

The ELASHER

FORESTRY
COMMISSION
News & Views

Issued by
INFORMATION
OFFICER

No. 206

February, 1965

THOSE DECEMBER RAINFALLS!

THE rainfalls recorded at Coed-y-Brenin and Dovey Forests during the 24 hour periods ending at 9 a.m. on the 12th and 13th December, writes Mr. P. A. THOMAS, Area Civil Engineer, North Wales, were 2.37 inches and 5.83 inches at the former and 1.96 and 6.82 inches at the latter. Assuming a fairly uniform distribution, which seems likely from the evidence of some of the outlying rain gauges, one may assess the staggering amount of rain which landed on the 20,857 acres of Coed-y-Brenin and the 21,596 acres at Dovey during the 48 hours - 17,300,000 tons on the former and 19,130,000 tons on the latter.

Mr. F. C. BEST, Conservator, North Wales, also writes about the storms in Wales. The first half of December, he says, was a period of almost unprecedented rain. There was extensive flooding in the Conway and Mawddach Valleys during the early part of the week starting Sunday, 6th December, and then, six days later, remarkable falls of rain occurred over a wide area.

At Dolwyddelan (Gwydyr) nearly 18 ins. fell in the week, at the Forest Centre at Coed-y-Brenin nearly 17 ins., and at the Forest Centre at Dovey Corris nearly 15 ins. At Lake Vyrnwy dam the 4.75 ins. in 24 hours was the highest ever recorded and the lake rose over 7 ft. in a night. Fortunately the earlier prolonged drought enabled this lake to hold the whole fall, and the newly constructed Trywerin dam held the whole fall in the headwaters of the River Dee; but in spite of this the upper reaches of the Dee and Severn had record floods and the shorter rivers of Conway, Mawddach and Dovey were affected even more.

At the height of the flood at Dovey a privately owned lake burst and Mrs. P. FRASER, widow of the late Head Forester of Dovey, living in a bungalow, had to spend three quarters of an hour in the middle of the night on the kitchen table.

None of these rainfall figures were taken at high elevation, where the falls may have been considerably heavier.

It is interesting to note that the highest in 24 hours ever recorded in Britain was 11 ins. on 18th July, 1955, near Weymouth, and that a fall of over 26 ins. was recorded at Llyn Cowlyd in a week in 1925.

**FROM GRAVEL PITS TO BIRD SANCTUARY

ANYONE travelling through Sevenoaks, in Kent, either by car or train, cannot fail to have noticed the large flooded gravel-pits at the south side of the town. In the past four years two of these have undergone a transformation; from dreary, barren, industrial sites, whose main features were the silhouettes of the dredger and the municipal gas works, they have become exciting and thrilling harbours for wildfowl of many different species, where the unexpected is always turning up.

I had the pleasure, writes Mr. P. F. GARTHWAITE, our Wildlife Officer, of being shown round the other day by Dr. Jeffrey Harrison, Scientific Adviser to the Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland, which has leased the pits from the owner as an experimental reserve. With the co-operation of the owner, the sheer banks of the pits were shelved, lagoons formed, and after an intensive analysis of the stomach contents of a large

number of duck, a variety of suitable vegetation has been established both on the banks and in the shallows. The results have been spectacular, both scenically and as an attraction to wildfowl and other birds.

The results of the experience in creating this habitat have just been set out in a simple little booklet published jointly by WAGBI and the Wildfowl Trust called "Know Your Wildfowl Food Plants". This illustrates about 25 of the important plant species, and indicates where and how to plant them, and what part is played by the seeds, foliage, roots and stems in the diet of various species. Bur-reed and spike-rush, amphibious bistort and mare's tail, horned pond weed and milfoil, all have their place in the water. While alder, birch, oak and bramble provide both cover and food on the bank.

There are many stretches of water in Commission forests which would benefit by such attention, and many frost-ridden marshy hollows, which with some inexpensive dredging and damming could provide a positive asset for the naturalist and sportsman by creating new and favourable habitats for that most exciting group of birds, the wildfowl. Human and other encroachment is continually reducing their natural haunts, and there is an opportunity for the forest yet again to prove its value in conservation of our fauna and flora.

"Know Your Wildfowl Food Plants" can be obtained from W.A.G.B.I., 6 Windsor Buildings, George Street, Liverpool 3, price 2/6, postage 6d.

**OBITUARIES

IT is with deep regret that we have to report the sudden death in late December of Mr. G. DAVIS, Clerical Officer at Chester. He had gone to work as usual but, feeling ill, he was taken to the local Infirmary and, within a few hours, had passed away. The news came as a great shock to the office staff and a colleague writes:

George, as he was so well known to everyone, started at the Chester office in 1951 on the closure of the Ministry of Food offices. From then onward he had largely handled the matter of office accommodation and stores, and anyone with personal knowledge of the Chester office will realise the amount of work which that entailed. A coincidence is that within a month or two we should be moving into our new quarters and there would no longer have been the accommodation worries that each winter had brought.

George was a keen gardener, taking great pride in his show of chrysanthemums. He was 60, and leaves a widow, to whom we extend our sympathy.

We are also sorry to record the death of Mr. GEORGE LEES, aged 76, a retired Forester. Mr. Lees began work in the Dean with the Office of Woods when he was 13, and retired in 1953. He was a native of the Forest and was appointed Forester at Serridge Beat after passing through the Dean School. He was also, for many years, in charge of the Edgehills and Ross Section. On retirement he built himself a bungalow only a few hundred yards from the woods and lived there almost until the time of death.

**TRIBUTE TO "BERTIE" GALE

THE passing of "BERTIE" GALE (reported in December) writes Mr. H. W. GULLIVER, Chief Clerk, Woking, set me speculating as to how long ago it was that we served together in the New Forest. It must have been in the late 1920s that Bertie joined the staff of the then Deputy Surveyor, L. S. OSMASTON, as one of the Commission's first "modern" Foresters. It was then that he followed one of our older Office of Wood's Woodsmen at Ramnor Cottage - situated about two miles off the Brockenhurst-Lyndhurst road and served by just a rough forest track.

We met in post-war years after Bertie's return from the Isle of Man and we found ourselves in reminiscent mood on the lines that "those were the days". One particular job we liked to recall concerned a contract, running over a year or so, for an extensive felling of millable timber in Ramnor Enclosure, by Commission workers. It was one of my stints to

work out the cube of Bertie's Measuring Book for each log recorded - No., Length and Quarter Girth, and to invoice the merchant. Bertie's work was so "spot-on" that the very tough merchant's representative came to accept his measurement and allowance for defect without question. This was indeed a compliment, since many of the hardwood logs had more than one measurement, using the "stop" technique.

Bertie was a most respected member of the New Forest staff and was quickly accepted by the forest "natives". I was privileged to be one of his many friends.

****BORN 1869 - STILL GOING STRONG**

FORESTERS who are familiar with some of the older characters in the Forest of Dean will be pleased to learn that Mr. ELAM WARD, a famous woodcutter who at the age of 95 must surely be the oldest of the Commission's if not the Government's pensioners, is active and in good health.

I called on him the other day to wish him and his wife a Happy New Year, says Head Forester R. J. JENNINGS. Having had the rare pleasure of being tutored by him in timber felling 30 years ago, we spent a little time reminiscing.

"I started work", he told me, "before I was nine years old, after running away from school when the teacher accused me of cheating from the boy next to me. 'How could I have done that', I said, 'when I finished my sum before he did!'

"I told the teacher as I'd had enough and I never went back but started with my father and brothers who were cutters. The first job I had was lighting the browst fires and I reckon I've done every kind of job there is in the woods. I liked the cutting best of all.

"I gave my notice in to retire when I was 70, but this was during the war and they wouldn't accept it. 'We can't spare chaps like you', they said. 'You'll have to carry on for a bit longer'. So I stayed until I was 72."

I asked him, adds Mr. Jennings, what was his recipe for good health? "Bread and cheese and hard work", he said, "and plenty of cider." He added quickly: "I've got a cask in ... would you like to try a drop?" So a glass was drawn off, and I tried a drop and drank his health. Yes, they live to a good age in the Dean.

****BIRDS OF PREY AND TOXIC CHEMICALS**

MANY Forestry Commission staff are aware that the Nature Conservancy are carrying out research on birds of prey - some have received circulars requesting information, others have joined us in the field work. I am grateful, therefore, for the opportunity to write a note for The Slasher, as it also provides me with an opportunity to express my thanks for all the help and co-operation received. So writes Mr. IAN PRESTT of the Toxic Chemicals and Wildlife Section of Monks Wood Experimental Station, Abbots Ripton, Huntingdon.

The Nature Conservancy, in collaboration with other bodies, have carried out the chemical analysis of a wide range of wild animals, and birds and their eggs, from many parts of the country, goes on Mr. Prestt. It was found that some residue, although often small, of the organochlorine insecticides (such as aldrin, dieldrin, heptachlor and DDT) was present in a large proportion of the specimens. The important conclusion to be drawn was that, due to their property of persistence, these chemicals were gradually being spread over the country. Possibly the most surprising demonstration of this was given by the results recently obtained from the analysis of 52 sea bird eggs. All of these were found to contain organochlorine residues, the highest being in ashag's egg from St. Abb's Head, Berwickshire. The chemicals must have got into the sea water and then been taken in by fish and other marine organisms, which in turn were eaten by the sea birds. This also demonstrates another property of these insecticides; they can be passed along the food chain and moreover they can be concentrated in the process.

It was therefore not altogether unexpected when it was found that predators at the ends of the 'food chains' contained the highest chemical residues. Now for a variety of reasons - such as their large size, the fact that they require relatively large hunting territories and the dislike for them among game-keepers - the birds of prey have long been in need of protection. This added threat to them from toxic chemicals has, therefore, caused a great deal of concern and so the Conservancy, as part of its duty to conserve the natural flora and fauna of Britain, is investigating the situation.

Work already completed by the Conservancy and the British Trust for Ornithology has shown that the peregrin falcon and the sparrow-hawk have declined catastrophically on a national scale, while more local decreases have occurred for the kestrel and tawny owl. Also the golden eagle has recently suffered an unprecedented drop in breeding success over a wide area of the Western Highlands.

The investigation has three main aspects: (i) national surveys, (ii) more local studies of breeding success and (iii) the examination of dead birds and eggs. We want to know which species are being affected and, for example, where they get the chemicals and what effect they have on the birds.

The types of results coming in, and from which the picture will be built up, are as follows. A detailed study was made in 1964 of the sparrow-hawk in six areas, each known in the 1940's or early 50's to contain between 10 and 20 breeding pairs. In two of the areas (Cambs. and Yorks.) no hawks were present; in Suffolk some were present but were not breeding; in Cumberland one pair nested and no young were fledged; in Anglesey five pairs were found, but of these one failed to nest, three fledged only one young and one only two (the typical number being 3 - 5). In the sixth area, however, in the New Forest in Hampshire, 13 nesting pairs were found. Eleven of these were known to be successful and an average of three young per nest was fledged. Moreover, a sparrow-hawk egg collected for us by helpers from the Commission from an addled clutch near York contained far higher residues than a number of such eggs collected in the New Forest.

This work always takes a long time, so it will be continued for a number of years. Also, the Government has now instituted a ban on the most widely used organochlorine pesticides, so we should get an improvement in the position if these chemicals really are the cause of the decreases recorded. I would be grateful to receive at any time, therefore, information on breeding of any birds of prey, but in particular of the sparrow-hawk and kestrel. I would also be pleased to receive any birds of prey found dead or addled eggs (but please note a licence is required to take wild birds' eggs, so I would have to collect these under my licence).

****RECENT PROMOTIONS**

WE were delighted to learn of the promotion of Mr. ERIC TINSON from Senior to Chief Executive Officer, with effect from the beginning of the year. Mr. Tinson, who has been with the Marketing Section at Headquarters for the last year or so, joined the Commission in 1938, commencing with the Finance Branch and remaining with it 16 years, except for Army service during the war. In 1954 Mr. Tinson went to Bristol where he was an HEO. He was promoted to S.E.O. in 1961 and, back in London, worked with O & M. and Industrial Establishments for a short period.

Others recently promoted, to whom we also offer our congratulations, are the following colleagues, who become District Officers Grade I: A. C. CHRISTIE; J. R. FLETCHER; W. G. JEFFREY; J. JOBLING; F. M. MACRAE; S. A. NEUSTEIN; P. A. W. OVERKILL; J. R. SKINNER; and B. WALBANK.

IF YOU DO SOMETHING, SEE SOMETHING, OR HEAR SOMETHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY, TELL YOUR SLASHER CORRESPONDENT. THERE IS A CORRESPONDENT IN EACH DIRECTORATE AND CONSERVANCY OFFICE.