

G'Day Mate! An International VIP Pays a Visit

Few field biologists in the National Park Service have escaped the ravages of the uninvited "outside expert" who blows through a park freely offering advice and "answers" to questions that he doesn't begin to understand. Occasionally, in truly pleasant contrast, an individual may pass through the park who does indeed possess great breadth of experience matched by keen intellect. These encounters are especially cherished by biologists in remote areas – who otherwise windup talking biology to themselves. Dr. Graeme Caughley, Senior Principal Research Scientist, CSIRO, Division of Wildlife Research, Australia, epitomizes this useful professional consultant. His field experience and intellect are coupled with sharp wit and penetrating insight. Caughley is known for outstanding work on the population dynamics and ecology of large mammals. [Much of this is referenced in *Analysis of Vertebrate Populations*, G. Caughley, 1977. John Wiley & Sons. His most recent book, *The Deer Wars* – the story of deer in New Zealand (1983. Heinemann Publishers) provides a very different perspective on the effects of deer on the ecology of New Zealand.]

Dr. Caughley spent about two weeks during February 1985 consulting with biologists at Olympic, Glacier, and Yellowstone National Parks. The trip was coordinated through the NPS Office of International Affairs and sponsored by IUCN as part of an International VIP program.

The subjects covered at Olympic ranged from dis-

cussions of the dynamics of mountain goat populations, through the practicality of aerial goat capture, to the design for an aerial census of elk in the rain forests of the park. Doug Houston reports that he and his colleagues at Olympic found the experience stimulating and useful. "In fact, we all experienced some sort of intellectual withdrawal symptoms after the visit. It's been a long time since we have answered so many hard questions or been challenged to look at the same problem from so many perspectives," Houston reports.

From Olympic, Caughley went on to Glacier NP, where he discussed "mostly bears" with Research Biologist Cliff Martinka and then to Yellowstone to talk bison population dynamics with Research Biologist Mary Meagher. On the way, he managed to present two population dynamics seminars for wildlife students at the University of Montana and at Montana State University. In Bozeman, he consulted with Dick Knight, team leader for the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team.

"Graeme is such a delight to us field science types," Meagher said after Caughley's visit. "We were telling him about the complaints we get over erosion and other impacts from so-called overpopulation of elk up on the Northern range. Graeme's reply to all this was that those people are talking theology and we're talking science, and until they can present their arguments backed by data, we should simply treat their objections with the scientific dignity they deserve."