

PRESERVING NATURE

By Brian J. Ford

OH yes, National Nature Week is with us right enough, but what is it going to achieve? Thanks to Press handouts by the score, coy interviews with the country's newly-emerged nature specialists on local television stations and one-horse radio networks, you know all about National Nature Week; and in a glorious orgy of irrelevance, even your daily correspondence bears testimony to the event.

But what is it all about? Let's face it, our heritage—that word again—is fast retreating from view, its rancid remnants quickly and obscurely crumbling away whilst we sit complacently, telly-faced, letting it. The few plant and animal species we have claimed as "rare" or of special scientific importance are being quietly flattened under the march of what is laughably called "progress." Many people will say, "What the hell...?" and indeed many do say just that; but then, they aren't scientists.

Perhaps you incline to this point of view. If so, let me point out that society as a whole would soon grind to a final halt without the concerted efforts of scientists; their materials for study aren't really so worthy of total neglect, perhaps

Tiny plot

This time last year I surveyed a power station near Cardiff for a naturalists' trust. Stuck right in the middle of one of the few remaining untouched salt-marsh estuaries, and a beautiful area at that, it has calmly engulfed and by now has partly filled one of Glamorgan's most picturesque and beautiful estuaries.

A tiny plot of this unique habitat outside the power station's influence is still preserved for a few years at least; but the rest is irretrievably destroyed. Naturalists and scientists used this area as part of their student study curriculum; but still the plans went ahead.

Of course we need electricity; certainly we must have more power stations—how else could I run a laboratory—but there were plenty of reasons why this station, as one example of perhaps many more, should have gone elsewhere.

"The estuary," says the official report on the chosen site, "will provide ash disposal space for the next 20 years or so."

What then? If an alternative solution is to be found then, why couldn't it have been introduced now and the estuary saved?

That's one example. There are dozens—perhaps hundreds—more. Partly this sort of inconsiderate blundering is due to shortsightedness; to the intellectual myopia that afflicts too many authorities today. Partly it was due to insufficient consultation.

A good measure of blame lies with the Government, who have wishy-washily steered away from declaring important sites inviolate in case some money-bound tycoon wanted to erect a mammoth monument to industry in the middle of it.

And much of the blame is due to the clannishness of naturalists. Too many naturalists are trying to oust the

others, rather than co-operate with them; their over-developed sense of self-importance replacing scientific concern with self-centred indignation.

Of course the sensible few, mostly thank goodness at or near the top of the bush, are fair-minded progressives; angry old men. But even they aren't doing much about it.

Few treasures

So National Nature Week (or Naturalists' Week, as it might more accurately be labelled) emerges from its chrysalis of publicity-inspired exhibitions and syndicated handouts as an attempt to interest people in nature.

But those people who haven't yet been interested by what is, after all, all around and above them all the time, certainly aren't going to become naturalists instead of Western fans on the strength

of a pretty postage stamp or two.

Frankly, I think the aim is impracticable—and I can't feel for the way in which it is being tackled, either. I can't think of a better way round these problems; but I am sure that the layman doesn't care a damn about nature—and he isn't going to change his mind until something is being done about it all.

Bringing the dangers of the future to the attention of those still sufficiently free of apathy to listen is all very well, but it is the solution to the problems that we want.

Unless something is done soon, we aren't going to be left with anything worth conserving. It is this that we need, not over-enthusiastic attempts to lead the layman to seek out and molest the last few remaining treasures that have managed to withstand the onslaught of civilisation.

Did I say civilisation . . . ?