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A.B.C. Talk
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R. PRINCE

CONSERVATION

There has been a great deal of talk lately concerning conservation, but there are many different ideas about what this really means. Basically, the aim of conservation is to ensure the maintenance of diversity in the environment, not only because this is of value from the point of aesthetics, but because the maintenance of biological diversity can both reduce the amplitude of environmental fluctuations, and provide information concerning the mechanisms affecting these fluctuations. This knowledge is of value in regulating our use of the environment.

Practically, it is unrealistic to propose that human activities should be reduced so they have no effect on the environment, for, indeed, this cannot be so. Man is just as much a part of this environment as any of the other animals, and has similar requirements for life, but he is separated by his ability to actively and consciously manipulate the environment for his own use. In this situation, it is possible to choose so that the optimum use of the environment can be made with a minimum of disturbance. The problem of making such decisions is central to the problem of conservation itself.

While it is obvious that decisions concerning environmental usage have always been made in the past, it is now equally obvious that many of the major changes in the environment which have actually occurred as a result of these decisions are both undesirable and unintended. Problems of pollution and degeneration of rangelands are in the same category, and there is an urgent need for society to reverse the tendency to make decisions on environmental usage which are based on the narrow criteria of immediate value to the user, or technical feasibility.

Resolution of many day to day problems is primarily a matter of commonsense, however. For instance, the utility value of a roadway is not only to be measured in terms of the engineering skill devoted to its construction as recent events at Myalup have shown and no doubt those who are familiar with the Stirling Range National Park will also appreciate this point. Neither is the development and maintenance of productivity of farmlands a simple matter of drawing lines on maps, clearing of vegetation, cultivation of the soil, and the sowing of crops and pastures, as many farmers are now no doubt aware. On the other hand, while the immediate problems such as the encroachment of salt land in the farming areas are of great importance, the resolution of these problems of unwanted environmental changes should not be considered to be in competition with other aspects of environmental conservation such as the provision of wildlife refuges or reserves, and the protection and management of native animals and plants. Man does not live by bread alone, and the provision of such area for wildlife conservation does have a place in our society. It is a sobering thought that more land has turned salt in most of the settled agricultural areas since the advent of farming, than has been set aside as wildlife reserves. It is almost certain that the interests of wildlife conservation were seldom, if ever, considered when development of these areas was initiated, but it is certain that the salt problem could largely have been avoided, and more wildlife areas reserved at the same time, if wider consideration had been given to these problems at the time

This knowledge is available now, and the public can ensure that it is used.