

THE EIGHTH INTERNATIONAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS

By MARGARET MORSE NICE

FIFTY years ago the First International Ornithological Congress met in Vienna; on July 2, 1934, the eighth of these meetings convened in Oxford. Some three hundred and fifty ornithologists from twenty-five countries gathered for the purpose of telling their discoveries, sharing their experiences, becoming friends, and protecting the birds.

The mornings were devoted to papers which were given in English, German, French, and Italian. Section I was concerned with Taxonomy, Zoö-Geography, and Bird-Behaviour; Section II with Anatomy and Physiology; Section III with Migration and Ecology; and Section IV with Protection and Aviculture.

Banding was much to the fore in Section III, both in the matter of homing experiments and migration. A notable report was given by Dr. W. Rüppell on Starlings, 353 of which had been caught at their nesting-boxes and sent to Berlin from all over Germany, 106 being subsequently captured at or near their homes. Mr. W. B. Alexander, of Oxford, gave a history of homing experiments, concluding with recent studies on House Sparrows and Greenfinches in winter, while Dr. R. Drost told of similar researches with migrating birds caught at Heligoland. Long papers illustrated with many maps on migration as shown by recoveries of ringed birds were given by Dr. E. Lönngberg for Sweden, Dr. E. Schüz for Rossitten, Dr. Drost for Heligoland, and Mr. H. F. Witherby for England.

The subject of censuses was discussed by Messers A. D. Middleton, Julian Huxley, and E. M. Nicholson. The latter reported on the comprehensive censuses of Common Herons taken in England in 1928 and the sample censuses since then, suggesting that such counts of *Ardea cinerea* would be an excellent project for international study. The consensus of opinion, however, seemed to be that any publicity given to the numbers of Herons might result in their increased persecution by fishermen.

There were less than half a dozen papers on life-history subjects: two on the breeding habits of a shore-bird and a harrier, my own on "Territory and Mating in the Song Sparrow," a lecture by Dr. Schüz on the ecology of the White Stork, and an important discussion by Dr. K. Lorenz on "Comparative Sociology of Colony-Breeding Birds."

One afternoon there were moving pictures: Chance's film "The Cuckoo's Secret" showing the bird laying in a Meadow Pipit's nest; another film showing the ejection of a baby Reed Warbler by a nestling Cuckoo and later the little foster parents alighting on the head of the great changeling to feed it. There were fine pictures of

the Golden Eagle in Scotland and marvellous ones of the Gannets at Grassholm, exhibited by Professor Huxley. Finally the home life of the Osprey was shown to us by Herr Horst Siewert with superb lantern-slides.

Two afternoons were spent on excursions. On Tuesday some of the members visited Lord Lilford's waterfowl collection, while the rest of us went to Foxwarren Park, where we saw many rare birds in Mr. A. Ezra's aviaries, including Pink-headed Geese and Sun Bitterns, and where kangaroos and springbok dashed over the hillside and a Sarus Crane came to drive us away from the vicinity of his nest. Another day we took char-à-bancs to Whipsnade, the zoo where the animals live as nearly as possible under natural conditions; here we were given a delicious tea by the Zoölogical Society.

The Congress was distinguished by the number and brilliancy of the social occasions. The first reception was given in the Town Hall by the Mayor of Oxford,—a woman of distinguished presence who provided us with a bountiful tea and showed us the treasures of the city—its gold and silver plate and ancient charters. That same evening the Vice-Chancellor of the University received us at the Ashmolean Museum, where, besides the art treasures, there was a special exhibit of contemporary British ornithological art with some notable pictures. For this occasion we were requested to wear "academical and evening dress," and many were gorgeous in the brilliant gowns pertaining to their colleges.

On Wednesday evening the President and Council of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds invited us to a reception in Exeter College, where the gardens were flood-lit and where in the Hall ornithologists waltzed to tunes played by the band of His Majesty's Coldstream Guards.

The dinner given by the English members of the Congress to the "overseas guests" was a very splendid affair. In Christ Church Hall—one of the most beautiful halls in England—with Queen Elizabeth and Henry the VIII looking down at us, we sat on benches at seven long tables, the officers and chief dignitaries, in robes and with decorations, being seated at the Top Table. The "toastmaster"—a special official—gained our attention by announcing in a stentorian voice, "My lords, ladies, and gentlemen, pray silence for your President, Professor Dr. E. Stresemann," and so on for each one of the speakers. Afterwards it was a special pleasure to me to meet Mr. H. Eliot Howard and to discuss with him the burning subject of territory.

The Long Excursion proved a fitting climax to the Congress. One hundred and fifty of us traveled all day in buses to the quaint little town of Tenby on the coast of Pembrokeshire in Wales. The next day as guests of the British Admiralty we were carried by two destroyers, the *Windsor* and the *Wolfhound*, over the smoothest of seas to the bird islands Skokholm, Skomer, and Grassholm. On the first of these the owner, Mr. R. M. Lockley, had birds and their

nests most carefully labelled for us—Puffins, Stormy Petrels, Manx Shearwaters, Oystercatchers, Greater and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Razorbills, etc. At Skomer there were unbelievable numbers of the absurd little Puffins, the ground was honeycombed with Shearwater nests in rabbit burrows, while the greatest sight of all was an immense cliff crowded with thousands of Guillemots (Murre) on their nests with here and there a snow-white Kittiwake.

Then we sailed to Grassholm, and when we drew near, it seemed as if the island were covered with new fallen snow. It was a marvellous and indescribable sight—acres and acres of the great white Gannets on their nests!

The trip home in the evening was very beautiful with the lovely gulls following the ships. And then came the Manx Shearwaters in a great stream hurrying home to Skomer—a thrilling sight. Before reaching the island, however, they thought better of their haste and settled on the water waiting for darkness to fall to protect them on their return from the Great Black-backed Gulls.

Monday we travelled back again to Oxford by a different route, being entertained at tea at Stanway House by the Earl and Countess of Wemyss and the Hon. Guy Charteris, who is an authority on Cuckoos. A pleasant feature of the long bus-rides was the chance to visit with different ornithologists. Tuesday there was a final reception at the Natural History Museum at London, where rare books were exhibited, and also examples of all the new bird species that have been discovered since the last Congress.

The Eighth International Ornithological Congress was a very great occasion for those fortunate enough to participate. Many elements contributed to its success: Oxford with a cloudless sky and all the glory of the ancient, beautiful colleges; the unselfish labors of the officers and members of committees—the Secretary, Rev. F. C. R. Jourdain, Mr. B. W. Tucker, Mr. H. F. Witherby, and many others; the generous hospitality of our many kind hosts; the conversations with ornithologists from many lands; the charm of the President, Dr. Erwin Stresemann, who with his delightful humor and gift for friendship always said the happy, gracious thing; the stateliness and splendor of the entertainments; and finally the never-to-be-forgotten day with the sea-birds.

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