

EDITORIAL

THERE SEEMS to be a widespread agreement that the waterfowl of North America are in a very precarious condition as to numbers. The reduction in numbers is probably more acute in some species than in others. It seems to be impossible at the present time to determine to what extent the recent decrease is due to drouth and how much to over-shooting. The determination of these factors has a very important bearing on remedial policies. But the fact remains that one factor is not controllable, while the other one is. Since these two factors operate in relatively unknown degrees to reduce the duck supply, in order to accomplish anything towards the prevention of further reduction an attack on the controllable factor is indicated, namely the closed season.

In advocating a closed season we need not discuss the positive method of increasing the duck supply by restoration of breeding areas, because that is a wholly different and independent matter. It is more important in the long run, but it is a slower process, while the closed season is prompt in results. Restoration work should be undertaken immediately, and results will come in due time—if the birds survive in the meantime.

It is possible that the general rains of the 1935 spring may help much to correct the unfavorable drouth conditions of the last two or three breeding seasons. If this is true to any great extent a closed season may not be so imperative at the present time. Yet the article by Mr. Furniss in this issue of the *WILSON BULLETIN* indicates that even where there was suitable environment in 1934 it was not inhabited by the normal number of ducks. Of course, in so far as this is the case it must indicate that over-shooting is a more important factor in duck decrease than is lack of proper environment. And if this is true we will face in each succeeding season a stronger demand for a closed season on waterfowl.

What are the objections to a closed season? We may dismiss the reluctance of hunters to give up the sport as lacking in argument, and therefore unsound. But we are of the opinion that the great rank and file of sportsmen are today converted to the closed season idea. We believe that the greatest obstruction to the closed season on waterfowl today comes from the professional game protector, the one who is paid to save the ducks. And it is explained in this way. A closed season on waterfowl would mean that hunters would not buy licenses for hunting. This would mean the loss of thousands of dollars of income to the fish and game departments of the states. The warden forces would be cut down. Thus, it is argued, a closed season would leave the game unprotected, and poaching would go on unrestrained.

This is a formidable argument, but it leads to the extermination of the birds by law, the open season. If the season is closed the extermination may possibly result illegally—the same result in either case. It is possible that the opposition to the closed season may arise also in the thoughts of the officials because of possible loss of employment, but we need not dwell upon this aspect of the case for it is merely an assumption. The fact seems to be that under our present method of financing the fish and game departments the future of the wild fowl is a very gloomy one. They seem to be doomed by the open season, and the closed season does not seem to hold great promise either.

As a remedy we suggest that fish and game departments should be financed by legislative appropriation, in the same way that other departments of the state are financed. The purpose would be to make the wild life protection forces independent of the variable income from licenses to hunt. It would then be possible to declare a closed season whenever the emergency demands. And as time goes on it is likely that the need of a closed season will occur more often than in the past. Even with the contemplated restoration projects in full swing there will never be the abundance of wild life that has existed in the past. It is more than probable that from now on there will be a constant struggle to maintain even the present status of most species of waterfowl. The closed season expedient may have to be resorted to at intervals. Would it not be wise to organize for this possible contingency? And is it not proper for the state to protect its own property? The case of Geer vs. Connecticut established the principle of state ownership of wild life. However, the long-established custom of running the fish and game departments with the income from hunting license fees will not be changed easily. Like other reforms it will come slowly, and only with hard and determined effort.

While the states slowly adjust themselves, in various ways, to the emergency of waterfowl shortage, about our only hope for their recovery lies in the quick response of the federal government. If the Biological Survey can secure the necessary funds for operation, it can declare a closed season on such species as need it; put federal wardens in the field, and exercise a wholesome restraint until the states have had time to adjust themselves to the situation. The immediate problem is to finance the Biological Survey. We have a good deal of confidence in Mr. Darling's desire to do this thing.

DURING RECENT MONTHS those in control of the remaining sets of Dawson's "The Birds of California" have placed them on the market at greatly reduced prices. The Student's Edition (published at \$45.00 and finally offered at \$9.50) was promptly disposed of. The Booklover's Edition, published at \$110, was then offered at \$19.00, and will no doubt be taken up also. We mention these facts in order to offer a word of commendation to the publishers for handling their unsold remainders in this way. The practice of destroying the remainders is so selfish and mercenary that it deserves only condemnation from the scientific world.

THE ARTICLE in this issue on the birds of Wyoming is published with the aid of a subsidy.