

## NEWS AND VIEWS

## Wildlife in the Channel Islands

THE German occupation of the Channel Islands interrupts a good number of years of continuous, sound biological field work conducted by the Jersey Branch of the British Empire Naturalists' Association amongst a fauna and flora unique in the British Isles for representing the northern limits of many Mediterranean species. Its air fauna has been shown to be rich in nesting species like peregrine, puffin, raven, guillemot, razorbill, oyster-catcher and various gulls, while the flora includes the first European station for the American club-rush (*Scirpus americanus*), which was probably introduced to St. Ouen's pond by wild-fowl, the only British station for the Jersey bugloss, and also the yellow broomrape. There are also such interesting plants as sea-scabious, spotted rock rose, the beautiful hyssop-leaved loosestrife, clustered trefoil, four-leaved alseed, evergreen alkanet, spreading star-thistle, five-spotted catchfly, French pink and proliferous pink growing about the quarries, the cliffs, or the shore.

The Rev. P. Burdos and Mr. H. J. Baal have for some years made a study of the bird life of the islands, and Mr. E. R. Casimir has recorded much of the flora. In winter the islands are so mild that at Christmas it is the normal thing to find some forty species of plants in flower. A great deal of low-tide research has been carried out at L'Etacq under the supervision of Mr. Baal and others, and the marine specimens exhibited at the States of Jersey Library; butterflies on the Queenevais were also watched and recorded, especially in relation to the migrations from France to Britain. Special efforts were made to conserve the wild life in the pretty Belle Hougue valley. Recorders have long debated whether records from the Channel Islands (and from the Scilly Isles) should not be credited to the British list, but to the French lists. The geology is mostly French, although where the granite predominates the scenery resembles Devon and Cornwall.

## Purchase Tax on Books

MR. KENNETH LINDSAY asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the House of Commons on July 2 whether he would exclude the book trade from the Purchase Tax, in view of the dependence of book exports on the volume of home trade and the vital importance of the book industry to the moral of English-speaking peoples, but Sir Kingsley Wood said that he had given careful and sympathetic consideration of the matter, and regretted that he could not exempt the publishing trade from making this contribution to the revenue needed for the prosecution of the war. It is legitimate comment on this reply to point out that while the tax is collected from the publishing trade, the cost of the tax must fall on the public. As we have already pointed out (NATURE, May 11, p. 719), it is against the public interest both from the financial and the intellectual point of view to place a check on the sale of literature,

a substantial proportion of which represents export business. The position is totally different from that in many other industries, where export trade does not depend on sales in Great Britain, and where it is desired for various reasons to reduce consumption at home. It is to be hoped that the Government may yet find a way of relieving the industry of the proposed burden.

## Shortage of Ergot

AN open request has been made to medical practitioners by the War-time Requirements Committee appointed by the Medical Research Council to observe strict economy in prescribing ergot. This is one of a remarkably small number of important drugs which have become scarce since the War began. The primary reason for the scarcity is not the present War so much as the Spanish Civil War, for Spain has not recovered her trade in this valuable item of *materia medica*, which was neglected during the period of domestic strife. Other countries which supplied substantial quantities of ergot were the U.S.S.R., Poland and particularly Portugal. Supplies of Russian material available to other countries have been steadily diminishing for the past two years, because the bulk of the output is reserved for use in Russia itself. The cessation of Polish supplies was, of course, a direct consequence of the War. In the last two years, the crops of Portuguese ergot have been below normal; indeed it is said that the last crop was a failure. Thus the world outside Germany and certain mid-European countries where sufficient quantities of the drug are produced for domestic requirements has had to depend mainly upon the diminished output of Portugal. Very large quantities of ergot, which is a fungus parasitic on the rye plant, are prescribed in general midwifery practice and in maternity hospitals, but it appears to be the view of the Medical Research Council that the prescription of ergot could be greatly reduced without prejudice to patients.

## Royal Aeronautical Society: New President

MR. GRIFFITH BREWER, who is an honorary fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society, has been elected president of the Society for the year 1940-41. Mr. Griffith Brewer was born in London in 1867 and commenced ballooning so long ago as 1891. When Wilbur Wright went to France in 1908, Mr. Brewer was his first English passenger. From then on he devoted his attention to aeroplanes and in 1914 learnt to fly at the Wright Field at Dayton, Ohio. During the War of 1914-18 he was honorary adviser to the Airship and Kite Balloon Services at Roehampton from 1915 onwards, and made experiments with ripping kite balloons in the air after breaking of the cable for the R.N.A.S. during 1917-18. In 1912 he founded the Wilbur Wright Memorial Lecture. More recently he has delivered addresses at Dearborn (1938) and at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1938)