
CURRENT SCIENCE—50 YEARS AGO

The Zoological Survey of India.*

WE have read the triennial report of the Zoological Survey of India for the years 1932–35 with considerable interest. This document recently issued by the Director presents in a concise and readable form the principal activities in which the departmental officers were engaged during the period covered by the report, and also indicates how the curtailment of grants has affected the progress of investigations. The work of the Scientific Surveys and the knowledge which they advance deserve the attention of governments and also of the public in greater measure than is generally accorded to them. The researches which they undertake are always of great intrinsic importance and frequently of real practical interest, but almost invariably, the value of scientific investigations is neither understood nor appreciated. Scientific work in India suffers from lack of proper exponents who can interpret its significance and its bearing on the practical problems of life in the language of the people. Many of the discussions initiated in the Indian Legislative Chambers on important public affairs have a scientific background, and decisions reached have frequently no relation to the proper appreciation of the development and the progress of science in its application to practical ends. It is needless to observe that the intelligent understanding and discussion of many administrative problems necessitates a fairly comprehensive knowledge of the scientific principles involved in their theoretical and practical aspects, and in their bearing on economics and politics as well as on social and legislative measures.

One of the ways, in which the work of the Surveys can be brought prominently before the public, is to extend and co-ordinate the existing Scientific Surveys where such co-ordination is desirable, and to establish a Committee of Scientific Advice. If such a Committee is formed on a representative basis, it should accept the responsibility of promoting discussion in the Council Chambers of Federal India on scientific subjects in their application to economic policy and national well-being. It may be necessary to organise periodical addresses by scientific authorities to the principal

political parties, and to assist government in all administrative measures and acts involving the application of modern scientific knowledge. An organisation occupying the status and fulfilling the duties of the Parliamentary Science Committee in Great Britain is already overdue in India, and the sooner we establish a definite link between Science and Government on the one hand, and Science and Society on the other, the sooner shall we secure the orderly progress of knowledge and the continuous improvement of the economic and social condition of the country. One of the most important truths which the Committee will have to impress on the public and government will be that scientific departments differ in their spirit and character from the administrative branches, and that investigations in the former should proceed uninterrupted by the fluctuations of financial assistance. Our civilisation has progressed by the increasing exploitation of the resources of animate and inanimate nature, and the wealth of the world increases in proportion to such exploitation. The reason why the industrialists invest more money in scientific research when their income falls, is that they live in a competitive world. Starving the scientific departments virtually implies extinction of the industry concerned. But governments as producers of wealth have no competitors, and their attitude towards scientific research correspondingly differs. Like all industrial organisations, government ought to find it more profitable to stimulate the means of earning increased revenue through scientific research, than to resort to the hackneyed policy of enhancing taxes during the recurring periods of financial depression. It is this aspect of administrative policy that the Committee of Scientific Advice that we have proposed should inculcate in the mind of government and the public. Until the political parties realise the imperative necessity of the substitution of such a financial doctrine in the place of the one now pursued, Scientific Surveys are liable to inhibitions of grants.

The Zoological Survey of India is entrusted with the care and maintenance of the zoological and ethnological galleries of the Museum which in their richness and variety have few parallels in the East. Lack of funds has affected this department quite as seriously as

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the other sections of the Survey. The official view of the Museum is that it is generally a place for the gratification of the eye, and the message of the exhibits is therefore permitted to remain sub-conscious. It is essentially an educational institution carefully devised for popular enlightenment. It is also a place of reference. Want of proper care and attention due to attenuated staff, and of periodical additions in a bright and attractive form which naturally implies expenditure of money, must rob this section of the Zoological Survey of its power to instruct the visitors and of its usefulness to research students. In 1933, the Director of Zoological Survey was able through the munificence of Dr. S. C. Law to organise an exhibit of storks in a replica of their natural surroundings, and other groups of animals can be exhibited similarly, provided sufficient funds are placed at the disposal of the authorities. In addition to increased grants from governments, the Museum of the Survey should have a large endowment without which further improvements become difficult. The Museum is a great national institution, the usefulness of which is capable of being extended by organising a series of popular lectures on scientific subjects. The presence of foreign scientists who visit the Zoological Survey may be utilised for supplementing the excellent resources which the institution already possesses for inaugurating the scheme of popular addresses in a manner similar to those organised by the Royal Institution of Science and Technology in South Kensington.

The Zoological Survey is now under the direction of Indian scientists and in spite of the limitations im-

posed by retrenchment, they completed several important pieces of research, and started a large number of interesting investigations during the period under review. It seems to us that in addition to laboratory and field investigations, special branches of research in experimental and economic zoology should be organised when funds become available. No institution in India has such material resources and wealth of experience and knowledge for organising these new departments, as are possessed by the officers of the Survey, and the value of the results of such enquiries for promoting the material prosperity of the country must manifestly be multitudinous. It is true that the work of the Survey is increasing far too rapidly to be handled by the existing staff, and we should be reluctant to make proposals likely to add to their burden. The Zoological Survey is already engaged in important economic problems, but nevertheless the field of investigation is capable of enlargement. Our knowledge of economic ornithology and mammalogy of India is imperfect, and there are gaps in our information regarding economic pisciculture and entomology. From the triennial report of the Director, we understand that he has submitted to the Government of India proposals for the extension of the department and increase of grants, and, in considering these proposals, we have no doubt that the authorities, while Indianising the services, will also provide them with the necessary means of maintaining their high standard of efficiency and traditional reputation.

ANNOUNCEMENT

THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON INVERTEBRATE REPRODUCTION

The Fourth International Symposium on Invertebrate Reproduction will be held 1-6 September, 1986 at the University of Lille I, France. Papers, posters and films are invited which relate in a broad sense to the following themes: Gametogenesis and fertilization, regulation of reproductive process (neuroendocrinology, and biorhythmicity and endocrine control); genetic regulation; population dynamics and reproductive strategies; pheromones and inter-organism

chemical communications. The proceedings are to be published as congress abstracts and in the Series **Advances in Invertebrate Reproduction**.

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