National parks of Western Australia

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"National Parks," says the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "are spacious land areas, essentially of primitive or wilderness character, that contain scenery and natural wonder so outstanding in quality that their preservation intact for the benefit, enjoyment and inspiration of the people, is a national concern."

Although all the so-called national parks do not comply with the above conditions, there are few people who will argue with the terms of the definition, or the desirability of striving to fulfil them.

The necessity for reserving large areas of land as national parks and nature reserves has long been recognised in many parts of the world, and some enormous tracts of country have been set aside for these purposes.

Amongst the best known of such reserves are the Yellowstone National Park in the United States of America, and the Kruger and Serengeti National Parks in Africa, but many of the lesser-known areas are serving equally important functions.

Preserving the National Heritage

National park and kindred authorities in all parts of the world (such as the "Nature Conservancy" of Great Britain, U.S. National Parks Service and the U.S. National Wild Life Federation) are faced with the ever-increasing problem of maintaining national parks and nature reserves in view of the rate of population growth, the expansion of agriculture, improved transport facilities and the consequent pressure for increased land use. They draw attention to the need to act quickly where suitable areas for reservation still exist, and the importance of resisting claims for the overdevelopment or "improvement" of certain areas.

"It is necessary," says the Annual Report of the Nature Conservancy of Great Britain.
Britain (1959), “to reconcile the use by the present generation of the national heritage with the need to safeguard its irreplaceable features for future generations... Use alone may be sufficient to threaten the scientific interest—to trample out of existence a rare plant, to drive away a rare bird or other animal, or destroy the character of a unique habitat.”

The same report states—“National bodies are being compelled to admit that their earlier policy of encouraging public access to building sites can turn out to be a Frankenstein Monster.”

Bearing all these difficulties in mind “The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949” of Great Britain has set down a policy for its National Parks Board which could well serve as a guide for other authorities: “To so administer the lands under its control as to ensure the preservation of their natural beauty, the conservation of native flora and fauna and the protection of geological and physiographical and other features of special interest.”

Danger of Over-development

Referring to the Australian scene, the Australian Academy of Science has recently been forthright in its criticism of engineering development proposed for the

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The principal Parks and Reserves under the control of the National Parks Board. Areas shown thus 

1. Yanchep
2. John Forrest Nat.Park
3. Lesmurdie Falls
4. Penguin Island
5. Serpentine Falls
6. Hamelin Bay
7. Stirling Range
8. Porongorups
9. Normanup

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Major parks under the control of the National Parks Board
summit of Mount Kosciusko and utters the following warning about the tendency to over-develop many parks and reserves (Anon 1961):

"But any national park, in addition to catering for the tourist and certain types of recreational sport, must also comprise areas in which conservation is the prime object. This is particularly important in Australia, a continent whose endemic flora and fauna attract world-wide attention. All local and visiting biologists are impressed by the fact that, after only a short period of settlement, very few virgin areas of native vegetation survive in Australia. Native plants, birds and animals are rapidly disappearing from the scene, even in districts in which there is no settlement as yet. A number of primitive areas will be essential if we wish to preserve for posterity characteristic examples of the Australian biota still existing in their natural environment, so that they can be studied by the scientist, and at the same time, provide a living museum for the naturalist and layman. Such primitive areas must be large enough to ensure that hydrological features, soil, and local climate are undisturbed by man's activities; large enough also to ensure that the ecological balance of the plant and animal communities is maintained. It follows that grazing, forestry, roadmaking and all engineering activities are out of place in a primitive area."

The Western Australian reserves fall into the following categories: A class reserves under the control of the National Parks Board (commonly known as National Parks) and A, B and C class reserves vested in various other bodies. It is only the "national parks" which will be dealt with in this series of articles, which are designed to give some general information about the location of such parks and their principal features.

The major national parks in Western Australia, in order of size, are as follows:

1. The Stirling Ranges (269,155 acres).
3. Yanchep Park (6,660 acres).
4. The Porongorups (5,384 acres).
6. The Serpentine Falls (1,440 acres).

Small reservations of under 1,000 acres are also held at Greenmount, The Knoll—Gooseberry Hill, Lesmurdie Falls, Hamelin Bay, Yanchep Beach, Penguin Island and Araluen.

The area devoted to agriculture in South Western Australia is approximately 24 million acres, and about half of this has been developed during the past 20 years. It is obvious therefore that without a very progressive policy on national parks and...
wild life reserves many natural features as well as animals and birds and plants will soon be lost for ever.

In addition to the 320,000 acres of national parks there are of course many thousands of acres of special fauna and flora reserves, State forests and water catchment areas. These offer valuable protection to many forms of wild life and compensate in some degree for the rather meagre acreage covered by the true national parks.

It must be conceded that wild life conservation depends to a great extent upon the acreage of parks and reserves which are set aside for this special purpose, and that such areas should be rigorously protected from any attempts at encroachment, including the depredations of grazing stock. However, the passing of conservation laws and the gazettal of reserves are not sufficient in themselves to protect anything, and unless parks can be patrolled and regulations can be enforced the most enlightened legislation can be nullified.

For instance, as a result of the recent unrest in Africa some of the most famous game reserves have been ruthlessly violated by trappers and poachers with disastrous results to many rare and unique forms of wild life. It is clear therefore, that one of the most important factors in flora and fauna conservation is a sympathetic public.

Great emphasis is now being placed upon the tourist potential of Western Australia and amongst the chief attractions listed are the natural scenery and unusual plants and animals. As already mentioned “Use alone may be sufficient to . . . trample out of existence a rare plant, to drive away a rare bird . . . or destroy the character of a unique habitat.”

Every citizen therefore should be a self-appointed guardian of our much boasted natural assets and not only refrain from destroying plants and animals in declared parks and sanctuaries, but protect them wherever possible in all parts of the State.

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