

REPORT OF THE BIRD PROTECTION COMMITTEE

This has been a critical year for the conservation movement, and only the fact that the conservation organizations have usually presented a united front against destructive legislation has prevented the enactment of many unwise laws. Never since there was any semblance of a national conservation program have the special interests that are determined to invade and get control of national forests, national parks, wildlife refuges, and wilderness areas been bolder and more persistent.

Much of the difficulty has arisen from the fact that the present administration does not yet have a clearly developed conservation program. In fact, bills that would have seriously impaired the conservation estate which the Departments of Interior or Agriculture are supposed to protect sometimes have been endorsed by the responsible departments. One version of the stockmen's persistent attempts to gain legal rights on national forest land had a special endorsement from the President.

None of this legislation became law owing to the alert and conservation-minded members of both parties in the Congress—particularly in the House. Despite all the activities of the pressure groups, sometimes actively aided by administrative agencies, the Congress held the line. It even amended at the last moment the Atomic Energy Act and the amendments to the Mineral Leasing Act to protect the national parks, monuments, and wildlife refuges.

The united conservation groups were successful in preventing the passage of numerous bad bills but were less successful in pushing good legislation. The Hunter Bill, which will provide water for important waterfowl wintering areas in California, and the Hope-Aiken Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act are the most notable positive legislative achievements since the last meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union.

Rare Birds.—Of general interest is the possible discovery of the breeding grounds of the few remaining Whooping Cranes. The Canadian Wildlife Service reports that four or possibly six Whooping Cranes were seen in Wood Buffalo Park on June 30; if all reports are correct, this included 5 adults and one young. It is possible that the actual nesting grounds lie within this great unbroken wilderness park, which contains about 17,300 square miles.

Congressional authorization for leasing lands within the breeding range of the Key Deer may prove of little permanent benefit to these animals. Leases can be negotiated, but they all contain a 90-day cancellation clause and until some land can be secured for permanent development and management, there is little hope of any permanent gain in the status of the Key Deer and the various species of birds that nest in the United States only on these keys.

Another possible cause for concern is the fact that the United Water Conservation District of Santa Paula, California, has filed an application for a license for water power projects which may result eventually in impoundments in or near the nesting grounds of the remaining Condors. This poses a potential threat to these birds that should be watched carefully.

On the bright side of the picture certain facts might be mentioned. The steady northward spread of nesting colonies of egrets and other herons following the fine public education and protection work that has been carried out over the years by the National Audubon Society and the Fish and Wildlife Service gives cause for real satisfaction. These birds are more secure and are steadily reoccupying the old known nesting ranges. Likewise, the apparent increase in such shorebirds as the Golden Plover and the Hudsonian Godwit is a cause for satisfaction.

Waterfowl.—The waterfowl picture is not so rosy. Despite adverse reports on waterfowl populations for the second successive year in some flyways, some liberalizations in regulations were given. One of the most questionable changes, in the opinion of your Committee, is the permission to extend the shooting season to January 20 by sacrificing two earlier days of the season for every day taken beyond January 10. Fortunately, the penalty was severe enough so that when this report was prepared, Georgia was the only state that had taken advantage of it. There are sound biological reasons why shooting should not continue beyond early January, particularly when waterfowl are on the downgrade.

There has been a steadily increasing trend in the Fish and Wildlife Service to give more voice to the states in the making of regulations. For example, this year the states were permitted to select either a daily shooting hour from one-half hour before sunrise to sunset or one from one-half hour before sunrise to one hour before sunset. There is little question that shooting until sunset increases the wastage of birds whether they are shot dead or crippled. Despite this fact only the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee elected to close one hour before sunset; all others took advantage of the maximum allowable shooting hours.

There were some small gains. The season on Wood Ducks was closed in the Mississippi Valley. The limit on the Hooded Merganser was continued at one bird which must be counted as a part of the daily bag limit; and the former provision of allowing 25 Red-breasted and American mergansers to be killed has been altered to require that these birds, if killed, must be counted as part of the daily waterfowl limit.

One of the most disturbing developments occurred in this year's appropriations bill for the Fish and Wildlife Service. For next year a large part of the operation and maintenance of refuges which had previously been carried on regular appropriations are to be carried on the Duck Stamp Fund. Members of A.O.U. may recall that when the price of the duck stamp was doubled some years ago, the increase was supported in the hope that better protection could be afforded migratory birds and that more refuge land could be acquired. This budget, by throwing practically all of the maintenance load onto the Duck Stamp Fund, will almost eliminate land acquisition from future budgets, although some land purchases will be possible this year from funds previously reserved for this purpose.

It has always been necessary to carry some operation and maintenance of refuges on duck stamps because of the refusal of Congress to appropriate sufficient money for this purpose. However, the greater part of the money used has been either for buying or for developing waterfowl land. During the years when the Duck Stamp Fund first became available, much of *it* went for development since money from various emergency funds was available for land acquisition, but little for land development. When these funds were no longer available, both development and acquisition had to be carried by the Duck Stamp Fund. Conservationists and sportsmen generally supported the increase in the duck stamp with the thought that this increase would provide more land acquisition in the program. There seems to be little hope of this unless the Administration's policy changes and money is allowed for land acquisition in the budget. The Budget Bureau has always attempted to force operation and maintenance costs upon the Duck Stamp Fund, but the Service up to this last year has been fairly successful in fighting off these attempts. To put it bluntly, the refuge program, which is only about half completed, appears to be stalemated for the present. While the Federal Government is slowing down on the

purchase of land for wildlife, a growing number of states are using Pittman-Robertson funds for buying land.

The situation can become critical if present policies are continued for long, since the wildlife refuges have played and will continue to play a key rôle in the wildlife conservation program.

Your Committee, as individuals, has been active in many of the conservation battles and have had generous and unfailing support from many of the members of the A.O.U. whenever they have been asked to help.

Ira N. Gabrielson, *Chairman*
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Hoyes Lloyd

NOTES AND NEWS

We regret to report the death of Charles F. Batchelder on November 7, 1954. Mr. Batchelder, who was 98 years old, was the last surviving Founder of the A.O.U. and its president from 1905 to 1908. He also served as associate editor of 'The Auk.' The Union suffered the loss also of a Corresponding Fellow, Ludwig Schuster of Hessen, Germany, on September 7, 1954.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge a generous donation from Mr. C. M. Goethe of Sacramento, California. Mr. Goethe made this contribution expressly toward the printing of an unpublished thesis in ornithology, and we have used it to help defray the cost of printing F. W. Loetscher's paper on North American migrants in Veracruz, which appears in this issue and which is part of a doctoral thesis submitted to Cornell University.

Mr. Goethe has expressed the hope that others will join him in providing funds which will enable 'The Auk' to publish the valuable theses on birds which are now unavailable to ornithologists.

At the banquet at the Madison meeting, a number of china and wooden birds, serving as decorations, were taken under the impression that they, as well as the auklets, were favors. Since many of these birds had associations of great value to the owners, the local committee will be grateful for their return. They should be sent to Robert A. McCabe, 424 University Farm Place, Madison, Wisconsin.

The publication date of "Recent Studies in Avian Biology" has been established by the University of Illinois Press as on or about June 15, 1955. The Treasurer wishes to thank subscribers for their patience and requests that further inquiries be withheld.