

REPORT TO THE AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION
OF THE COMMITTEE ON BIRD PROTECTION, 1957

On the international scene mention should be made of the first conference of the International Committee for Bird Protection to be held in Africa, which took place in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia, July 8-10, 1957. It was attended by representatives of 10 National Sections including the United States, Canada and Venezuela. Rudyerd Boulton, Jr. was appointed as official delegate of the Union. At the meeting it was reported that the International Convention for the Prevention of the Pollution of the Sea by Waste Oil (London, 1954) had been ratified by Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Ireland, German Federal Republic, Mexico, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The great importance of obtaining the support of the United States for this Convention was strongly urged.

In the United States the 84th Congress (first session) did not establish a notable record of conservation achievements, though several important actions were taken, some of which had a bearing on the welfare of bird-life, directly or indirectly. Many years of education, planning, and effort were climaxed with the passage by both Houses of the Congress of a bill authorizing the establishment of a Key Deer National Wildlife Refuge to protect the Florida Key deer and other fauna and flora of that unique semi-tropical area. The Act authorizes the Fish and Wildlife Service to acquire up to 1,000 acres of land by purchase, donation, or exchange, although the use of condemnation proceedings is denied on any island traversed by overseas highway No. 1 to Key West. Appropriations for land acquisition are limited to \$35,000.

Efforts were made to revise the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act so that a greater part of the annual receipts must be used for the acquisition of migratory bird refuges. Objections were voiced to an increase in the stamp fee as a means of raising additional revenue until the Federal Government shows that it is willing to appropriate more money from general revenue to assist the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service in carrying out its duties and obligations without having to resort to the use of the special duck stamp funds. A number of bills on this subject were introduced during the 1st Session and committee hearings held. More serious attention to this subject is expected from Congress during the 1958 Session.

No action was taken on a bill that would authorize the Secretary of the Interior, through the Fish and Wildlife Service, to undertake basic research into the effects of insecticides, herbicides and fungicides on wildlife. This bill has the endorsement of the Department of the Interior and action may come on it in 1958.

Your president and the chairman of this committee responded in separate letters to a request from the Department of the Interior for helpful suggestions in the Department's program of reorganization of the Fish and Wildlife Service. Intensified research of the highest quality was urged with the added thought that Federal research and activities be restricted to those provinces that are definitely Federal in character. By deleting from the Federal program those functions that can be handled competently at State or local levels, Federal appropriations may be applied to a broader and more thorough job on those projects that cannot be carried out efficiently at lower governmental levels.

From Dr. Yoshimaro Yamashina comes the encouraging word that the Short-tailed Albatross has been breeding on Tori Shima, an island some 300 miles south of Tokyo and about midway between Tokyo and the Bonin Islands where the bird was formerly reported. According to the staff of the meteorological station on Tori Shima there were 23 adults present in 1953 but, due to feral cats and dogs as well as human interference, no young were raised. In 1954 the Japanese Association for the Protection of Birds appealed to the staff of the station and laborers were warned off the nesting area. The Japanese Government also forbade news photographers to disturb the birds. As a result 3 young were raised in 1955-56 and 8 young in the following year (1956-57). In addition to the reduction of the number of cats and dogs for which the Association provided traps, the Yamashina Institute for Ornithology and Zoology prevailed upon the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to designate Tori Shima as a reservation and the staff of the meteorological station were authorized to guard the island. Also, the Ministry of Education named the Short-tailed Albatross, *Diomedea albatrus*, as a Natural Monument of Japan early in 1957.

The "gooneys" of Midway Island, the Laysan and Black-footed Albatrosses (*Diomedea immutabilis* and *D. nigripes*), are subjects of study by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This investigation, sponsored by the Bureau of Aeronautics, Department of the Navy, was occasioned by the hazard to aircraft created by the presence of these birds on and over the runways. It is reported that from November 20, 1956 to June 15, 1957, 399 albatrosses were struck and killed by aircraft during 1728 landings and takeoffs on that island. A promising approach to this problem involves the levelling of sand dunes and unused revetments adjacent to runways. These irregularities of the terrain cause air currents to be deflected upwards, thus creating favorable soaring conditions for the birds. Where this has been done in connection with construction work on that island, the soaring of albatrosses has been greatly reduced. Reduction of the hazard created by a dense colony of nesting Sooty Terns

close to one of the runways is being sought through the hard-topping of the area involved, causing the birds to move elsewhere. A similar procedure has been used for water catchment on the island. The Fish and Wildlife Service is to be commended for this approach whereby the hazard to aircraft, particularly jet-propelled planes may be lessened materially without having to resort to a killing program.

The results of waterfowl breeding-ground surveys in 1957 indicate that there has been little change in the size of the population breeding in Canada, although there has been some redistribution of birds in response to a decline of water areas in southern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan.

With the view of reducing the excessive kill of waterfowl both the Canadian and United States Wildlife Services have issued regulations prohibiting the use, in hunting, of recorded calls of these birds. Such prohibition was needed particularly in the hunting of geese to which the feeding call was an irresistible attraction.

To forestall the threat of mining operations in one of the world's most important goose colonies, the Northwest Territories Council established the Bowman Bay Game Sanctuary embracing 500 square miles on Baffin Island. Surrounding this game sanctuary within which exploration, hunting and industrial activity are completely prohibited, the Canadian Wildlife Service set up the Dewey Soper Migratory Bird Sanctuary. Within the bird sanctuary, which has an area of 3150 square miles, hunting is prohibited but mining may be allowed under permit provided all necessary steps are taken to prevent damaging the habitat.

The Hawaiian Division of Fish and Game has transmitted an encouraging report on the status of the Laysan Teal. A careful census made on Laysan Island from June 25 to July 3, 1957 indicated a population of at least 580. Under permit from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 8 birds were brought back to the Honolulu Zoo for propagation and, as of August 5, all appeared to be healthy and thriving.

Also on the favorable side is the status of the Hudsonian Godwit and the Trumpeter Swan. Fairly large numbers of the godwits have been reported on some of the refuges in the United States, while the Trumpeter Swan may be approaching the saturation point in the habitat it now occupies. In the Lower Copper River Valley in Alaska, 26 broods of swans were reported, averaging 4.1 young to the brood. All those that could be observed closely proved to be Trumpeters. The birds also are said to be nesting on the Kenai Peninsula.

At the time this report was prepared, the year 1957 gives indication of being a promising one for the Whooping Crane. Public interest in the survival of this species remains at a high level and it seems likely that

no Whooping Cranes were lost through illegal hunting at least for four years. The wild population seems to have had a relatively successful season and, on July 12, Canadian observers reported having seen, in Wood Buffalo Park, three families, each with a single young. Additional young may have been produced in another area that could not be searched.

In the United States the successful raising, at the New Orleans Zoo, of two young to a size approaching that of the adults, is a most gratifying event, offsetting somewhat the unfortunate loss of a wild adult through attempts at capture on a Federal Refuge. Under the experienced care of George Scott, aviculturist of the Bronx Zoo, from the time the eggs were hatched in May until the birds were nearly full-grown, these two individuals and their parents may become the progenitors of a race saved from the very brink of extinction. The ultimate success of the Whooping Crane in 1957 can be revealed, however, only after the migrating population of wild birds has again returned to the Texas coast where they can be counted.

An effort to preserve a rare species through the perpetuation of its favored and exclusive habitat is taking place in Michigan in connection with Kirtland's Warbler. There the Michigan Audubon Society, in cooperation with the Michigan Department of Conservation, is setting up a project for the establishment and maintenance of permanent Jack pine areas so essential to the bird's welfare. Trees 5 to 12 feet high are optimum for the bird's use, so a program of continuous, successional management must be established.

The failure of the Congress to make provision for an expanded and thorough study by the Fish and Wildlife Service of the effect of various pesticides on wildlife is extremely unfortunate. In the meantime the use of such pest control agents is spreading rapidly, often with little concern for their effect on beneficial forms of fauna and flora. In the Middle West, where the Dutch elm disease is making inroads, there is accumulating evidence of the careless use of DDT in the control of the bark beetle, an important vector in the transmission of the disease. In the absence of comprehensively compiled information on the effect of insecticidal operations on birds generally, one finds an incongruous mixture of facts, fantasy and conjecture. It has been shown that single applications of DDT at the rate of 1 pound per acre of forest had little or no effect on the number of birds, whereas single applications of 5 pounds per acre caused heavy mortality. Likewise, the use of 1.5 to 3 pounds per tree for the control of the Dutch elm disease resulted in a 22 percent reduction in bird numbers with some evidence that part of this may have been due to movement of the birds out of the sprayed area. DDT residues remain toxic for extended periods and prolonged exposure of quail

and pheasants to them has resulted in decreases in production, fertility and hatchability of the eggs and the vitality of the young. Other chlorinated insecticides produce similar adverse effects.

The situation, then, is that available information shows that chlorinated insecticides have caused damage to birdlife under field conditions, but that the extent of damage may be minimized by controlling the rate and time of application. Until more quantitative data become available, it does not appear possible either to endorse widespread application or to condemn such treatment as unduly harmful. It was just such a study that was contemplated by the Fish and Wildlife Service under the measure that failed of passage in the past Session of the Congress.

Increased experimental use of repellents to lessen damage to crops and forest plantings by both birds and mammals has characterized recent research by the Federal Government in cooperation with State and private agencies. Not only does this approach obviate the necessity of killing programs but it permits the offending species to render whatever beneficial services they may be capable of. This approach, somewhat scoffed at only a few years ago, now is attracting the attention of crop specialists and foresters throughout the country.

Most of the materials so far tested are "chemical" in nature and some are actually toxic, yet their use in reduced concentrations make them relatively safe. Nevertheless the aim being sought are non-toxic repellents which may be used by the individual concerned, thus obviating the necessity of stringent supervision.

Much of the research in this field has been conducted by the Fish and Wildlife Service at its two laboratories, at the Patuxent Research Refuge at Laurel, Maryland and at the Wildlife Research Laboratory, Federal Center, west of Denver, Colorado. Progress reports Nos. 1 and 2 on the subject of bird repellents, compiled at the Denver Laboratory, give a digest of the work so far done.

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