

NATURAL HISTORY

Museum on the Move

from our Planning Correspondent

It now seems certain that stuffed birds will be migrating from South Kensington to Tring in Hertfordshire while the Lepidoptera move in the opposite direction. The last report of the British Museum (*Natural History*) for 1963-65, published two years ago, briefly mentioned that the museum intended to move the bird collection to Tring from South Kensington, where for the past 30 years it has been housed in part of the entomology block in what the report described as deplorable conditions. This plan came a stage nearer fulfilment earlier this week, when Mr Robert Mellish, Minister of Public Building and Works, visited Tring and looked at plans for a new £400,000 four-storey building on which work is due to start later this year. On the face of things, the move makes sense. The bird collection will at last be adequately housed while the Lepidoptera will be restored to their rightful place alongside the rest of the entomology collection. The land at Tring, which was bequeathed to the museum by the late Lord Rothschild in 1937, will be fully exploited.

The rub for the ornithologists is, of course, the fact that Tring is 33 miles from London. In a letter on page 1177 of this issue, Dr W. R. P. Bourne, secretary of the Seabird Group of the British Ornithologists' Union, argues that the real place for the bird collection is the north-west corner of the South Kensington Museum site, which long ago was discussed as a possible site for a new bird room. It is two years since the news leaked out that the Natural History Museum would soon be given funds for a substantial extension, but nothing seems to have been decided yet.

The entomologists are naturally delighted at the prospect of having the insect collection once again under one roof and not having to carry material between London and Tring. Among the ornithologists the British Trust for Ornithology, which has its headquarters at Tring, is also in favour of the move, and a spokesman said earlier this week that most ornithologists either welcomed the move or had no strong feelings either way.

The director of the Natural History Museum, Dr G. F. Claringbull, says that most ornithologists are happy that the bird collection will be well housed; the move, he said, would "do Tring good and do ornithology good". Like all museums, his is short of money and of space. The Tring site appears to be just the right size for the bird collection, and many of the existing buildings can be used. Dr Claringbull also says that of all the collections in the museum the bird collection is the assemblage most easily separated from the rest of the museum. The head of the bird room, Dr D. Snow, made much the same case for this move, adding that he did not expect it would affect serious students. He believed that most ornithologists would prefer a tailor-made building at Tring now to the hope of a new building at South Kensington in the indefinite future. For those who visit museums at weekends, there will be some consolation in Dr Claringbull's view that there is no reason why the Tring Museum should not be open to the public for the times kept by the parent museum at South Kensington.

Parliament in Britain**Cross-Channel Link**

MR N. G. CARMICHAEL for the Ministry of Transport said that the British and French Governments are satisfied that a rail tunnel would be the only realistic form of cross-Channel link. The possible advantages of a bridge were heavily outweighed by the disadvantages of high cost and the need to obtain international agreement between all the maritime powers for such a structure in the English Channel. Mr Richard Marsh, Minister of Transport, gave assurances that no final decision would be taken before full public discussion of the issues. (Oral answer, March 10.)

European Conservation Year

DECISIONS taken in 1970 will almost certainly have important consequences for the future of the European countryside. Mr Arthur Blenkinsop (South Shields) gave some account of the history and aims of the conservation movement in Europe. The Council of Europe has a Standing Committee on the conservation of nature and natural resources. This committee—whose chairman is Mr Boot of the British Nature Conservancy—has agreed to make next year European Conservation Year. Mr Blenkinsop felt that the Government was not supporting this venture sufficiently in money, publicity or patronage.

Mr Arthur Skeffington for the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, in reply, gave details of a number of projects being organized to celebrate the event. Publicity is being coordinated by the Countryside Commission, which has set aside a sum of money for the purpose. Mr Skeffington stressed the importance attached to the principle of conservation of nature, and said that the Government effort would be the best it could manage in the present economic circumstances. (Debate, March 10.)

Education

THE Minister of Education, Mr Edward Short, said that £82 would be spent on each primary school child in the academic year 1969/70. This compares with £146 for each secondary school pupil, and £766 for each university student. Estimated figures for the year 1970/71 are primary £82, secondary £147, university £809.

In reply to a question about the size of the student population in universities and other institutions of higher education, Mr Short said there were 121,000 full-time and sandwich course students in 1951/52, 227,000 in 1963/64 and 363,000 in 1967/68. In 1972/73 the total number of full-time and sandwich course students on advanced courses is expected to be around 430,000. Corresponding figures for part-time students in these institutions are respectively, 41,000 in 1951/52, 120,000 in 1963/64, and 134,000 in 1967/68. No estimates are available for 1972/73. (Written answer, March 10.)

Foodstuffs

MR J. H. HOY, for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, said that responsibility for the long-term evaluation of new substances in food lies with the manufacturers. They must ensure that the ingredients comply with the provisions of the Food and Drugs Act, 1955. No arrangements for the independent screening of these substances would be undertaken by his department. (Written answer, March 12.)