

OUR JOURNAL:

An Appreciation for the 100th Number

By MYLES E. W. NORTH

Our first issue appeared in 1910. Now, nearly half a century later, we have produced our 100th! This, surely, is quite an achievement, since funds (which usually depend upon our subscriptions) are limited, material for publication arrives irregularly, and the physical difficulties of getting a number published are often surprising. Nevertheless, issues have continued to be produced—not, indeed, as regularly as anybody could have wished—but, when produced, covering a remarkable variety of subjects—birds, mammals, reptiles, fish and shells; entomology, botany and general biology; geography, travel, anthropology and ethnology. And, for a Journal with such limited funds, the illustrations have usually been profuse! In fact, whenever one finds a longish interval between one issue and another, or a modest issue following a lavish one, the explanation may often be that we spent our last penny on the lavish issue and have been obliged, for the time being, to husband our resources! These lavish numbers are usually of considerable scientific value and maintain the prestige of the Journal in the scientific world, and personally I am all for them, provided that we do not bankrupt ourselves on their account or that the breathing space before the next issue is not too prolonged, since members like to get their journals regularly.

Our Journal has its own distinctive character, which was formed in the first number of 1910 and has been maintained ever since. Therefore, it is of interest to spend a little time upon this pioneer 1910 number, which is first-rate. To begin with, there is actually a coloured plate—of the Coqui Francolin—as frontispiece! Owing to the expense of reproduction, coloured plates have necessarily been few and far between in the history of the Journal—in fact, only nine have ever been published, the last in 1931. The Coqui plate illustrates an article on francolins by Sir Frederick Jackson (the eminent ornithologist who later wrote the *Birds of Kenya and Uganda*). Next, there follows an article on nature study by another of our great men, C. W. Hobley (author of *Bantu Beliefs and Magic*, etc.), who was either sole or joint Editor of the Journal for the first fifteen numbers, from 1910-19. He was in addition a regular contributor to the Journal and displayed an astonishingly wide range of interests, as some of his articles show—Kariandusi deposits of the Rift Valley, Early Man in British East Africa, Evolution of the Arrow, Notes on Crocodiles, Baobabs and Ruins, African Sign Writing, a Bird Collection from Lamu, Migration of Butterflies, the Spitting Cobra, Records of Earthquake Shocks, the Rhino and his Curious Diet, and Some Unidentified Beasts. The paper on nature study is brilliant, and in many respects rings just as true today as it did in 1910. I would like to quote a few extracts :

“There may be many members who are anxious to do some work in this field, and who are at the same time rather doubtful as to what they can do and where to begin; one may compare such to a child placed in a room full of toys and standing wondering and confused, doubtful as to which it should select to amuse itself with. Most men, if they live long in a country like this, cannot help falling to some extent a victim to the spells of nature; the wealth of mammalian fauna and its attendant sport awakens a thrill in nearly all: some find birds a fascinating attraction, others succumb to the charms of the varied insect life, a few are attracted by the flora, and savage man again absorbs the attention of others. The scenery of the more rugged parts of the country appeals to the artistic eye, but it is feared that only a few try to read the riddle and go back to the geological causes of which the scenery is but the answer. Among such a bewildering range of subjects the choice must, of course, rest to a great extent with the would-be student's natural aptitude, or his liking for any particular branch, and also to some extent upon the locality in which he chances to live. . . . There is always a tendency among neophytes to assume that such-and-such a thing has been done by some one else, and that everything is known and has been worked out; as a friend said a little time since, ‘Oh, what is the use of collecting birds? Mr. X. has done all that’, whereas the greatest man of science knows that for eyes that see and brains that seek, the field for research is never so wide as it is at present, and that the eternal ‘why’ can never be fully answered. . . . One of the great obstacles to nature study in this country, both at present and for years to come, is the scattered state of students and the consequent difficulty of frequently meeting and discussing questions, but this has not prevented success being attained in other similar countries, and we must not be discouraged on that account. . . . A few words with regard to collecting: the prime factor of success in this branch is not to become too diffuse; if a man decides to collect birds then let him stick to birds, if he prefers insects let him stick to insects . . . he will then learn by experience where they are to be found . . . and will quickly acquire a working knowledge of the different genera.”

Hobley recommends a nature calendar on the lines of Gilbert White and makes many other valuable suggestions with regard to the various branches of study, and concludes with a list of books. Never, in the whole history of the Journal, can there have been a more stimulating paper. There follows an article on plants by E. Battiscombe (later the author of *Trees and Shrubs of Kenya*) and one on butterflies by the Rev. K. St. A. Rogers (who later collaborated with Dr. V. G. L. van Someren in a great butterfly contribution, mentioned below); then, further articles and short notes, including a fine picture of the Hadada Ibis by Dr. R. van Someren. This completes the first number, which has never been surpassed. There were giants in those days!

Very early in our history—in 1914—there appears the first article of our leading editor, contributor and artist, Dr. V. G. L. van Someren. As editor, for a period of 15 years from 1922-36, he was either in sole or joint control, and covered 44 numbers,

or nearly half the production of the Journal to date! As a contributor he was primarily concerned with birds and butterflies. His outstanding ornithological work is, of course, the *Birds of Kenya and Uganda* which was issued serially between 1925 and 1935. This covers the game birds, pigeons, ducks, geese, bustards and waders, and runs to some 300 pages, with illustrations of nearly all the species. His outstanding entomological work (part of which was done in collaboration with Canon Rogers) is the *Butterflies of Kenya and Uganda*, issued serially between 1925 and 1939 and profusely illustrated. An artist, van Someren always illustrated his works either with drawings or photographs, and it is difficult, with so much material, to select any special example for mention. However, six out of our nine coloured plates are by him, and among these one of the most delightful is of *Hymenoptera* Sand-wasps (1919). By the way, several other members of the van Someren family have been intimately concerned with the Journal—his son, G. R. C., his brother, Dr. R., and his nephew, Dr. V. D.

In 1938 Dr. V. G. L. van Someren led an important expedition, sponsored by the Coryndon Museum, to the Chyulu Hills near Kibwezi in Kenya—a fascinating forested mountain range, almost uninhabited and little explored. The results—again profusely illustrated—were published in the Journal for 1939-43 by van Someren himself, with a useful map (done jointly with A. M. Champion and C. S. Hitchens), and by P. R. O. Bally, A. J. F. Gedye, W. D. Hincks, Sir A. K. Marshall and B. P. Uvarov.

From 1941-6 there was another outstanding editor, J. R. Hudson, who published no fewer than 21 numbers containing much excellent material during this period. He also performed a unique act in the history of the Journal, by publishing a comprehensive Index (under subject and author heads) of the contents of Numbers 1-80 (1910-43). This is an invaluable work, for which all students of the Journal are surely most grateful.

From the year 1947 onwards, as a result of post-war difficulties, the cost and delay of publication became increasingly acute and there were long gaps between Journals. To fill the vacuum, a modest but valuable little quarterly called *Nature in East Africa*, printed by the Falcon Press, of Nairobi, was started. This supplied the 'Short Notes' section of the Journal and ran for 11 numbers between 1947 and 1950 before being discontinued when conditions for printing the Journal itself had become easier. It performed a most useful service, and consideration has since been more than once given to the question whether it should be revived. Myself, I would prefer to continue to publish such matter in the Nature Notes section of the Journal, where they are less liable to get overlooked.

In an article of this length it is unfortunately impossible to mention even a selection of the leading papers contained in the Journal. I have, however, been able to mention some of those published during our early and middle years, so will now cite three samples of recent years, each entirely different but, in its individual field, of great interest. The first is of outstanding value—G. H. Swynnerton and R. W. Hayman's 'Checklist of the Land Mammals of Tanganyika and Zanzibar' (issue 90 of 1950). This is just the kind of list that every territory should have but will be lucky

to obtain. The second is of outstanding originality—D. G. MacInnes' 'Explanation of Scientific Nomenclature' (issue 95 of 1954). This contains an excellent glossary of the scientific names of our birds, giving the origin of the name (Latin, Greek or composite) and an explanation of its meaning. For instance, how many people know that the name of the Shrike *Rhodophoneus* means 'rosy murderer'? My third sample is, to me, outstandingly strange—some notes on the carnivorous habits of the duiker by M. Dalton (issue 94 of 1953 p. 73) and H. F. Stoneham (issue 97 of 1955 p. 205). Apparently duikers like meat and are even prepared to catch it, *pace* Stoneham, who says: "I have many times told the Africans to prove to me that duikers attack fowls [as alleged], and they have since done so. About dusk some years ago they called me to witness a stalk. The duiker approached stealthily on the feeding fowls and we waited and watched. Eventually it was close enough to seize one with a rush and I shot the duiker in the act with the fowl in its mouth, though not much hurt."

Many distinguished people have contributed substantially to the Journal. I would like to mention just a few of them here: for birds, Belcher, Benson, Brown, Guichard, F. J. Jackson, Leakey, Moreau, the van Somerens, Stoneham and Williams; for mammals and reptiles, Hayman, Hesse, Ionides, Loveridge, Blayney Percival and Swynnerton; for fish, Copley; for shells, Verdcourt; for entomology, Hale Carpenter, Gedye, T. H. E. Jackson, Pinhey, Poulton, Rogers, van Someren, Townsend and Uvarov; for botany, Bally, Battiscombe, Jex Blake, Dale, Moreau and Napier; for archaeology, Andrews, Hobley, Kirkman, Leakey, Mary Leakey and Moysey; for geography and travel, Juxon Barton, Brooks and Champion; for geology, Glenday, Gregory, Hobley, Pulfrey, Richard and Sykes; for anthropology and ethnology, Darroch, Dobbs, Hull, Orchardson, Michael Sampson, Thorp and Wynstone Waters.

With regard to our printers, the two leading firms are Messrs. Longmans Green of London, from 1910-22 (18 numbers), and Messrs. East African Standard Ltd. of Nairobi, from 1922-45 (no fewer than 66 numbers). Since 1945 there have been several changes, the work being performed at times by Messrs. Witherby of London, and by Messrs. Boyd, E.A. Printing Press, English Press and E.A. Standard of Nairobi. To all of these, and especially to the Standard, we are most grateful. Frankly, I think we are a bit of a nuisance to our printers, since we demand the highest standards of production for relatively few copies! However, I hope that it may be some consolation to them that, unlike many other productions, our Journals are kept, and read again and again. For instance, in how many periodicals is it easy to refer to the contributions of 1910, as I have been able to do in this paper?

One important function of our Journal which may not be well known to everybody is the fact that, with each issue, a considerable number of copies are dispatched to scientific institutions and publications all over the world, and in exchange we receive many journals of the greatest value for the enrichment of our Library.

In conclusion, I am sure that all the members of the Society will give the Journal, under its present Editor, Mrs. Mary Aldridge, and her sub-committee, Messrs. Bednall, Bowles and Magner, every good wish for the future.