

RESEARCH WORK OF THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

AN adjournment debate in the House of Commons on July 21, at which was discussed the research work of the Nature Conservancy, was opened by Mr. M. Kimball with an attack on the work of the Conservancy which showed a complete misunderstanding of the purposes and nature of the Conservancy. Nevertheless, the debate as a whole should prove a useful piece of publicity for the work of the Conservancy, which still lacks the resources necessary for an adequate publicity policy to remove misunderstandings such as those exemplified by Mr. Kimball's speech. On the matter of finance, it may be noted that, although several speakers commented on the inadequacy of the Conservancy's budget of no more than £500,000 a year, the Parliamentary Secretary for Science, Mr. D. Freeth, made no comment beyond saying that it is a matter for individual judgment whether the Conservancy's resources are too small.

Mr. Freeth, recalling the Director-General's description of the research programme as "a comprehensive attack on a range of ecological problems which are regarded as of fundamental significance for the advance of conservation", maintained that besides increasing scientific knowledge, the Conservancy's work is in the long run of great benefit to the nation. Of a staff of 250, 100 are scientists, and the Conservancy also maintains 40 postgraduate students working for doctorates in ecology and related subjects. It is, he insisted, a research council, and although it does its best to encourage interest in Nature and its conservation, this is not a primary purpose, and one has to recognize that many of the reserves are established to be sanctuaries for wild life, a purpose inconsistent with free access. The Conservancy welcomes at all its reserves scientists and university workers who have research to do which is likely to be of value. Mr. Freeth does not believe that there is overlapping with the work of other Government research organizations. There is considerable interlocking of personnel at a very high level, as well as on *ad hoc* committees, and the Select

Committee on Estimates which explored the question of relations with the Forestry Commission in 1958 found no evidence to justify a recommendation to transfer to the Commission some of the fundamental research now undertaken by the Conservancy. Much of the Conservancy's research is basic in character and not suitable for dissemination through the National Agricultural Advisory Service.

The Conservancy, Mr. Freeth pointed out, controls about 8,000 acres of woodland, and research here is essential: first, to provide representative examples of the more important ecological types in their earlier stages of development; secondly, to provide adequate areas of managed woodland which would otherwise be threatened by systems of management more concerned with profit-making; and thirdly, to provide specialized facilities for undisturbed research and long-term field-trials. Mr. Freeth specifically denied the suggestion that the Nature Conservancy has ever established the breeding of coypu. For publicity or educational campaigns, or the issue and enforcement of regulations, the Conservancy has to look, for example, to the Ministry of Agriculture or of Transport.

As regards liaison and co-operation with county naturalist trusts and other bodies of naturalists, Mr. Freeth pointed out that the Select Committee on Estimates was impressed with the argument that unique opportunities for research would be lost if the Conservancy did not acquire as soon as possible the whole of the 250,000 acres envisaged. At present, 88 reserves represent 177,000 acres, and Mr. Freeth does not think it reasonable to delay proceedings merely because in a particular area a county organization has not been formed. He welcomed Mr. Kimball's praise of the Nature Conservation Corps, but to what was perhaps Mr. Kimball's most important point—that for only half the reserves has a five-year management plan been established—he made no reply. If this is due simply to financial stringency, it is time that the Minister for Science—and Parliament—acted.

SALMON AND FRESHWATER FISHING IN GREAT BRITAIN

RECENTLY the Committee on Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries produced a stimulating report in which are made several recommendations which may lead to some very necessary changes in freshwater fishery legislation.*

Of major importance are the recommendations that the powers of the River Boards be extended. The report rightly appreciates that fishery problems are often localized and suggests that River Boards should be allowed to make by-laws to suit local conditions. Equally important are the recommendations that River Boards should have the power to demand accurate returns of catches from all licence holders. Clearly, adequate salmonid fishery conserva-

tion is greatly hampered by inaccurate returns of catches. As conservation to a large degree centres around re-stocking, it is obvious that the recommendation that no person be permitted to stock his waters without the consent of the River Board is pertinent: there is much more to stocking than the mere planting of fish.

Some valuable recommendations are made on the control by River Boards of the obstructions to migratory fish, and of particular importance in this context is the suggestion that a River Board should have the power to prevent any diversion of water unless sufficient water is passed down the original channel to avoid damage to fisheries. Equally sound is the point made that old dams, sluices, or leats in poor condition should be repaired by the owners, or alternatively demolished. Overcrowding in pools

* Report of the Committee on Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries. (Cmd. 1350.) Pp. viii + 151 + 13 plates. (London: H.M.S.O., 1961.) 8s. net.