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● The Supreme Soviet recently took time out from discussing the new constitution and assenting to Mr Brezhnev's elevation to the Presidency to consider the state of the country's forests. The current Five Year Plan provides for an extensive forestry programme, including reafforestation and planting of some 12 million ha, draining of 1.5 million ha of water-logged plantations, and routine maintenance of some 230 million ha; the total cost is over 160 million rubles.

The main shortcomings, it appears, lie in the spheres of protection and 'integrated' use of resources. There are frequent cases of wide-spread fires as checks on the observance of fire safety rules and prevention work are not always all they should be. Too little attention is given to the use of scraps and firewood timber which is often left at the felling site. Some timber is lost during rafting and transport or disappears as waste. There is a basic imbalance in the use of timber; the conifer reserves of the Urals and the north are being consumed at an intensified rate, and insufficient use is being made of deciduous varieties.

To remedy deficits in the processing industry, another source of losses, a resolution was passed "On measures to improve further the conservation of forests and the rational use of timber resources". The usual wide campaign of support in the media soon followed. The Deputy Minister of Forests of Byelorussia suggested in an article that new measures may involve a major administrative change; those forests which still belong to collective farms (some 20% in Byelorussia), he said, should not be left "with the former owners", but handed over to the state forestry fund.

● It is only recently that the Soviet Union has acceded to the idea of international control of whale fisheries, and the statement of Vladimir Tveryanovich, chief specialist at the Ministry of Fisheries, marking the close of the whaling season, has something of the enthusiasm of the newly converted. Inverting the customary Soviet pride in over-fulfilled norms, Tveryanovich proudly announced that this year the Soviet whaling flotillas had reduced the total number of whales taken; nevertheless, he added, "rational use" of the catch meant that both the variety and the quality of the output of the factory ships had been substantially improved. He also noted that scientific teams—hydrobiologists, biologists and technologists—had sailed with the flotilla; their results, he said, will allow correct estimates of whale-stocks to be made so that the whaling industry can be conducted on a more "rational" basis. There is, as always, no suggestion of a moratorium.

In the case of the dolphin, however, these is a strong Soviet commitment to a total ban on hunting, both in the Black Sea and in the Pacific. According to Aleksei Yablokov, a prominent Soviet biologist, although dolphin hunting is totally forbidden in the Soviet Union, Bulgaria and Romania, the Turks still hunt Black Sea dolphins on a large scale. He quoted "figures from foreign experts" indicating that at least 40,000 dolphins are landed from the Black Sea, and almost as many escape from the hunters only to die of wounds. Several Soviet surveys of the Black Sea dolphin population have been made during the past few years; with the present rate of catch, says Yablokov, the Black Sea dolphin will be virtually extinct by the end of the century. As for the Pacific dolphin, between hunters and pollution it may well become a disappearing species within "a couple of years" unless some action is taken.

Yablokov stressed that dolphins are not a suitable source of raw material for industry. The skins and fat are of low value, and their meat is inedible. This last statement contrasts curiously with the campaign of 1930 which claimed that dolphin meat (in the form of sausages and other delicatessen) could make a significant contribution to the Soviet food supply, and even earn foreign currency as an exotic export. According to Yablokov, the dolphins still have a role to play in the Soviet economy. Experiments are going forward on the training and domestication of Tursiops dolphins, which tolerate life in captivity well and will breed in captivity.

Whether these somewhat exotic plans for the dolphin materialise, Yablokov's other domestication project seems more feasible. This concerns a small school of baleen whales, living near the Shantar Islands. Since the baleen whale has a relatively small range, Yablokov suggests that they might be herded in a similar manner to reindeer, with herdsmen seeking out the best "pastures" for them, and protecting them from their natural predator, the killer whale.

● The discovery of a baby mammoth, preserved in the permafrost, is proving a most exciting challenge to Soviet palaeontologists. It was found by a bulldozer operator cutting peat on the banks of the Kirgili river in the Magadan goldfields. According to Academician N. A. Shilo, the head of a special commission investigating the find, it is the best-preserved specimen so far discovered. Interviewed in *Pravda*, he said the young mammoth was 115 cm long, 104 cm high, and had a trunk length of 57 cm. The body was covered with reddish-brown hair. It was, apparently, some six months old at the time of death.

● A new 'primary standard' based on a special time and frequency system came into force throughout the Soviet Union on 1 July. The latest time standard, designed at the Institute of Radio Physics and Electronics of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukranian SSR, is based on a ruby rod maintained at 2 K which transforms electromagnetic energy into acoustic waves with a frequency of 10^{10} Hz.

At present the Soviet Union has 105 State Standards; by 1980 there should be some 140. According to V. I. Kipichenko, Head of the Metrology Board of Gosstandard (State Standard Committee), the fundamental standard of length—defined in terms of the wavelength of ^{86}Kr radiation—"is not proving fully satisfactory in present-day conditions". An intensive research programme is accordingly under way to produce a standard of length based on laser radiation which, he says, will make it possible to link the standard length to that of time.

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