

THE GLAZIER

**FORESTRY
COMMISSION**
News & Views

Issued by
**INFORMATION
OFFICER**

No. 218

February, 1966.

THE MISSING SHEPHERD

had failed to return from the hills and, for their efforts, were warmly thanked by the police.

COMMISSION staff in strength joined in a large scale search in Perthshire for a shepherd who

Mr. A. S. MACNAIR, District Officer, received the call for help in the evening, preparatory to the search party setting off early the following morning from Glen Finlas. His report makes interesting reading:

"I telephoned the Forester at Achray and we decided to use men from the nearest two beats, together with radio equipment. Assistant Forester J. BEATON, with eleven men, a radiomobile, four handsets and a Glencoe stretcher formed the Commission contribution to the party, which was in the charge of an Inspector of the Dunblane police and also included an R.A.F. rescue team with helicopter, and other helpers. Commission radio provided all the communications throughout the operation and both R.A.F. personnel and the police expressed admiration for the equipment."

Sad to relate, the shepherd was eventually found dead, having fallen for some distance down a precipitous scree.

**DEATH OF MR. GILBERT BALLANCE

NEWS of the death of Mr. GILBERT BALLANCE, Assistant Conservator, came as a great shock to his many friends throughout the Commission; although he had not been in really good health for some time, his passing after an operation was unexpected.

Gilbert Ballance, who was 52, joined the Commission in 1935. He had spent a great deal of his early days in France, although he obtained his university degree in this country. He had served, among other places, in Exeter and Bristol before going to Cambridge in 1949, where he remained until his very recent transfer to Woking. He always maintained great interest in the subject of fire protection and, in fact, became a Licentiate of the Institution of Fire Engineers. Nursery work was another of his special subjects.

**MR. FRANK BEST

NEARLY £100 was subscribed to provide a farewell gift to Mr. FRANK BEST, who recently retired from the post of Conservator, North Wales. This took the form of a .30-06 Express sporting rifle (his own choice, of course) with telescopic sights and leather carrying case. The presentation was made on behalf of wellwishers by Mr. J. Q. WILLIAMSON, Senior Officer for Wales, at the annual dinner of the Conservancy social club. This function, incidentally, was being held for the last time in Shrewsbury and the attendance was a record.

Forester R. O. L. THOMAS, of Llangollen, tells us that Mr. Best claims to have been the first man in history to have shot a pheasant from the cover of a group of Metasequoia trees. No basis for this assertion is given by our correspondent but we suspect the incident may have occurred when Mr. Best was among the sequoias on the Leighton Hall estate near Welshpool. To the best of our recollection these magnificent trees were brought to this country from America as tiny seedlings in pots more than 100 years ago. Many exceed 117 feet in height and some contain about seven tons of timber apiece. In 1957 the grove was presented to the Royal Forestry Society of England and Wales by its former owner, Major C. P. ACKERS.

**STAFF MOVES

BY the end of this month Mr. TOM FARMER hitherto Administration and Finance Officer at

Dumfries, will have arrived at Headquarters to take up his new post on temporary promotion to Chief Executive Officer. Mr. Farmer is no stranger to London, having served at Headquarters for a considerable time before leaving in 1955 for Dumfries as Chief Clerk. His many friends look forward to working with him again and some will remember close associations with him during the somewhat hectic days which preceded introduction of the Bill leading to the 1951 Forestry Act, our most recent major piece of legislation.

Mr. A. A. COWAN, S.E.O. in the Forest Management Division at Headquarters, succeeds Mr. Farmer at Dumfries. Mr. J. HOGARTH, on promotion to S.E.O., will follow Mr. Cowan and Mr. K. H. C. TAYLOR, on promotion to H.E.O., goes to Glasgow to replace Mr. Hogarth.

On the Engineering side, Mr. C. D. MACMAHON is also due at Headquarters at the end of February, as Assistant Chief Engineer in succession to Mr. D. M. BEATON, who is leaving the Commission this Spring.

****ASH WITH SINGLE LEAVES**

IN a recent issue Mr. J. P. DAVYS reported on a 20-years' old ash at Chiddingfold, South East England, which bears single leaves instead of the usual type.

Mr. A. FADDY, Forester at Salcey, East England, writes: "I came across a similar specimen here about six years ago. Apart from the unusual leaf, in every other respect it was a 'normal' ash; the leaves were borne singly and were larger and more serrated than the leaflets of ash - almost like smaller editions of sweet chestnut leaves. A specimen was sent to Alice Holt Lodge, bringing forth the information that it was a variety of common ash (Frax. Excelsior - Var. Monophylla, sometimes known as Var. Diversifolia). Later, mentioning this matter to an old ex-employee at Salcey, he showed me another specimen which is in fact still extremely difficult to spot among the normal ash."

Then Mr. A. F. MITCHELL, of Alice Holt Lodge: "The Chiddingfold discovery is of great interest, undoubtedly a very rare occurrence in wild ash; I have seen somewhere that its occurrence is probably one in three million ash trees. As a garden or park tree, however, it is occasionally seen and nurserymen bud it from their stock trees on to ordinary ash seedlings. The Commission certainly owns at least one of these at Westonbirt, but it is quite small. There are good specimens on Primrose Hill and in Regents Park and one of the biggest (77 ft. x 8 ft. 5 ins.) in Holland Park, all in North London. Kew has a few, of course, and Victoria Park, Bath, has a big one (65 ft. x 8 ft. 5 ins.). The tallest I have found is one exceeding 80 ft. at Forde Abbey, and the biggest bole is also in Dorset, at Wootton Fitzpaine, 13 ft. round.

"When someone says they must show you their 'mystery' tree you may see anything from an Amelanchier to a Zelkova, but it is more likely to be a single-leaf ash than any other single tree."

And Mr. D. F. MARSHALL, Forester at Swaffham, recalls working at Chiddingfold in 1933 and finding a small specimen of the single leaf. "I thought it so unusual", he says, "that I cut off a leaf specimen and handed it to my instructor on my first day at the Dean School. It was placed in a glass covered case and may still be there".

And the One-Needled Pine!

Assistant Forester G. SIMPSON, Allerston Forest, North East England, says reference to the one-leaved variety of Ash reminds him of the one-needled Scots pine on the Pickering beat of his forest, which differs from its normal surrounding colleagues in that it is not so hardy and suffered severely in the 1959 winter. He asks whether any other forest can boast a one-needled Scots pine.

Rarer still, he goes on, is the monstrosity known as the so-called 'Snake' variety of Sitka spruce on Cropton beat. Dallimore and Jackson give no varieties for Sitka but its 10 foot long tentacle-like branches - cum-stems protrude from a tussock of molinia and intertwine in the neighbouring spruce, giving one the impression of a nest of snakes. Yet another variety of Sitka spruce, similar to virgatata of the Norway spruce, is to be found on Pickering beat.

****MORE ON BADGER WATCHING**

SOME time ago Mr. D. A. MacCASKILL, of Inverinan, West Scotland, wrote of the formation of a badger club. "Our activities since then may be of interest", he says. "Members have paid some 100 separate or combined visits to the setts during the spring, summer, and autumn and we have now completed our film record; some work remains on the still photography side, mainly to take black and white pictures and using natural light rather than flash technique.

"We followed the cub period through until the break up of the families in late July and August and now have a pretty clear picture of what goes on. One thing, however, rather baffles us; when the families did disperse it was just as if the animals had all gone away on holiday without leaving any address. The setts remained, but no badgers. Do they live a lot above ground at this period or do they perhaps use single small holes which we didn't find?

"On evenings in the summer we followed cubs and adults on to the feeding grounds and if the wind was suitable it was possible to walk to within a few yards of them and watch them feed; we were, in fact, able to catch one of the cubs. Next summer we will spend the whole night with them just to see what actual area of ground is covered; provisionally, we think that each animal may need up to 100 acres to support it.

"We still have a very long way to go before all the mysteries of the badger are solved - but how fascinating and satisfying it all is."

****MURDER IN THE BARN**

MOST readers of the Slasher will. I am sure, have heard of the old Edwardian melodrama "The Murder in the Red Barn", writes Head Forester W. L. McCAVISH, who is Game Warden in the Border District. The true story that I am about to relate is every bit as gruesome, only in this case the intended victim came off best.

One early morning in December, Keeper B. GRAHAM of the Mounces beat, Kielder, entered his barn, and found a dead barn owl on the floor. Upon picking it up, he found that the bird was clutching a dead weasel in its left claw; the weasel, in turn, had its teeth embedded in the upper part of the owl's right leg.

Upon investigating the matter I came to the following conclusion.

The owl, which we knew frequented the barn by flying in through a broken window, was perched upon a beam in the roof, waiting for its would-be victim, a brown rat, while upon the floor of the barn a weasel was also prowling, intent upon a similar mission.

The barn owl spied the weasel and swooped, gripping it with its left claw just in front of its forelegs, and its right claw just aft of its forelegs; the weasel's long and flexible neck enabled it to turn its head and attack the owl's right foot, causing the bird to lose its grip with the right claw. The weasel then dug deep into the upper part of the owl's right leg, severing an artery, and causing it to lose most of its life blood. In its death throes the owl seemed to have gripped tighter with the left claw, and strangled the weasel, both being locked together in death.

Keeper Graham left the bodies upon the floor and after half an hour went to collect them to show to me; he found that part of the breast of the owl had been eaten away, undoubtedly by the brown rat; hence my remark that the intended victim came off best.

****STUDENT OF SERIOUS MUSIC**

IN the recent competition organised by Border Television, the winning Jedburgh team was helped to victory by Forest Worker KEITH FERGUSON, of Wauchope Forest. More than 30 Border towns competed for the coveted title of "Cock O' the Border, 1966", so all credit to Jedburgh for winning against such odds. The competition took the form of a school quiz; memory and observation test; quizzes on "Pop" and serious music; sport; and general knowledge. Keith Ferguson was the team's expert on serious music and his wide knowledge of this subject was a great asset to his team. Well done.

****THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER**

THE Inforesta Drama Group again excelled with "The Man Who Came to Dinner" - their seventh production in four years. Certainly the show provided some good entertainment for Commission staff and friends, as well as local Derby and Joan Club members - the play was staged at Duthy Hall, Southwark.

ALAN CHAPMAN, in the lead, gave a polished performance as Sheridan Whiteside and was ably supported by the large cast. SHIRLEY FOWLER was especially convincing as Lorraine Sheldon, the second grade actress struggling hard in an effort to reach the top; and LILY PALLET gave a smooth performance as the secretary. Space alone prevents our giving credit where it is due to all the other performers. It was good to see that although MAURICE GUBBY, JOHN ALP and KEN WINTER have now left the Commission their enthusiasm for drama has not waned, for they were able to add their valuable contributions in the fields of acting, producing and design.

We await the eighth production - "Love's a Luxury", on 12th-13th. May - with pleasurable anticipation.

****ON MOVING HOUSE**

WHO of our Foresters has lived in the greatest number of houses? Forester GEORGE TAYLOR, of the Dean has what he describes as a "fair record". Can anyone beat it? Here is his story: I was born in a Crown house at Pingary Tump near Mitcheldean, where my father was a Crown woodman. I might have seen the light of day at Aston Bridge Lodge but shortly before I arrived, and while my parents lived there, the roof caved in one night and fell on them as they slept in bed. Those were the good old days when you had to wait until the place collapsed around you before another was made available! Pingary Tump, by the way, is the site of an old gallows and is mentioned by the Rev. Nicholls in his book on the Forest of Dean, in which he tells of sheep stealers being hanged there. From it there was a magnificent view of the Severn Valley and the Cotswolds.

The family moved to Churchill Lodge and I recall we had a deep well in the scullery from which we drew our water with chain and bucket. Then we moved to Nagshead Lodge; followed another move, this time to Marians Lodge for a few years, and then away again to Blakeney Hill Lodge. Transfers were looked upon as commonplace, though, and after a while we moved again, now to Russells' Lodge on the beat known as Centre, where my father remained as Forester until he retired. I then took over the house on the beat which is now known as Speech House Walk.

My wife and I moved to a new house at Purple and after ten years it was found desirable to move me to Serridge Lodge, near Lydbrook. Not for long, though, for someone thought that it would be a good idea if a few more transfers took place and so we went to Reddings Lodge on the Highmeadow beat. I have now moved back to Speech House Walk and am living in a house in the Nagshead Inclosure, making the tenth Crown house that I have lived in in the Forest of Dean.

To young foresters who may be worrying about moving I would say "Don't worry about it you get used to it eventually".

****A CHALLENGE**

FROM the Dean comes the statement that, from the fire tower at Staple Edge, plantations of the following species of trees can be seen:

Oak, chestnut (sweet), beech, Norway spruce, Sitka spruce, European larch, Japanese larch, Douglas fir, Thuya, Truga, Corsican pine, Scots pine.

Scattered through the woods are also natural groups, and isolated specimens, of birch, alder, holly and yew.

Is there a fire tower anywhere else which can boast a view of an even greater diversity of species?

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