

REPORT TO THE AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION  
BY THE COMMITTEE ON BIRD PROTECTION, 1959

With respect to bird protection, internationally speaking, your Committee is fortunate in having as one of its members the President Emeritus of the International Council for Bird Preservation, Jean Delacour, who, regretfully, was unable to attend this meeting. He has, however, given us a digest of matters that have come to his attention. I know you will be interested in the fact that the Council published, in 1959, its Bulletin VII which presents accounts of its activities concerning, among other subjects, birds in danger of extinction, establishment of refuges, prevention of oil pollution of the sea, further protection of birds of prey, wildfowl preservation, and the effects of pesticides on wildlife. It contains articles on the state of bird protection in more than 20 countries with information on the laws in force. This Bulletin may be obtained for \$2.30, including postage, from Mr. G. W. Merck, New York Zoological Society, 30 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.

During 1958 and 1959 the I.C.B.P. has been particularly active in efforts to prevent the mass destruction of small birds in Italy, used in special dishes in restaurants for tourists, including, no doubt, patrons from North America. The Executive Board of the International Wildfowl Research Bureau (a branch of the I.C.B.P.) met in the south of Spain in April 1959. Among other matters a resolution was sent to various German authorities requesting complete protection for *Branta bernicla* in the German Federal Republic for three years as has been done in other European countries.

A most successful International Conference on Oil Pollution of the Sea was held in Copenhagen, Denmark on 3-4 July 1959. This meeting was well attended by representatives of a wide range of interests including government departments of transport and commerce, ship owners, port authorities, seamen's unions, sea fishery associations, conservation, ornithological and humanitarian organizations, together with the diplomatic representatives of 19 nations. In addition, delegates from seven international organizations concerned with conservation of varied natural resources were in attendance. This Conference was called by the British Coordinating Advisory Committee on Oil Pollution of the Sea. Considerable help in obtaining support was given by the President of the I.C.B.P., Dr. S. Dillon Ripley, and the Chairmen of the National Sections of Canada, The German Federal Republic, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Sweden. It was announced that an intergovernmental committee had unanimously adopted a draft report (for submission to the Secretary of State) that

the United States accept the 1954 Convention with reservations of a technical nature.

In this connection, it should be mentioned that, until foreign ship operators become thoroughly aware of regulations regarding the discharge of oil in inland North American waters, ships now using the St. Lawrence Seaway may create increased hazards to bird life in the Great Lakes.

The International Council for Bird Preservation continues to extend its membership, the latest countries to form National Sections being Portugal and Malaya. The next world meeting of the Council will be held in Japan in 1960, when it is hoped to arouse further interest in bird conservation in Asia.

Word comes from Dr. Ibarra of the National Museum of Natural History in Guatemala that recently enacted legislation has afforded complete protection to aquatic bird life at Lake Atitlán. The fact that this area is increasingly important as a tourist attraction has led to this commendable action.

Help in the form of documents useful in the promotion of refuges in East Africa was rendered to the Director of the Coryndon Museum in Nairobi. It is gratifying to know that a beginning has been made to provide sanctuaries for birdlife in that colony.

That mushrooming of the human race is having dire effect on wildlife in the latest of our states, Hawaii, comes from the President of the Hawaii Audubon Society, Mr. Joseph E. King. While he did not favor the attempt, made by the Board of Commissioners of Agriculture and Forestry, to introduce the Barn Owl from California, ostensibly to aid in the control of rodents, he was more concerned with the rapid development of the island of Oahu and its threat to native birds, particularly aquatic species inhabiting the lowlands. The Hawaiian Gallinule and the Hawaiian Stilt, he states, are examples, and, with the continued drainage of ponds and marsh areas, migratory waterfowl will be deprived of wintering areas in the Hawaiian Islands. Nevertheless, a gratifying note comes from Hawaii with the report that seven nests of the Nene Goose had been found, some of them in rough lava beds many yards distant from vegetative cover.

A matter of more than ordinary importance to those concerned with the management of troublesome birds was the holding of a one-day conference on bird control on 18 August 1959, in the Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C.

The morning session dealt with damage to agricultural crops, the research that is being done to alleviate it, and the policies of the Fish and Wildlife Service in meeting these problems. The afternoon session

concerned albatrosses as hazards to aviation at airports in the Mid-Pacific. Our President was unable to attend so the chairman of your Committee was asked for comments which were transmitted by mail. Without going into details, it may be said that promotion of bird control, particularly that of a reductional nature, was emphatically condemned. As a matter of policy it was urged that the function of the federal government in matters of bird damage be, first, to determine the nature and extent of the damage, second, the devising of measures for alleviating the damage with emphasis on procedures of avoidance and prevention rather than reductional control, and, third, the promulgation of these methods so that those directly involved might take steps to protect themselves. The idea of promotion of operational bird control, either through federal or cooperative funds was opposed. Up to the time of preparing this report your chairman has had no information regarding any decisions made at this conference.

Progressive legislation in the protection of birds of prey was enacted in several states. New Jersey, Maryland, and New Hampshire, in the East, and Minnesota and Oklahoma in the Midwest, afforded protection to hawks and owls, usually with a proviso that the birds may be killed when actually inflicting damage.

With respect to the dispersal of highly toxic pesticides about which all of us are concerned, we must realize that we are dealing, not only with contemplated programs, but with accomplished facts. I refer, in particular, to control measures against the fire ant in the Southeast and the Dutch elm disease in more northern areas. We have no means at our disposal summarily to stop or materially reduce the intensity of these going programs. Our hope must lie in the findings that, we feel, will come from the research now started. Recently received from the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife is a statement that its Branch of Research has a current annual budget of \$185,000 for studies of the effect of pesticides on wildlife and an additional \$95,000 allocated for sport and commercial fishery work in the same field. Legislation proposed in bills in the Senate and the House would raise the authorization for future research of this kind to \$2,565,000 annually. Actual appropriations, however, would be made in accordance with the needs of a rationally expanding program as the work proceeded. Please remember that this two and one-half million to cover research in all aspects of pesticide use is about the same as that being appropriated annually for operational fire ant control alone, with no appreciable research having antedated its inception.

Progress in the research on pesticides was reported at the hearings before the House Committee on Marine Fisheries on August 4 and the

Senate Committee on Foreign and Interstate Commerce to increase appropriations for pesticide research (Senate Bill 1575; House Resolution 5813). A transcript of this testimony was not available to your Committee at the time this report was being prepared.

To recite all the accumulating evidence of the harmful effects of aerial dispersal of highly toxic pesticides would extend this report far beyond a permitted length. It may be advisable, however, to call attention to certain facts that are characteristic of extensive, governmentally sponsored pest control operations. As pointed out by a careful observer of the fire ant program in the Southeast, the average landowner seldom objects as long as the federal or state government is footing the bill. The "gravy train" is always popular; never protested by the recipient of its benefits. When such programs are buttressed also by a wealth of supporting propaganda from sources long looked upon as authentic, few indeed are those who will question it. Often the very individuals engaged in such promotion are the ones whom, through years of personal contact, the farmer has learned to trust. Is it little wonder, then, that the fire ant and other similar projects acquire and retain support?

Because of the increasing magnitude of chemical pest control your chairman ventures the suggestion that, in the United States, legislation, comparable in principle to that of the Coordination Act in water manipulation matters, be enacted to help regulate the dispersal of pesticides under governmental projects. You will recall that the Coordination Act calls for advisory council from wildlife agencies in connection with governmentally sponsored water manipulation projects. At the rate we are going, one can readily see that dispersal of highly toxic materials over great areas may be as disastrous to wildlife as the ill-advised manipulation of a water supply in a single stream or impoundment.

Here in Regina many of us are closer to the nesting of the Whooping Crane than we have ever been before. Yet, we are still some 700-odd miles south-southeast of the nearest nest location. This Museum has served as a clearing house for whooping crane information for the two governments concerned with the preservation of this noble bird. We can expect Director Bard and his associates to give us up-to-the-minute information sometime during this meeting. Nevertheless, a few notes from the South will introduce the subject. During the 1959 nesting season the captive pair at the New Orleans Zoo laid seven eggs, the first on 14 February and the last on 8 May. For reasons not yet known to this Committee none of these hatched. That means that the captive population remains the same—three adults and three juveniles. The

23 adults and 9 young that wintered in 1958-1959 on the Arkansas Refuge, plus the 6 in captivity, brought the known total, in the spring of 1959 to 38, the highest recorded at any time during the past 21 years.

As mentioned in last year's report, the status of the Greater Prairie Chicken is a matter of utmost concern to ornithologists. In Illinois, Wisconsin, and elsewhere in the Midwest it is looked upon as the number-one bird conservation problem. Its solution (if at all possible) will rest on the acquisition and maintenance of sufficient grassland habitat. The Soil Bank program has aided some, but there is question regarding its permanency for this long-time project.

You are all familiar with the adverse conditions that confronted waterfowl in the southern parts of the Prairie Provinces this year. Even at a late date the decline in water levels continues in Saskatchewan, and the apparent maintenance of waterfowl populations in the adjacent provinces may be due to an influx of birds from the drought-ridden province of Saskatchewan. In line with sound management, hunting privileges have been curtailed both in Canada and the United States.

It has been learned that the federal government of Canada will call a national conservation conference sometime in 1960. Up for discussion will be all the problems of resource conservation and it is expected that the needs of a positive wildlife program will receive attention.

It is impossible in a report of this kind to discuss all the problems that arise in the field of bird conservation. There just isn't time enough at one of these meetings nor pages enough in *The Auk* to comment on everything that logically might be considered. Therefore, your Committee asks your indulgence if your greatest concern or pet peeve has been passed over lightly or wholly ignored. Let us hope (even though it seems futile) that the time may come when the problems of bird protection will be so few, or so inconsequential, that the whole subject could be treated in a few pages of typewriting.

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