

dispersal.

The woodland near Balnakailly Bay at the north end of Bute is the only portion for which the Nature Conservancy have enough information to assess its quality satisfactorily. On the basis of visits by Bob McKechnie in 1958, Dr. Eric Bignal in 1977 and Miss Anne Carstairs in 1979, we have a list of 156 species of flowering plants and ferns, 18 bryophytes and three birds. Plants of particular note include *Dryopteris aemula*, *Equisetum sylvaticum*, *Hymenophyllum tunbrigense*, *Polystichum lobatum*, *Cladium mariscus*, *Thelypteris dryopteris* and *Thelypteris phegopteris*. I would be very surprised if readers could not add to our information. However, it is sufficient to demonstrate that the woodland is of adequate standard to be considered for Site of Special Scientific Interest status and this proposal will be considered in a full revision of sites in Argyll and Bute District. On the basis of a fairly brief visit to Barmore Wood by Loch Fad, I would suspect that it, too, is of interest but much more survey is required.

Woodlands tend to be where they are for no better reason than 'they have always been there'. So far as the remnants of native woodland are concerned, several factors combine to suggest that the foregoing statement will not remain true for much longer. First, there would appear to be limited markets for their produce. Secondly, most are not being managed for any crop. Thirdly, financial incentives are available for converting them to other crop types. Whilst their value for nature conservation and amenity is generally recognised, very little funding is available for either purpose. So long as present attitudes and fiscal incentives are unchanged, only a fraction of existing areas will be saved. The message for Bute is very clear. Value what you have and take active steps now to safeguard its future. Naturalists can no longer depend on the goodwill of others to preserve their study areas.

THE ROLE OF THE AMATEUR NATURALIST

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Quite rightly, one can wonder why the naturalist is to be assumed to have a role. After all, few participants in leisure pursuits see themselves as having anything so grandiose. Recreation is for relaxation and enjoyment. Are we then cast in the same mould? Is our pursuit of natural history solely a method of escaping the pressure of modern society? Each individual must answer these questions for himself, but I dare in the ensuing paragraphs to influence your response. For me, nature was another of those subjects in which my father was all-knowing — and therefore a source of potential embarrassment and discomfort. Through having to learn how to identify trees in order to collect suitable firewood at Scout camp, I came in contact with people who obviously enjoyed studying nature for its own sake. As one thing leads to another, so that small step led eventually to a degree in Forestry. Let there be no doubt—I thoroughly enjoy nature study and I consciously use it as a form of escapism, but . . .

It seems to me that in bygone days a naturalist was involved in more than enjoying himself. Such was the state of knowledge that it was open to almost anyone with a keen eye, a ready notebook and a modicum of intelligence to provide observations and ideas that might advance knowledge. There is a myth that this is no longer true and a companion myth that all that needs to be known has already been fathomed. If you subscribe to either of these views, it's time to blow the dust from your notebook and the cobwebs from your mind. Nature is dynamic. So should you be. Unfortunately, I am not sufficiently familiar with Bute to substantiate my views with examples from the island. There can be no doubt, however, that the problems encountered in the course of my duties as Regional Officer of the Nature Conservancy Council are a fair cross-section of the activities which could be taken up by most amateur naturalists.

Rarities always generate interest and they are always

surrounded by an aura of mystery and confidentiality. Ben Lui National Nature Reserve contains one of the few British localities of the Alpine Woodsia (*Woodsia alpina* L.). The NCC had no details of the locations of this plant and none of the published papers were too helpful. After an intensive literature and herbarium search and correspondence with several of the botanists involved in early finds, we set about our task. The localities were photographed using instant print film so that individual plants could be marked on in the field. Repeated survey showed how the colonies changed in distribution and vigour. On another reserve there is a rare butterfly whose foodplant is unknown. At Loch Lomond NNR the distribution and status of the Loch Lomond Dock has been investigated and a possible problem of hybridisation revealed.

But it isn't just the rarities on which work is needed. There has been much debate on the need for protection of the otter in Scotland. The Nature Conservancy Council had to commission a special survey of the situation. As a result, it is likely that protection will be afforded under the new Wildlife and Countryside Bill. A related puzzle is the extent of overlap in food preference between the otter and the feral mink. There have been many studies of the breeding bird communities of woodlands but relatively few of uplands and saltmarsh. Admittedly they are harder to study, but the basic requirements are still those of keen eyes and ears and a notebook. Studies of hedgerows and road verges seem to be a largely English pursuit . . . and yet the problems are also Scottish. When did you last record a sample stretch of your favourite hedgerow or verge? The list is endless and I would stress that the foregoing is only by way of exemplifying the range. Motivation is the key to action and only you know what really interests you. The chances are that whatever it is you could be making a worthwhile contribution. Perhaps by now you will have realised that I firmly believe that any naturalist worthy of the name should be pursuing some study which will advance our knowledge. That, it seems to me, is his prime role.

Of course, most naturalists today are conservationists. What does that really mean? Is it just simply a question

of paying another subscription, attending another round of meetings, some more field visits and reading another journal? If it is, then it's time to wake up to the facts. Such is the pressure on our land that many of the species and places which give you pleasure are destined to be lost in the next few years . . . that is, unless you are prepared to argue the case for their survival. This then, is the second role of the modern naturalist — the conservation of our wildlife heritage. Once again a wide range of talents can be deployed in negotiation, mediation, persuasion, education and evangelism.

The Transactions of the Buteshire Natural History Society demonstrate clearly that it is a lively organisation. It would be timely to channel the enthusiasm into fulfilling the two roles explained above. Every member can play some part and I would urge each and every one of you to do so. Taking action is not enough on its own, however. The information you collect has to be passed on to other naturalists. What better vehicle could you ask for than the Transactions of your own Society? By making known the interest of various areas, you provide a foundation for their protection. In this way, the two roles come together to the benefit of your Society and future generations of naturalists.