

EDITORIAL

European Wildlife Conservation Year

The European Information Centre for Nature Conservation has declared 1980 European Wildlife Conservation Year. The aim is to focus attention on the threat to wildlife presented by man's activities and to increase our awareness of the importance of wildlife in our total environment. The case for the development of natural resources is easily made. Who can deny the need to provide jobs, to create wealth so that all can live in dignity. Most of us by now realize that development is achieved only at a cost, the loss of resources, the elimination of something which existed before. When a forest is established an ecosystem is destroyed, to be replaced by a new one, strongly influenced by man. This loss is the price to be paid by society, albeit often a small one in relation to the gain.

Agriculture and forestry are not subject to controls on development such as are exerted by the planning authorities on building and industrial development. In the case of state forestry, at least, it may be argued that external control is unnecessary, although a plea for centralized land use control was made, in a different context, in a previous editorial¹. The state services are responsible bodies anxious, it is to be hoped, to cause the minimum of damage to the environment. But do all their members and all who practice forestry understand the importance of our wildlife, can they distinguish real from mythical pests and are they aware of the vulnerability of many species to intensive silvicultural practices?

Man is a predator, often needlessly. The drainage of vital wetlands for marginal agricultural gain, the eradication of hedgerows for convenience, the branding as pests of animals such as the badger, the indiscriminate use of pesticides and herbicides, these all take their toll and may lead to the destruction of creatures who play perhaps a significant if sometimes poorly understood role in the balance of nature.

1. Sylvie rules here — O.K.? Irish Forestry, 1977. Volume 34(2):61