

of birds are pursued for the sake of their plumage, which is required to minister to the heedless vanity of European fashion. The causes of this diminution in the wild Fauna of India are in some cases natural and inevitable and in others they are capable of being arrested. In the former class I would name the steady increase of population, the widening area of cultivation, and the improvement in means of communication, all of them the sequel of what is popularly termed progress in civilisation. Among the artificial and preventible causes I would name the great increase in the number of persons who use firearms, the immense improvement in the mechanism and range of the weapons themselves, the unchecked depredations of native hunters and poachers, and in some cases, I regret to say, a lowering of the standard of sport leading to the shooting of immature heads, or to the slaughter of females. The result of all these agencies, many of which are found in operation at the same time and in the same place, cannot fail to be a continuous reduction in the wild game of India. I cannot say that the Government of India have hitherto shown any great boldness in dealing with the matter, but there has been and still is, in my opinion, very good reason for proceeding cautiously. There are some persons who say that wild animals are as certainly destined to disappear in India, as wolves, for instance, have done in England, and that it is of no use to try and put back the hands of the clock. I do not attach much value to this plea, which seems to me rather pusillanimous as well as needlessly pessimistic.

ARGUMENTS ANSWERED.

There are others who say that in a continent so vast as India, or to narrow the illustration in a province with such extensive forest reserves as Burma, the wild animals may be left to look after themselves. This argument does not impress me either, for the distant jungles are available only to the favoured few, and it is the disappearance of game from the plains and from accessible tracts that is for the most part in question. I do, however, attach great value to the consideration that wild animal life should not be unduly forested at the expense of the occupations or the crops of the people. Where depredations are committed upon crops or upon flocks and herds the cultivator cannot be denied within reasonable limits the means of self-protection. Similarly it is very important that any restrictions that are placed upon the destruction of game should not be worked in a manner that may be oppressive or harassing to his interests. Hitherto the attempts made by Government to deal with the question by legislation, or by rules and notifications based on statute, have been somewhat fitful and lacking in method. In parts, as I have already mentioned, elephants have been very wisely and properly protected; a close season has been instituted for certain kinds of game; an Act has been passed for the preservation of wild birds; and, I observe from one of the enclosures to your memorial, that your ingenuity has not shrunk from the suggestion that a deer may reasonably be considered a wild bird under this Act. (Laughter.) The possession or sale during the breeding season of the flesh of certain wild birds in municipal or cantonment areas is forbidden. Then again rules have been issued under the Forest Act protecting certain classes of animals in certain tracts. The general scope of these restrictions has been in the right direction, but I doubt if they have been sufficiently co-ordinated or if they have gone far enough.

FURTHER ACTION NEEDED.

And one of the last acts at Simla before I had received or read your memorial was to invite a re-examination of the subject, with the view of deciding whether we might proceed somewhat further than we have already done. We must be very careful not to devise any too stereotyped or procrustean form of procedure, since there is probably no matter in which a greater variety of conditions and necessities prevails, and the rules or precautions which would be useful in one place might be positively harmful in another. Among the suggestions which will occur to all of us as deserving of consideration are some greater restriction by the charge of fees or otherwise upon the issue of gun licences, the more strict enforcement of a close season for certain animals, the prohibition of the possession or sale of flesh during the breeding season, penalties upon netting and snaring during the same period, restrictions of the facilities given to strangers to shoot unlimited amounts of game, and upon the sale and export of trophies and skins. I daresay that many other ideas will occur to us in the discussion of the matter or may be put forward in the press and elsewhere by those who are qualified to advise. My own idea would be, if possible, to frame some kind of legislation of a permissive and elastic nature, the provisions of which should be applied to the various provinces of India, in so far only as they were adapted to the local conditions. The question of the native States somewhat complicates the matter, but I doubt not that the Government would, when required, meet with the willing co-operation of the Chiefs, many of whom are keen and enthusiastic patrons both of animal life and of sport. The subject is not one that can be hastily taken up or quickly decided, but I have probably said enough to show you that I personally am in close sympathy with your aims, and I need hardly add that if the Government of India finds itself able, after further study, to proceed with the matter, an opportunity will be given to those who are interested in each province to record their opinions.

Game Preservation Association.

THE PROTECTION OF WILD LIFE.

In reply to a memorial from the Burma Game Preservation Association his Excellency spoke as follows:—Gentlemen,—Among the many memorials which the enterprising inhabitants of lower Burma and of Rangoon have showered upon me, and to all of which it has not been possible for me to give a verbal reply, I have selected yours as one of those to which I should. The great importance of the subject which it raises—the question of game preservation in India—is one that may appeal, in my judgment, not merely to the sportsman, but also to the naturalist and the friend of animal life. It is certainly not through the spectacles of the sportsman only that I would regard it, though I yield to no one in my recognition of the manly attractions of *shukar*. Such considerations, however, might be suspected of a selfish tinge, and I think that in approaching the matter we should, as far as possible, put our own predilections in the background, and view it in the public interest at large. There are some persons who doubt or dispute the progressive diminution of wild life in India—I think that they are wrong! The facts seem to me to point entirely in the opposite direction.

DIMINUTION OF BIG GAME.

Up till the time of the Mutiny lions were shot in Central India—they are now confined to an ever narrowing patch of forest in Kathiawar. I was on the verge of contributing to their still further reduction a year ago myself but fortunately I found out my mistake in time, and was able to adopt a restraint which I hope others will follow. Except in the native States, the Terai and forest reserves, tigers are undoubtedly diminishing. This is, perhaps, not an unmitigated evil. The rhinoceros is all but exterminated save in Assam; bison are not so numerous or so easy to obtain as they once were; elephants have already had to be protected in many parts; and above all deer, to which you particularly allude in the case of Burma, are rapidly dwindling. Every man's hand appears to be against them, and each year thins the herds.

HEEDLESS VANITY OF FASHION.

Finally many beautiful and innocent varieties