

SPECIAL REPORT AND PROPOSALS  
REGARDING CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES OF THE  
AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION

Since its organization the American Ornithologists' Union has made its work the advancement of its members in ornithological science and the publication of a journal of ornithology and other works relating to that science.

The Union has confined itself to these objectives, and it will be noted that bird protection is not in itself one of the aims for which the organization was founded. Nevertheless, as would be expected, its members, and at times the organization, have taken a keen interest in bird protection.

At the second meeting of the A.O.U., a committee was formed to work for the protection of North American birds and their eggs against wanton and indiscriminate destruction. This committee was instrumental in founding the National Audubon Society, and later some of the activities of the Committee were taken over by the U. S. Biological Survey when that government organization was formed in 1885. Thus, from an historical standpoint, the Union has had a considerable, and at times, powerful, influence in the cause of wildlife conservation, particularly the conservation of birds.

The Union has had continuously a bird protection committee similar to the original ones, the principal function of which has been to provide information regarding conservation activities or problems to the members of the organization.

From time to time efforts to interest the Union in specific projects have been made. In this connection, the Union has neither a paid staff nor facilities for acquiring information that would make it possible for it to participate intelligently and in detail in the many conservation problems that exist. Its officers now give generously of their time to manage its affairs, and it would be impossible for them to give the additional time that a conservation program would require.

The Union is an international organization with members in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere, and for that reason it would be unwise for it to act on conservation problems which concern one government. The Union properly can consider major conservation problems as coming within its field of interest, but the very fact that it is international in its membership makes it a practical necessity to act only on fundamental problems with international implications.

The Union has, however, an important indirect role in conservation matters. Many of its members are also members of conservation groups and support local as well as national and international organizations in that field. For some this has been their life work. In addition, most of the members are centers of local influence for spreading knowledge of birds and bird protection in their home areas. Many of the members serve as scouts or lookouts for conservation organizations when local or other problems become acute enough to demand concerted attention. The Union also provides the greatest body of scientific knowledge about birds of the Americas that is available, and its members have freely placed their knowledge at the disposal of most, if not all, organized conservation groups.

It is the belief of this committee that we have thus achieved a major conservation force which is difficult to measure and yet is contributing daily both to education and to the programs of action groups working for better protection and management not only of birds but all forms of wildlife and their habitat.

It is our recommendation that the following be considered as the guiding principles of the American Ornithologists' Union in dealing with conservation problems.

1. That the A.O.U. recognize that bird protection is only a part of the whole conservation problem; that the conservation of soil, water, and vegetation are fundamentally important for the preservation of birds; and, in fact, the preservation of suitable habitat in many cases far outranks in importance the protection of the birds themselves.
2. That the A.O.U. take no direct action in conservation matters but that it encourage its members to continue to supply information to conservation groups and to participate locally, nationally, and internationally in the organizations that are promoting the conservation of basic natural resources.
3. That the A.O.U. encourage its members to exert all possible effort to teach conservation and to encourage conservation thinking in their own communities.
4. That the A.O.U. maintain a committee on bird protection whose primary function shall be to provide to the members, at least annually, and more often if necessary, information on critical conservation problems in which participation by A.O.U. members is important. The Committee shall present a report outlining the progress or lack of progress in conservation during the preceding year.
5. That the work of conservation organizations be reviewed in this report and that this Committee be authorized to give official commendation to meritorious conservation efforts. Such commendations would not involve any commitment for the American Ornithologists' Union but would simply be a recognition by this organization of good work by other organizations primarily devoted to conservation problems.
6. That in establishing this policy, the Union should reserve the right to investigate and take a position on any fundamental problem with international implications.

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