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National Parks Now in Russia

Geography

Through the Institute for Natural Sciences, Soviet Russia has established nature reserves for safeguarding its wild life comparable to the national parks of America.

After the chaos of the revolution, when many of the rare animals of Russia preserved on the hunting estates of the Czar and the nobility were destroyed, considerable effort is being expended to restore the sable, sea otter, wisent and other fast-disappearing game to some semblance of their former numbers.

Prominent among the reserves set aside for protection is a tract of land of approximately 1097 square miles in the Caucasus where there flourished formerly a herd of wisent, an old-world cousin of the American bison, now thought to be extinct, except for a few zoological park specimens. When the grand dukes held hunting reserves in this region there were about 700 of them. A scientific expedition, sent there recently, failed to find a trace of this herd. The ibex, of alphabet-block fame, still survives in this section, however.

A small park of about 55 square miles has been established at Ilmen,

one of the most beautiful parts of the Urals, said to contain a natural collection of 150 different kinds of precious and semi-precious stones.

At Astrachan in the Volga delta is a bird preserve of 88 square miles. A somewhat smaller area in the Crimea has been made a preserve of moufflon and various kinds of deer. A rest station for migrating birds has been located in a marshy region midway between the Caspian Sea and the Arctic. Besides these there are many other small government reserves, notably the estates of the writers Tolstoi and Pushkin, and the island of Kondo in the White Sea set aside for the eider duck.

In spite of the national interest in parks, the game laws, promulgated in 1924, still leave much to be desired. Under this edict it is made more or less a public duty to kill the larger predatory animals such as leopards, lynxes and wolves. Some of the former are extremely rare and might well enjoy a closed season. The eagle and various other rare birds of prey have also been put in this category.

Science News-Letter, September 28, 1929

Cave Man's Brain Found

Anthropology

A rare find of human brains, representing our ancestors thousands of years ago, has been announced from Odinzowo, near Moscow, in central Russia. The two petrified brains were found associated with the teeth of a woolly mammoth, and they are without doubt the very oldest fossilized human brains ever found.

It is reported that a commission of scientists has been selected to make detailed studies of these remarkable finds of man during the ice age when the huge mammoths and the rhinoceros were clothed with a thick coat of woolly hair.

These rare finds are not "casts," but actually petrified human brains—somewhat shrunken, to be sure, but sufficiently well preserved so that anatomists can reconstruct the form of the brains from the fossils.

The cave man was equipped with a goodly supply of gray matter. The Russian scientist, Hindze, who is preparing a report on the fossil brains, is of the opinion that man in the ice age possessed a brain slightly smaller and less developed than recent dwellers of the same area.

Science News-Letter, September 28, 1929

Duck Holds Breath

Zoology

Diving animals like ducks and muskrats can be induced to hold their breath until they die from lack of oxygen. This strange phenomenon has been observed by Dr. Theodore Koppanyi of Syracuse University.

The nerve endings of the reflex that controls holding the breath are in the nostrils, Dr. Koppanyi said, since pouring water over the nostrils induces it in both the duck and the muskrat. Besides this submergence apnea, as the feat of holding the breath is technically known, there is another respiratory adaptation in diving birds and animals by which apnea can be brought about by bending the head back on the neck while the animal is lying on its back. Complete suspension of breath for ten minutes has been observed in this position, the scientist declared.

"It is actually possible," he said, "to kill the duck by maintaining this postural apnea until the animal dies from lack of oxygen."

Science News-Letter, September 28, 1929

Practically all of the iodine in the human body is stored in the thyroid gland.