

## On the slippery trail of the cocktail-cabinet outdoorsmen

As a way of participating in the European Year of the Environment (EYE), we announced in our March issue that in April 1988 we would present a number of 'EYE sore Awards' to the perpetrators of examples of several categories of needless environmental despoliation, chosen from nominations by our readers.

In the meantime, we said, we would publish—and local radio stations would broadcast—some of the better entries as they came in, in the hope of inspiring remedial action before the actual crunch of the awards. Entries are piling up, and this month we publish one from Mike Gibbons, prompted by BBC Radio Scotland's coverage of the awards 'scheme', about catering for people who try to 'rough it' in luxury and ruin the landscape they have come to enjoy.

**T**he River Dionard, which reaches the sea near Cape Wrath in north Sutherland, is a very high-class salmon river. It flows through Strath Dionard, a valley which even the normally sober journal *A Nature Conservation Review* describes as "one of the most spectacular glens in Scotland."

Along the valley, a series of peaty hummocks are interspersed with pools and larger lochans stained dark by the peat. The area has been designated as a Grade 1 Site of Special Scien-

tific Interest (SSSI), and 6,000 acres have been declared as the Gualin National Nature Reserve. Divers, greenshanks, golden plovers, golden eagles, merlins, pine martens and otters are among the animals breeding in the reserve.

Mike Gibbons knows Gualin well from regular holidays in the area, but since 1981 he has seen it become scarred beyond recognition. Mechanical vehicles have, in his words, "eroded the area to such an extent over the last five years, that many of the diverse



**Before.** Strath Dionard when fishermen relied more on their legs.

habitats have been destroyed, and the valley bottom reduced to a mass of water, peat, slurry and rock." The damage is so bad that a German tourist is reported to have asked the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) why army tank training was allowed on a nature reserve. Gibbons knows of an otter holt that has been destroyed by the vehicles, although the effect on the other wildlife of the valley is difficult to

determine.

These vehicles, which are a little larger than Range Rovers and have tank-like tracks, provide a taxi service for anglers who wish to enjoy the rich salmon fishing with a minimum of effort. In high season, they may make four trips a day along the Strath, and as one route becomes eroded, another is established, thus constantly widening the scars on the delicate peat.

## Diplomacy and death in the rhino wars

**T**he government of North Yemen, the world's largest importer of rhino horn, has formally agreed to implement all six points of a strategy designed by conservationists to put an end to a trade that has done much to reduce the world population of the black rhino from about 65,000 in 1970 to 4,000 in 1986.

Dr Esmond Bradley Martin reports from Kenya that, in December 1986, he and Lucy Vigne, the coordinator of a project funded by a consortium of conservation groups, visited

North Yemen and, with the help of the US and British ambassadors there, held two "long and productive" meetings with the ministers of foreign affairs and of the economy.

Dr Bradley Martin warned the ministers that if North Yemen—which, through the medium of three or four large traders, imports the horn to make dagger handles—did not try harder to enforce its 1982 law prohibiting these imports, foreign aid, especially from the US, might be reduced. He also reminded them of the continuing criticism of North Yemen in the world's press.

Accordingly, a six-point strategy was worked out:

1. The prime minister would talk to the principal trader, who has been buying about two thirds of all imports, and warn him to stop handling new supplies.

The bitter end. The mufti will announce that it is wrong to do this.

2. The foreign minister would discuss with a senior official of the United Arab Emirates the need to close down the entrepôts for rhino horn in its sheikhdoms.

3. The government would prohibit all rhino horn exports. (Chinese, Koreans and Yemenis buy the leftover shavings from the dagger handles and export them to eastern Asia for use in traditional medicines.)

4. The government would ask the grand mufti to issue a religious edict stating that to cause the extinction of an animal species is against the will of God.

5. When reapplying for their licences, owners of dagger-making workshops would have to agree not to use any more rhino horn. If, later, rhino horn was found on their premises, the shops would be closed.

6. The customs department would encourage water-buffalo horn as a rhino-horn substitute by eliminating import duties on it.

It was an opportune time, says Dr Bradley Martin, to draw up such a strategy. The country has been in an economic slump for

the past two years, and the government, in order to raise revenue, has already been cracking down on smuggling generally. Also, adverse publicity from conservation organisations and the world's press has been hitting home. The yearly average of 1,700kg between 1980 and 1984 fell to less than 1,000kg in 1985 and 500kg in 1986.

The cabinet decision to implement all six points of the strategy was taken on 31 December 1986, and in March 1987, Dr Bradley Martin went back to North Yemen to see what had actually been done. He writes: "So far the first three points have been acted upon. Most important of the remaining three points is the affidavit system, and the foreign minister and deputy minister of the economy promised that this would be in effect by December 1987."

"At present," he adds, "congratulations are in order for what the government has so quickly achieved. However, continued pressure and monitoring will be required to see that the action plan is fully enforced."

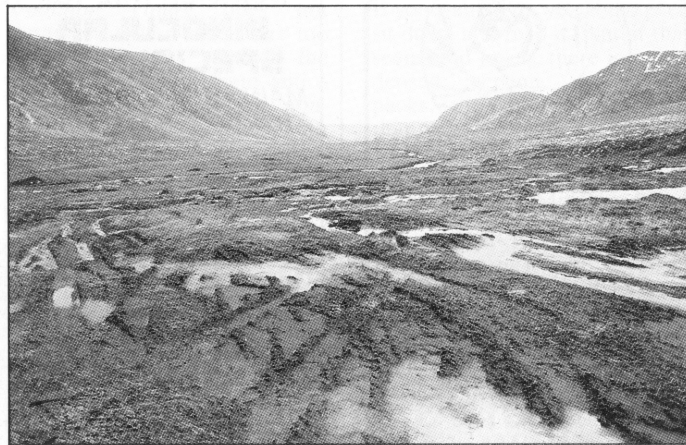
The organisations supporting Dr Bradley Martin's project are



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The salmon fishermen of old would have been horrified. Bruce Sandison, angling journalist and author of *The Trout Lochs of Scotland*, says that Loch Dionard is "one of those very special places in Scotland. But you have to work for the reward. It's a seven-and-a-half-mile walk in, but well worth the effort when you get there". He has made that walk several times to fish the loch, and he has no time for the tracked vehicles "complete with their cocktail cabinets."

Strath Dionard was the site for some of the pioneering research of Desmond and Mamie Nethersole-Thompson, authors of a number of classic monographs on Scottish birds. Mrs Marjorie Fergusson, the late owner of the valley and a dedicated conservationist, was a great friend of theirs, and her dearest wish was that this land should be left as it was. The Nethersole-Thompsons persuaded her that the best way to ensure this was by a management agreement with the Nature Conservancy Council which allowed Gualin to be established as a National Nature Reserve. They describe the state of the



**After.** Tanks in a nature reserve?

Gualin under its new owners as a "downright disgrace."

The new owners are a syndicate. Most Highland estates are under severe economic pressure these days, and, not surprisingly, owners want to do all they can to maximise their income. Foreign tourists wanting to fish in comfort can provide a valuable source of revenue and be of considerable benefit to the local economy. An unviable estate

could well be sold for forestry, like other parts of Caithness and Sutherland (see BBC WILDLIFE March 1987, p138), and that would do far more harm to the wildlife of Strath Dionard than the tracked vehicles.

The NCC needs to be sensitive to such considerations, but at Gualin, it has a more particular problem. The original nature reserve agreement (still binding on the new owners) was drafted

so as to allow limited vehicular access to the fisheries. This agreement, drawn up in good faith at a time when the present level of usage could not have been anticipated, takes precedence over the powers that the NCC might otherwise have under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and effectively hamstrings it from using these powers to stop the damage.

A spokesman for the NCC in Inverness told BBC WILDLIFE that the council has tried, and is still trying, every option open to it. Because this procedure is lengthy, it has taken steps in the meantime to limit the vehicles in order to reduce the damage. The only lasting solution, though, would be for the owners to restrict the use of vehicles to the previous owner's level, and so to honour the spirit of the nature reserve agreement.

If they are prepared to do so, we shall be happy to garland them on these pages; if not, then the owners of Gualin must be strong contenders for the Bulldozer Award for needless land misuse, to be announced in March 1988.

**MICHAEL SCOTT**

the African Wildlife Foundation, WWF, New York Zoological Society and African Fund for Endangered Wildlife.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the rhino-horn trade, Zimbabwe has been stepping up its war against Zambian poachers with designs on the 500 or so black rhinos that inhabit a strip of the Kariba National Park along the Zambezi river, the Zambia/Zimbabwe border.

Saxon Logan, a Central Television producer who is making a documentary on the subject (for transmission this autumn), reports that in this desperate effort to save what is generally reckoned to be the last viable wild rhino population, support from conservation organisations is conspicuous by its absence. He attributes this to the "robust and aggressive" nature of Zimbabwe's campaign—ie, in the past two years, wardens have killed 27 poachers.

He quotes a visiting conservation official as saying: "It's very difficult to support a wildlife department's efforts to save the rhino when it has human blood on its hands."

In the same two years, though, the number of rhinos whose blood is on human hands is about 200, and the population is nearing the point where the genetic defects of inbreeding could start to turn up. The latest plan, while the wardens try to hold off the invading poachers, is to translocate the rhinos well away from the border, and so far—thanks to a grant personally authorised by Prime Minister Robert Mugabe—110 have already been moved.

In the meantime, the protection of the rhinos that are still there is left to 70 armed men patrolling 150 miles of river. It is a full-scale war and "a logistical nightmare by any military standards," in the opinion of Glen Tatham, one of Kariba's provincial wardens. The poachers are almost as well organised as the wardens, outnumber them and are often better armed.

And the incentive is certainly there. Logan tells of accompanying wardens as they confiscated a haul of 32 horns worth an estimated \$1.6 million. This is the factor that, war or no war, can only change if all the markets are closed.



These towers—a few of hundreds, and shown here in a quieter, and safer, season—are now bristling with guns blasting away at the hundreds of thousands of turtle doves that pass through the Gironde estuary near Bordeaux every May and June on their migration to northern Europe (*Jenny Devitt reports from Paris*).

The fact that it is against the law to kill the birds has made very little difference in the 18 years since the law was passed.

For one thing, there was the almost immediate discovery of a loophole allowing shooting on land surrounding a dwelling, and a

'dwelling' can be almost anything—a wooden hut, or a caravan, usually.

Not all hunters bother with the loophole, though, and in the past two years, about 100 of them have been fined up to £200. That is not very many, considering that last year about 8,000 illegal hunters were estimated to have killed 100,000 doves—but it does show an increased willingness by the authorities to crack down.

Another such sign is the French environment minister's recent refusal to change the law—even after much lobbying by the hunters, who claim that they are following an old bird-shooting tradition. This, in fact, only stretches back to the advent of long-distance transport, and as lately as the early twentieth century, there were only a few dozen trappers in the Gironde.

Anyway, as far as the turtle doves are concerned, legalities and traditions are irrelevant. The birds pass over this part of France before they have bred for the year, and it is a particularly bad time for them to be killed in large numbers. At one observation point, bird-watchers have recorded a decline from 46,000 in 1984 to 30,000 in 1986.