

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON BIRD PROTECTION
TO THE AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION, 1955

ONE of the most critical current problems presented to conservationists is the apparent unending enthusiasm of the Armed Services for invading and taking over wildlife refuges. There have been so many moves to take over wildlife areas that it appears to be a concerted effort by the services to get all they can while the getting is good. In some cases, the Department of the Interior has resisted these requests; in others, it has not.

One of the two most pressing is the effort of the Army to grab 10,700 acres of the Wichita National Wildlife Refuge (Oklahoma). The area they are asking for is the best turkey range on the refuge and furnishes important grazing for the bison and long-horned cattle. The Army tried a new tactic in this effort, and introduced an item of \$1,000 into the Appropriation Bill for the administrative costs of transferring the area. When this was discovered, in spite of the last-minute efforts of conservationists, Congress approved the item. The Army, in effect, got Congressional approval for a raid on a wildlife refuge but did not formally approach the Department of the Interior until October. Secretary McKay objected vigorously to the transfer of any of this refuge to the Army. Every interested person should write and get their friends to write to the Secretary of Defense protesting this raid, and to the Secretary of the Interior approving the stand the Interior Department has taken in objecting to the transfer.

The second most important problem does not involve the actual invasion of a refuge, but the proposed extension of the Matagorda Island Air Field for photoflash bombing would bring these activities to the edge of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge (Texas). When photoflash bombing was tried at the Salt Plains Refuge (Oklahoma), the ducks and geese left the area and did not return for a long time. It is feared that the Whooping Cranes will respond in the same way, and there are few places where they can go if they are driven out of Aransas. If this project is carried out despite the protests of conservationists, and the official protest of the Canadian Government, all the previous effort to preserve the remnant of the magnificent Whooping Crane may have been in vain. Great public opposition has stopped this project, at least for the present.

There are numerous other demands for refuge lands either in the incipient stage or out in the open. Some one of the Armed Forces is proposing to move in on a number of federal and state wildlife

areas. The Army wants to take over two magnificent game management areas developed by the state on a national forest in Louisiana. This is being fought by the conservation department and by conservationists in that state. The Air Force wants additional land on the Cabeza Prieta Refuge, and also a big block of the Kofa Refuge. These two areas protect the remnants of the Gaillard Sheep in the United States. The sheep have increased in numbers since these refuges were established, but if present proposals become effective, it is probable that the money and effort to save this fine mammal will have been wasted. There is also an Air Force proposal to take over a large part of the Desert Game Range which protects the Desert Mountain Sheep. Reports persist that the Navy is considering taking 4,000 square miles in eastern Montana which would include the Fort Peck Game Range, on which much time and effort has been spent by the Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies. A fine herd of deer, antelope, and the associated small mammal and bird life will be jeopardized by this proposal which has not yet become very definite.

These are only samples. Other moves to take over big blocks of the Francis Marion and DeSoto National Forests were abandoned because of public protest. It is apparent that with the huge funds now at the disposal of the Armed Services, they are all attempting to acquire great areas of land. It seems from a civilian point of view that some of these areas could be used jointly. It is known that some of them are used only a comparatively short time each year, and if real cooperation existed among the Armed Services, some of them could be utilized more intensively than they are now.

These efforts are not restricted to wildlife refuges and national forest areas. It has just been learned that the Navy has moved into and occupied a considerable area in the Cape Hatteras National Seashore. It is not conceivable that the National Park Service failed to object, and it seems obvious that they were muzzled to prevent any information as to this proposed action reaching the public until it was an accomplished fact.

Legislation.—The last session of Congress considered much good and much bad legislation, and it is probable that the 1956 session will be equally important for conservationists. Two good laws were passed. The old mining law, which had been abused in many ways and which was being increasingly used to steal timber and other valuable public resources, was revised so that in the opinion of informed people more than 75 per cent of the abuses can be eliminated. The new law also provides a comparatively simple method of eliminat-

ing fraudulent or invalid mining claims without the necessity of long, drawn-out court action. The bill thus represents a distinct step forward, but some changes are still needed to eliminate the remaining abuses. This can be done without interfering with legitimate mining. The Mining Congress supported this revision, and this also represents a distinct gain, since it was the first time the industry has been willing to consider any corrective legislation.

Congress also passed a bill providing a method for distribution of the \$13,500,000 surplus Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration funds to the states. It authorizes this distribution over a five-year period on the basis of the present formula, but will require appropriation each year of this additional money by the Congress. It also broadens somewhat the uses that can be made of the money by adding the word "management." This will legalize some borderline projects which are good management and good conservation but which were difficult to approve under the language of the old law. In this way it makes it identical with the Federal Aid to Fisheries Act which has been in operation for a number of years without abuse.

Many bad bills were introduced, and conservation opposition was successful in keeping many of them in Committee. The Upper Colorado River Storage Project was passed by the Senate with Echo Park in it, despite an effort led by Senator Neuberger to delete the item. More senators voted to keep Echo Park out of the bill than had been anticipated in the short time that was available to gather support for the proposed amendment. The bill was reported out by the House Committee without Echo Park, but it was never brought up in the House since checks indicated that it would have been beaten badly if it were put to a vote. The bill still occupies a strategic position in Congress and will have to be vigorously opposed by conservation groups if this battle is not to be lost.

One bad break was the approval by the Armed Services Committee and later by the Appropriations Committee of the Army raid on the Wichita Refuge. There was nothing in either the authorization or appropriation bills which forces the Secretary of Interior to give this land to the Army, and so far Interior has opposed any such transfer. They have been willing to continue arrangements for use by the Army during certain periods, under a special-use agreement that has been in effect for a number of years without any undue interference with the wildlife or with the public use. There seems to be no good reason why such an arrangement cannot be continued.

Threatened species.—Such information as has reached your Committee regarding threatened species is indicated briefly here.

The status of the California Condor remains about the same and another year has passed without any verified report of an Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

The Trumpeter Swan population in the Red Rock Lakes and Yellowstone Park area is 590, or 52 less than the previous year. This population appears to be approaching a saturation point in this territory, and unless more birds can be successfully moved into new territory, it is not probable that this population will increase greatly. A small flock is being established at the Delta Waterfowl Research Station, using stock from both Peace River and from Red Rock Lakes. It is possible that these birds may be more easily transplanted than wild birds, although the birds transferred from Red Rock Lakes to Jackson Hole successfully established a small breeding colony.

It is presumed that all present have heard the May, 1955, report of the Whooping Cranes and nests in Wood Buffalo Park. The latest report, from the Canadian Wildlife Service, states that six young of the year were seen from the air on September 12. The birds have not yet migrated, so it is not possible to say how many of these youngsters will get to Aransas. The latest threat to this population has already been discussed.

A report by D. A. Woodside, a wildlife biologist, reached the Committee through Harold Coolidge, which indicates that on July 28th and 29th, at least twenty-two Nenes were seen in one small area. Twenty-two were counted on the 28th and twenty on the 29th, with the possibility that three others sighted are not included in the total. These birds appear to gather in this area between 4:00 and 5:00 P.M., and some signs indicate that they may be roosting there.

A letter, dated February 6, 1955, from Tatsuo Udagawa states that he was on Toroshima Island from January 18th to 30th. During that period he saw each day from eight to sixteen adult Steller's Albatross (Short-tailed Albatross), and believed that the maximum number was less than twenty. He reported seeing three nestlings and four unhatched eggs. The language of the letter is somewhat obscure, but it seems to indicate that these nestlings died when they were about 50 days old.

The Everglade Kite is reported to be in serious condition with a very small population still existing. Developments and proposed developments, if carried out, could interfere with the few remaining pairs, although the Fish and Wildlife Service hopes that the nearby Loxahatchee Refuge will provide suitable habitat and food for this species.

All available information indicates that the number of Attwater's Prairie Chickens continues to decrease as more of their habitat is developed agriculturally. Dr. Clarence Cottam, Director of the newly established Welder Wildlife Foundation, plans to try to establish a colony on the 8,000-acre area on which this institution will be located. The land lies within the original range of this bird, and preliminary arrangements have been made to secure birds for this effort.

General notes of interest.—The Cattle Egret now numbers several thousand, mostly in the Okeechobee area in Florida, and seems to be firmly established in this country.

The herons, egrets, and other long-legged wading birds continue to prosper and to extend their breeding range northward.

The Long-billed Curlew seems to be holding its own or perhaps increasing in numbers. The Chairman of this Committee recently saw on the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge the largest concentration of this species in his field experience. He has visited the area frequently since before it was a refuge and has never seen as great a concentration of this fine shorebird.

An increasing number of reports regarding the killing of migrating birds by ceilometers are being received. As the number of these instruments increases, such kills may become important. The Committee does not have enough information to present any concrete suggestions at this time, but we believe that the Committee for the coming year might well gather information regarding the subject.

IRA N. GABRIELSON, *Chairman*
JEAN DELACOUR
LUDLOW GRISCOM
HOYES LLOYD
ROGER TORY PETERSON