

PROBLEMS OF RESERVE MANAGEMENT

Many conservationists are inclined to sit back with a satisfied sigh when an adequate reserve has been set aside for the protection of the habitat of a particular species. They see the creation of the reserve as the culmination of their efforts to ensure that a section of the animal's living space and environment are maintained in perpetuity, as indeed it is -- up to a point.

To the Department, however, the gazettal of the reserve means only the beginning of our worries. It then becomes our responsibility. Farmers' eyes search it for arable soil and soon lodge applications for its alienation if they think that the whole, or sections of it, could be tilled or grazed. If it is in auriferous country, mining interests seek to exploit its hidden resources. Local authorities, business enterprises, or sporting organizations seek to lease or to control it wholly for their many purposes. Neighbouring farmers, understandably anxious to protect their own properties, wish to burn it regardless of the effects of fire on the flora and fauna for whose protection it was set aside. There are often complaints that "vermin" have bred up on it and are causing devastation and leading to the ruination of surrounding farms.

All these applications and complaints must be investigated and answered, if possible, or countered. We cannot simply ignore complaints or oppose applications to reduce, alienate, or lease such areas "on principle". Sound arguments are needed to justify our viewpoint and considerable research is needed to substantiate arguments, however sound we believe them to be. For instance, an application to lease parts of Bernier and Dorre Islands could only be answered by a thorough ecological evaluation of their role in and value to the conservation of flora and fauna. A scientific party set up by the Fauna Protection Advisory Committee visited these islands in July, 1959, and carried out a detailed ecological survey of them. The party's report on their work has now been published as this Department's Fauna Bulletin No. 2. Its principal author was Dr W.D.L. Ride, Director of the Western Australian Museum and leader of the scientific party. It runs into 132 pages and is an outstanding documentation of the human and natural history of these two islands. It includes recommendations which were adopted by the committee in toto.

As we have reported in previous issues, problems of management of the important reserves at East Pingelly are under investigation. The first of what will be a series of reports has been compiled by Mr R.D. Royce and Dr A.R. Main and will be published, ultimately, in a series of bulletins.