in 1943 recommended the establishment of a series of small National Nature Reserves. These are planned chiefly for scientific purposes to preserve both flora and fauna.

For more than a decade Britain has been considering the need for National Parks, and a number of specific areas are now being examined by the Ministry for Town and Country Planning. These would be much more extensive than the proposed Nature Reserves, and would be primarily for public enjoyment. In regions where wild land is limited, the parks would be known as Scheduled Areas. In them present ownership or usage would not be changed. “The only restriction would be the prohibition of development destructive of the present character of

the countryside.” To preserve certain wild conditions, Nature Reserves might be established within National Parks and Scheduled Areas.

A Wild Life Service is recommended, to study the fauna and flora of Britain and to work with land management agencies to conserve it. The author recognizes the close affinity of such a service to the bureau which will operate the National Parks and especially the Nature Reserves. However, he believes it would be “difficult or even impracticable to burden” scientific investigators with administration of lands. Perhaps because of the troubled history of government control of predators in the United States, the British Wild Life Service would be specifically required to work closely with the humane societies if it became necessary to plan the destruction of large numbers of injurious mammals or birds.

The author recognizes the impossibility of establishing in populous Britain a series of extensive wild areas similar to the great national parks of the United States or Canada. His program for prohibiting further economic developments in specified areas and for maintaining modified habitats for interesting plants and animals makes the best of realities in a land where the primeval wilderness vanished centuries ago. Some of the policies suggested in this book might be applicable to our own eastern and middle-western country, where the purist in nature conservation laments that all is lost because extensive wilderness areas no longer are available.

Professor Tansley summarizes his book by recommending the establishment of a National Wild Life Service, National Nature Reserves and National Parks; enlarging the prerogatives of the Forestry Commission; and teaching conservation in the schools. He has condensed his excellent plea for organized nature conservation into 67 pages of text illustrated by 26 fine photographs.

VICTOR H. CAHALANE

PLANT SCIENCE IN LATIN AMERICA

Plants and Plant Science in Latin America. Edited by FRANS VERDOORN. xl+384 double column pp. 83 plates+text illus. Waltham, Mass.: Chronica Botanica Co.; New York City: G. E. Stechert and Co. 1945. \$6.00.

If one is interested in the plant life of Latin America from almost any angle, even an amateurish one, this volume is the one to buy. Speaking broadly, it is the most comprehensive book so far published on the green world to the south of us. Great pains have been taken to procure material from authoritative sources. Almost a hundred authors of many nationalities have written accounts of the vegetation and