

### NOTES AND NEWS.

WE ARE in receipt of a number of letters from members of the Union criticising the paper published in the April 'Auk,' on bird work of the Biological Survey, because of its failure to make any allusion to the destruction of birds in the West through poisoning operations directed against predatory mammals and rodents—a matter that would seem serious enough to engage the attention of any agency having to do with the conservation of wild life.

While it is evident that a large proportion of our members are alive to the situation we would call the attention of all to the paper by Dr. Jean M. Linsdale on the use of thallium in poisoning operations in California (Condor, May-June issue, 1931, pp. 92-106) and Dr. Grinnell's editorial comment (*ibid.*, pp. 131-132).

We learn that "over one-third of the area of California is being subjected to repeated applications of a poison [thallium] to kill ground squirrels, so insidious and far-reaching in its effects as to threaten the existence within that whole area of important native birds, such as Mourning Doves and Valley Quail, as well as secondarily but even more certainly, of carnivorous birds and mammals generally." Reports from 116 witnesses covering about one per cent of the area poisoned show a total of 5204 dead birds and mammals other than squirrels, actually counted, and Dr. Grinnell estimates that means that during the past four years approximately 50,000,000 birds and mammals have been killed exclusive of the ground squirrels. Dr. Linsdale's figures cover 22 species of birds including 3314 Doves, 713 Quail, 82 Pheasants, 80 Wild Geese, 67 Meadow larks, etc. He explains moreover that his informants are not in any way biased "few of them have any trace of sentimental prejudice in favor of any kind of wild animal" and "many hold the opinion that squirrels should be poisoned even if every other wild animal is killed."

The total area poisoned during the year ending June 30, 1929, was (according to the Tenth Annual Report of the California Department of Agriculture, as quoted by Dr. Grinnell) 5,000,000 acres involving 558,000 pounds of thallium poisoned grain while in the year 1928 Dr. Linsdale tells us that 2,000,000 pounds of poisoned grain were used of which 602,728 pounds were thallium treated.

As Dr. Grinnell says "the pity of it is that these campaigns of destruction are carried on in coöperation with the Biological Survey, a governmental organization which we were brought up to believe, upon the best of grounds, was consecrated to the practice and encouragement of real conservation and nothing else."

For several years past the American Society of Mammalogists has been opposing the use of poison by the Biological Survey and several members appeared before the Agricultural Committee of the House of Representa-

tives to protest against the passage of the so called "Ten-year Coöperative Program" for the "control" by the U. S. Department of Agriculture of predatory and other wild animals injurious to agriculture, etc. In spite of their protests and a written protest signed by nearly one hundred leading zoologists, the campaign backed by the wool growers of the West and approved by the Biological Survey was authorized though, as we understand it, the appropriation of \$1,000,000 each year has to await the next congress. In the course of the hearing on the bill Hon. Charles Adkins, of Illinois, asked "In your putting out of the poison to destroy the rodents are you denuding the country of all other animals that eat that poison?" and Mr. Henderson of the Biological Survey answered "No, sir. The rodent poison is usually poisoned steamed crushed oats and the poison is placed in small amounts near the holes of the rodents. Many of the birds are not attracted by oats, as well as they are by other grains. The charges are made that we frequently destroy game birds with these poisoned oats. But Quail, Grouse and Pheasants have a marked immunity to strychnine, so they are rendered immune to this poison. To some extent some of the smaller birds have been poisoned. (Control of Predatory Animals. Hearing on H. R. 9599, pp. 39-40.)

This was on April 30, 1930 after thousands of pounds of thallium had been used in squirrel poisoning in California and yet no mention of this poison and its disastrous effect on birds was made before the Committee. It would seem that the Biological Survey was not aware of this! At any rate it is fully informed on the subject *now*, and the least it can do is to put its foot down firmly on any further use of thallium.

It seems to us that it is impossible for an agency actively interested in the conservation of wild life to be at the same time actively engaged in its destruction and it is deplorable that the Biological Survey which has done and still is doing such admirable work on various scientific and economic problems should be involved in this wretched business of destroying life.

This matter could well be left to the individual states which, as it is, bear the bulk of the expense, and let their citizens, only a small proportion of whom favor this destruction of wild life for private gain, take up the matter with their legislatures. Some states have already passed laws regulating or forbidding the use of poison, believing apparently in the statement of Mr. H. L. Stoddard, a member by the way, of the Biological Survey staff that "If for any reason poisoning is considered undesirable cotton rats may readily be trapped *although trapping is more cumbersome and expensive*" [italics ours] (cf. his 'The Bobwhite Quail,' reviewed on p. 444, *antea*.)

By its present activity in adopting and encouraging the poison method the Survey is being brought into disrepute to an extent that its officers apparently do not realize and we sincerely hope that it may abandon at once any further participation in this nefarious work.

We should advise those of our members who have written us, to take up this matter in their local press and with their Congressmen in order to make clear to the public and to Congress just what these poison campaigns mean and to encourage State action before it is too late. If every member of the Union secures the publication of at least one letter, or possibly an editorial, in the newspapers of his town or city the way will be paved for further action.

The 'St. Louis Star' has been taking up the cause of wild life in excellent editorials, let our other leading papers do likewise.

Moreover let us not be misled into thinking that this matter of poisoning is a question for the West alone. In a circular issued by the U. S. Department of Agriculture on May 4, 1931, announcing the authorization by Congress of the "Ten Year Program" we are informed that "in many eastern states also, increased efforts will be exerted for the control of rodents," while Mr. Henderson, in further testimony at the hearing of H. R. 9599, above referred to, said that the Survey has now one man stationed in Pennsylvania and proposes to have other men there under the "Ten Year Program," while for rodent work in the eastern United States, he stated, there will be an increase of appropriation "from \$19,097 to \$88,200" (pp. 41-43).

It looks as if this "Ten Year Program" would be as disastrous to wild life in America as the Russian "Five Year Plan" bids fair to be to human life in Russia, if not in the world at large.

We should also emphasize Mr. Redington's closing remarks in his paper in the April 'Auk' when he says "We (the Biological Survey) need all possible support from agencies interested in helping the bird or other animal to live" or again "An influence that has exerted all too little force is the appeal of the bird itself" and further "To give the bird the benefit of the doubt in all cases where there is a difference of opinion is our desire and our plain duty." Mr. Redington is undoubtedly perfectly sincere in this and we doubt if he was aware of the destruction of bird life that was going on in California when he wrote his paper. Therefore let our Committee on Bird Protection take up with his appeal and promise of coöperation, and find out exactly what the Survey proposes to do in the face of this destruction of bird life in California, which has been going on also in other states in lesser degree.

If ever the "appeal of the bird itself" needs our support it does so now.

THE BRODIE CLUB of Ontario, Toronto, has published a circular combating a similar circular distributed by Jack Miner entitled "Facts about Hawks" pointing out that his statements are not based upon stomach analyses and that in other matters he is mistaken. A still better service to the Hawks and Owls is a series of sketches of the various species written by the Club members and based upon reliable scientific information and published in the "Toronto Globe." We have always contended that the daily press is the best medium through which to further the protection of wild life.

THE FOLLOWING request from a European taxidermist has recently come to our attention, translated it reads: "Please let me know whether there are American books dealing with taxidermy and whether it is possible to procure in this country skins of Great Horned Owls. At the present time I buy 500 of these skins per year for the manufacture of decoy-birds, but the exhaustion of the stocks of European dealers in feathers obliges me to cease this manufacture."

Obviously the Hawks are having a bad time of it abroad as well as at the hands of game commissions in America.

WE LEARN that the Carnegie Museum Expedition to northern Manitoba including J. B. Semple and George M. Sutton has reached Churchill on Hudson Bay.

THE LAST Heath Hen was trapped and banded on Marthas Vineyard Island on April 1, 1931, when he visited the meadow on the farm of James Green, the ancestral booming field. He was immediately liberated in his favorite retreat among the scrub oaks, the last of his race since December 8, 1928.

THE SIXTH Annual Meeting of the Cooper Ornithological Club was held at Berkeley, California, May 15-17, 1931 when an interesting program was presented before a representative attendance.

DR. ALEXANDER WETMORE and Mr. F. C. Lincoln who have been on an expedition to Haiti returned on June 1 after a most successful trip. Dr. James P. Chapin who has been in Africa for some time has also returned with additional specimens and information upon the bird life of that continent.

WE WOULD again call attention to the Detroit meeting of the Union which will take place October 19-23 next. It is none too soon to make arrangements to be free to take the trip at that time. These annual meetings are an inspiration to all who are able to attend and this one occurring in a city not before selected as a meeting place will make it possible for many members to attend who have not heretofore been present.

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