The Guajira Peninsula, which lies in the northernmost part of the continent of South America, has many aspects of scientific interest. Although politically it belongs to two nations — Venezuela and Colombia — it is a physiographic unit quite different from other parts of the continent which are almost contiguous to it at the same level, such as the Hylean Magdalena and the forested area of the Catatumbo River; it has a certain affinity only with some of the Antilles and with the subxerophytic belt that runs parallel to the Caribbean, from Cartagena of the Indies to the delta of the Orinoco.

A study of the Guajira can make an exceptional contribution toward definition of the concepts of a semiarid zone, toward determination of the factors which make life difficult in such a region, and toward investigation of elements which can contribute to biological and cultural improvement in arid and semiarid regions of the world.

Located near the 12th parallel north, but in the heart of the hot equatorial region, the peninsula has an area in its Colombian part alone of approximately 3,000 square kilometers, and is surrounded by a sea rich in both food and commercial fish. It exhibits peculiar meteorological factors, poor soils, scantly flora (although economic species are not lacking), and an extremely varied fauna. Over and above all, it shows the example of the Guajiran people, who have maintained their personality in spite of the impact of European culture, from the day of the Conquest on — a people who today still enforce respect for their
ancient laws and customs, showing what man can do through adaptation to the precarious environment of a semiarid region.

The Guajiros have not been able to overcome the difficulties presented to a prosperous agriculture by the aridity of the soil, the scarcity of rainfall, and the severity of the winds. However, they have succeeded in maintaining a type of cattle industry of their own which provides them with the means of subsistence and health. If the white man had collaborated in the expansion of pre-Colombian cultures, instead of establishing himself as an unsympathetic ruler, the Guajiros would have developed the environment in which they have shown themselves to be so deeply rooted.

The Ethnological Institute of Colombia is at present carrying out exhaustive studies concerning the people who once inhabited the Guajira and those who now inhabit it. Other governmental institutions are concerned with solving the economic problems of the peninsula, principally that of water. The Geographic Institute has just finished a geodetic triangulation of the Colombian portion, which will be followed immediately by aerial photography and surveys for the final map. All these activities are signs of a coming economic and cultural development of the region, and call for an intensive study of its natural resources and their preservation before the equilibrium is upset.

In July 1952 the author of this preliminary report began a physiographic study of the Guajira dealing with the relationship between the native flora and fauna. Even though he cannot predict the results of this investigation, the author proposes the presentation before the General Assembly of the International Union for the Protection of Nature of certain ideas on the semiarid region of the Guajira, in order that these problems — which, because of the interest they hold for Venezuela, the site of the Assembly, and for her neighbor, Colombia, should not be overlooked — may be placed on the agenda.

Therefore, and as a preliminary to the definitive study which it is hoped can be presented to the Assembly, the author presents the following proposals for discussion:

1. Inclusion of the Guajira Peninsula, belonging to Colombia and Venezuela, in the IUPN's list of semiarid regions and among its subjects for investigation.

2. Promotion of the creation, as a joint project for Colombia and Venezuela, of a station to be located in the area, for the study of the semiarid region of the Guajira.