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STOP PRESS - EGG THEFTS

Reports have come in of attempted and partially successful approaches by persons as yet unknown, masquerading as lookers at eggs. Their aim appears to be to steal eggs, especially Guillemots possibly to disguise them as Great Auks(!). One approach is to be a researcher *per se*, while the other uses two journalists about to write an article on the variation of eggs for a magazine called "Oceans".

As the police have been called in following their visit to University College, London, please contact Rosina Down there (tel: 01-387-7050 ext. 416) if you have similar requests. Probably the best strategy is to egg them on (excuse the phrase) if approaches are made while you observe, witness, record and variously acquire evidence while calling the local police.

February 1981.

Protection for collections of eggs in museums

House of Lords

Collections of birds' eggs already in the possession of museums before enactment of the Wildlife and the Countryside Bill were not intended to be the subject of prosecutions, the Earl of Avon, a Lord in Waiting, said when the Bill was considered in committee.

Lord Montagu of Beaulieu moved an amendment to Clause 1 (Protection of wild birds, their nests and eggs) which would provide a defence for bona-fide museums with existing collections of birds and eggs able to show that these collections were in their possession before the passing of the Act.

He said he was not an egg collector but the Council of Museums Associations, of which he was a member, were concerned on this point. It would be difficult in the future for museums to prove the source of their eggs if indeed it were known.

Lord Donaldson of Kingsbridge (Lab), for the Opposition, said his party supported the amendment.

Lord Mowbray and Stourton (C) said the amendment only covered museums. The private person whose grandfather might have had a collection needed protection too.

The Earl of Avon said should a case come to court the Government believed it would be sufficient for a museum to have kept records of all eggs received after enactment of the Bill and to swear an affidavit that all other eggs in its possession were held before the Act applied to them.

He understood museums had recently been advised that for their protection they should keep good records and mark and protect their property.

The Government believed the amendment created more problems than it attempted to solve. Pre-Act egg collections were not intended and not likely to be the subject of prosecutions.

The amendment was withdrawn. There were one or two wildfowl like the wigeon and the pinkfoot which one could only shoot at night, Viscount Massereene and

Ferrard (C) explained in opposing an amendment banning the shooting of any wild bird between an hour after sunset and an hour before sunrise.

You can (he said) only shoot wigeon if the moon is right and the tide and cloud is right. This only happens two or three times a month.

Lord Beaumont of Whitley (L) who moved the amendment, said the shooting of wildfowl and waders at night was not as selective as it ought to be. It was easy for protected species to be shot by mistake.

Lord Buxton of Alsa (C) said the amendment was grossly unfair to a very small section of the community. They were a band of people around the coast, dedicated enthusiasts who owned no land and had nowhere else to go.

Lord Leatherland (Lab) asked to say a few words on behalf of courting couples.

My memory (he said) is not what it used to be but I believe sometimes well-intentioned young

people sit in hedgerows at night. They want to sit there peacefully and uninterrupted. Just think what would happen if at some emotional moment there was a shot and they were peppered with pellets from 80 yards?

Lord Buxton of Alsa: There is no known species on this planet that courts in 10 degrees of frost at night in January.

The Earl of Avon, a Lord in Waiting, said the Government had taken advice on the practice of night shooting. They must remember that in the main this type of shooting was only possible on a few nights each winter and its practitioners were few and, for the most part, the most skilled of wild fowlers.

The amendment was withdrawn. The committee stage was adjourned.

The Bill of Rights Bill completed its report stage and the Imprisonment (Temporary Provisions) Act (Continuance No 3) Order was approved.

House adjourned, 10 pm.

The Times, 28 January 1981

To summarise the meaning of this future act as it effects museums it is merely necessary to point out that if the eggs are accessioned and catalogued then this is sufficient. This is still with the proviso that the eggs were taken before the present legislation or after then but under the licensing provisions. (This was discussed in the last issue, 2(8), page 376).

The B.C.G. is planning to hold a meeting inviting interested parties to discuss such topics as a standard method of indelibly marking eggs, etc. The results of this will be published.