

THE SOMERSET TRUST FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

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Soon after a very successful inaugural meeting in Taunton in October 1964, the membership of the Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation stood at 400. Two years later it has more than doubled its numbers and membership is just on the 900 mark. This is good progress, but not good enough; for the Trust, in trying to conserve some of the wild places of Somerset, is faced with increasingly intensive agricultural pressures, building developments, the growth of road traffic and the population explosion. The work it is doing will benefit everyone living in or visiting the county who cares for the life of the countryside.

The Trust's major task in the early years, it was decided, must be to list all places of considerable natural history interest, plot them on Ordnance Survey maps and submit them to the Planning Department of the County Council. This vital information on the natural history value of various sites would then be in the hands of the Planning Officers when any application for development came before them, and would no longer have to be submitted afterwards when some possibly irrevocable decision had already been made.

The county was, therefore, divided into four areas — corresponding to the local Planning Department areas — and local committees were formed to press on with this work. Much has already been achieved, but much remains to be done.

Through a generous anonymous gift the Trust has been able to make a donation of £500 to the costs of the surveying and mapping of the Axbridge and Chewton Mendip area of the Mendip Hills by Miss Alice Coleman, F.R.G.S. and her staff, in the course of the Second Land Utilization Survey of Great Britain. This is a badly threatened area on Mendip and accurate and up to date information is essential if as much of it as possible is to be conserved unspoilt.

In conjunction with the two Mendip Preservation Societies the Trust is trying to have the western Mendip Hills — roughly that part west of the Wells-Bristol road — designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It has already successfully opposed an application to the Planning Authorities to build a cable railway at Cheddar Gorge, and it is continuing to oppose the application for the re-opening of North Hill Quarry on Crook Peak.

A new development in the work of the Trust has begun with the acceptance by Wellington Rural District Council of recommendations made by the West Area Committee for the future of Langford Budville Common, which has recently been scheduled as a Site of Special Scientific Interest by the Nature Conservancy. The Trust's proposals for field studies and practical work in nature conservation were made after consultation with the Somerset Education Department. The form which these will take is now under discussion.

The Trust is much indebted to members of the various Natural History Societies in the county for their help in the mapping of places of natural history interest; for without their expert knowledge little progress could have been made.

URSULA DACOMBE,
Hon. Secretary (pro tem.)