

THE WILSON ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB OF TODAY<sup>1</sup>

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THE Wilson Ornithological Club of today is firmly rooted in the scene of American Science, natural history, and bird study. The past fifty years have seen its structure grow from an obscure beginning, a development which has been admirably described by Dr. Strong in the preceding paper. It is quite fitting that we should pause at this period of our existence, not only to look back over the years, but to analyze our present selves, praise and condemn ourselves, compare our present personal thoughts, feelings, and activities, and see what we wish for a bigger and better future.

In 1937 the Wilson Club submitted to its 838 members a questionnaire containing altogether 37 fact-finding questions. Each new member that joined before November 1, 1938, was given the first fourteen of these questions. Three hundred and seventy-nine questionnaires were returned, representing the cooperation of 45.2 per cent of the members.

There can be no better way to study ourselves than to delve into these questionnaires with a curiosity-loving eye and mathematical mind, for here lies as good a text of our gross anatomy, as good a cross-section of our middle structure, as can be devised. The Secretary has done this very thing. He has been aware of the statement at the head of each questionnaire which warned: "All *personal* information will be kept strictly confidential by the officers of the Wilson Ornithological Club." He has respected this statement to the very letter and has taken only general information. The questionnaires now reside in a tight bundle and a strong piece of twine holds them to secrecy. Here follows the results of the Secretary's study.

Thirty-five per cent of us dislike to reveal our full names.

Seventy-five per cent of us prefer to use initials in writing our names.

Collectively we are 40.8 years of age.

We are busy people following various occupations; only two of us are retired. Topping the list of occupations among us is the teaching profession with 24.8 per cent of us involved. Next is the business and industrial field where 16 per cent of us earn our living. Other occupations, listed in the order of their greatest following, are: Student, 13.5 per cent; biological investigator, 8.9 per cent; museum worker, 7.1 per cent; game sanctuary worker, 7.2 per cent; lawyer, physician, and nurse, 6.8 per cent. Occupations followed by less than 3 per cent of us are house wife, farmer, librarian, chemist, geologist, religious worker, writer, archeologist, entomologist, and artist.

In the field of ornithology our interests are manifold, so manifold, in fact, that they are too numerous to be listed entirely. The most widespread interest is in life history studies, for 41.1 per cent of us

<sup>1</sup> The second of two papers presented at the Twenty-fourth Annual Meeting in recognition of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Wilson Ornithological Club.

have expressed enthusiasm in this work. In second place comes interest in census work among 27.9 per cent. In third place comes interest in bird-banding among 20.8 per cent. In fourth place appears the interest in bird photography among 16.9 per cent. Other outstanding interests are as follows: general interests, 11.8 per cent; ecology, 10.2 per cent; distribution, 6.8 per cent; conservation, 6.5 per cent.

We are a well-educated group of individuals. At least 18.6 per cent of us have a Ph.D. degree while 24.4 per cent possess at least one *advanced* degree of some sort. These figures only partially represent the educational background of our organization when we take into consideration that 13.5 per cent of us are in the process of getting an education. Some of us have placed our wisdom under the covers of books; in fact, 13.9 per cent of us have completely filled the pages between book covers.

Turning away from our basic questionnaires for a moment to compare the names on our membership roll with the names on the membership rolls of the American Ornithologists' Union and the Cooper Ornithological Club, we find that our interests in ornithology are so intense that between 35 and 40 per cent of us are also members of the American Ornithologists' Union and 10 per cent of us are members of the Cooper Club.

Returning to our questionnaires again, we find that 67.1 per cent of us are taking an active interest in conservation. If ornithologists are accused of not being good conservationists, let the accusers be shown this figure!

The backbone of our organization is *The Wilson Bulletin*. Without it our fifty-year-old structure would soon crumble into a mass of disorganized bird-lovers and ornithologists. What do we think of our *Bulletin*?

Ninety-five per cent of us have found interesting and instructive the articles in the *Bulletin* and have expressed our approval. Because we are an educated and a thinking group of people, we see in our *Bulletin*, as we see in other things, room for improvement. We have different ideas for its contents, we do not all agree on certain of its present policies. It is our *Bulletin*; we are, therefore, in a position to speak our minds.

In an issue of the *Bulletin* for 1900 there was published "A Monograph on the Flicker" by Frank L. Burns. The entire issue from cover to cover, 82 pages in all, was devoted to this article. Later, in 1911, another issue (two numbers combined) was devoted to a similar monograph on the Broad-Winged Hawk by the same author. These two articles were some of the first comprehensive life histories of birds ever published and were the first articles ever to occupy *all* the pages of a single issue of an American ornithological journal. In 1937 this custom was revived when the September issue of the *Bulletin* contained "A Life History of the Oven-bird" by H. W. Hann. These *Bulletins* were without the general notes, the reviews, and the shorter articles more quickly

read. Asked whether it was desirable to have one number of the *Bulletin* devoted entirely to an article monographic in scope once every year, every other year, or at all, the members replied as follows: 57.8 per cent preferred it once every year; 13.9 per cent preferred it every two years; 13.5 did not prefer it at all; 7.5 per cent were indifferent while 7.1 per cent qualified their answers by saying "occasionally."

Each year it is customary to publish the membership roll. Approximately 14 pages are involved. Thus the roll is published at the expense of other articles that might be published. Naturally considerable expense is involved and space is used that might be devoted to the publication of other articles, general notes, etc. Yet the roll is useful in several respects: (1) New members find their names promptly incorporated in the organization and feel that they are at once a part of the organization; (2) an up-to-date address list is provided for intercommunication; (3) the roll serves as a convenient check-list for the officers, committees, and others. Faced with the question "In the future do you wish to have the membership roll published every year, every other year, every three years?" the members replied as follows: 20.6 per cent said "every year"; 37.5 per cent said "every other year"; 34.9 per cent said "every three years"; while 5.2 per cent were indifferent. As many as 0.7 per cent volunteered the statement that they preferred not to have the roll published at all. Studying these replies further we find that 72.4 per cent are against the publication of the membership rolls every year and are thus *not* in favor of our present custom.

*The Wilson Bulletin*, like many contemporary American ornithological journals, carries reviews of literature. Here, as in *The Auk*, *Bird-Banding*, and *Bird-Lore*, there is much duplication of reviewed material. Our *Bulletin* is not sufficiently large to cover the literature in the thorough fashion of *The Auk* and *Bird-Banding* and has never intended or pretended to do so. Asked if we prefer additional reviews, 65.4 per cent of the members said "Yes"; 25.9 per cent said "No"; while 8.6 per cent were indifferent. These replies are indicative of one of two things—either the majority of us enjoy reading duplicated reviews in the ornithological journals and looking for possible diversity of editorial opinion, or the majority of us depend upon the *Bulletin* for reviews and have little occasion to refer to other journals.

Because *The Wilson Bulletin* is used primarily by middle westerners and is, therefore, a local journal, the following question was asked: "Would you be interested in having foreign literature reviewed?" The vote was close indeed. Forty-two and one-tenth per cent said "Yes"; 45.8 per cent said "No"; and 12 per cent were indifferent.

Every natural history journal of any importance contains sections captioned "General Notes." These are items easily and quickly read; and they are of such diversified character, that each member is almost certain to find one note of great interest. The question, "Do you find the general notes of sufficient interest to warrant their continuation?"

received an affirmative answer in 92.4 per cent of the members—a decisive answer indeed.

The members were asked to make any suggestions regarding new sections in the *Bulletin* and particularly to give their opinion of a section on conservation. This question received an interesting and instructive group of replies, though many of them were decidedly in disagreement.

Easily fifty per cent favored a section on conservation but the qualifications with the replies were so varied that they cannot be compiled. However, we may mention a few of them. Here are some favorable replies in brief: Discussion of conservation all right if confined to information, not propaganda; give a concise summary of conservational activities; give only a yearly review of conservation; give information concerning conservational legislation, particularly as applied to birds; show spirit of cooperation rather than criticism in conservational matters; confine conservation to editorial remarks and general notes, but do not have section on conservation; let utterances on conservation be rational, for remember that conservation has made asses of some conservational organizations; so much conservational matter is published in a juvenile fashion that it would be a joy to see conservation treated in a scientific magazine; have an annual water-fowl census section. Another twenty-five per cent were opposed to a section on conservation and objected to the *Bulletin* taking any step in conservational work. The following replies were typical: Enough publications on conservation; don't be like *Bird-Lore*; leave conservation to journals that specialize in it; conservation is apt to be dull so stay away from it; stress ornithology always; too much conservation already; *Bird-Lore* covers the ground sufficiently; a mistake to enter the field of conservation for you will incur hatred; let the *Bulletin* print studies of birds which may be used in conservation but leave conservation talk to others; a conservation section all right if you can get an outstanding authority to handle it.

A few other sections were suggested. Samples are: reminiscences of old times; experiences of members; section of letters; photography section; migration section; experimental ornithology section; biographical section; activities of ornithologists; ornithological projects being undertaken here and there.

Another question put to members was "What kind of articles would you prefer?" Members were also urged to criticize the *Bulletin*. Several members answered by urging more truly scientific articles; others urged more popular articles. The urge for scientific articles, however, was greater than the urge for popular articles. Naturally members asked for more articles in the fields of ornithology in which they were especially interested. If they liked life history work they wanted more articles on that subject. A number of members asked to have the *Bulletin* refrain from publishing local lists. Here are some more comments in brief: let's not copy *The Auk*; keep between *The Auk* and *Bird-Lore*;

would like more live material instead of reviews of past; heavier editorial blue pencil; more original material; Dr. Stephens is doing a fine job; more historical notes; more articles in systematic ornithology; should still read the *Bulletin* if it came disguised as a tabloid newspaper; more careful selection of general notes.

Altogether 91.3 per cent found the general appearance and format of the *Bulletin* attractive. (This reply was solicited before the cover with the Wilson's Warbler drawing was changed.) Only 2.6 per cent did not like the format; two disapproved of the cover. Numerous comments were volunteered thus: paper too shiny; type could be more attractively spaced; let an advertising agency draw a more attractive cover design; reprints to authors gratis; start articles at top of page so that reprints do not begin half way down the first page; margins too wide, thus wasting space for type.

Twenty-one members reported complete sets of the *Bulletin* in their libraries.

Once a year the Wilson Club functions as a true organization when it holds its Annual Meetings. Here lies the source of the structure's activity; here the Club becomes an organization and not a subscription list.

The present Annual Meeting is only our twenty-fourth although our organization is a half-century old. Unlike the A.O.U., which has met annually since its inception and has had regular attendance over a long period of years, the Wilson Club has met irregularly and has only recently begun to receive a following at its Annual Meetings. Actually 18.4 per cent of us have attended one meeting while an additional 13.9 per cent have attended two or more meetings.

The business sessions and the reading of papers are accepted customs on the occasion of Annual Meetings. Other activities are sometimes of equal importance for they provide both amusement and instruction to members and visitors during the few hours when the meeting is not in session.

The members were asked if they would like an exhibit of photographs, an exhibit of artistic work (paintings, drawings, etchings), or a photograph contest in which various members would enter a limited number of photographs and an award would be given. The suggestion of an art exhibit was liked by 59.3 per cent of the members; the photograph exhibit by 59.7 per cent; the photograph contest by 43.7 per cent. Of the three suggestions, 28.5 per cent preferred the art exhibit while 21 per cent preferred the photograph exhibit.

The members were asked to suggest other activities and the replies were of great interest. Some were as follows: life history photograph exhibit; symposia every year; display of bird-banding apparatus; special exhibits such as food habits of raptorial birds; symposium on game management; pictorial history of the W.O.C.; bird-skin guessing contest; hold the Annual Meeting with the A.O.U. when the latter con-

venes in the Mississippi Valley; exhibit of valuable ornithological books; field trips; have local bird organizations meet with the Club.

The Wilson Club has followed no traditional time of meeting, save that when the American Association for the Advancement of Science holds its Christmas Meetings in the Mid-west, we meet with them. Nevertheless we have met most often at Christmas and Thanksgiving time. Asked which would be preferred, the Friday and Saturday following Thanksgiving or two consecutive days between Christmas and New Year's Day, 21.4 per cent said Thanksgiving; 31.5 per cent said Christmas. A large portion of the membership, 46.2 per cent, were indifferent, probably not desiring to attend a meeting. Nearly every other time of the year was suggested. Asked whether or not our meeting with the A.A.A.S. was an inducement for attendance, 35.7 per cent said "No" and 33 per cent said "Yes" while 30.4 per cent were indifferent.

In conclusion the Secretary will present his conception of the Wilson Ornithological Club of today using the data already given you and injecting a little of his own opinion.

We of the Wilson Ornithological Club are 40 years of age and in the prime of life.

We are interested in field ornithology liking especially life-history studies, census-work, bird-banding and bird photography.

Because a large portion of us are school teachers we have by necessity become well-educated, having degrees of many sorts.

We are Midwesterners. Our interest in birds is somewhat localized. Less than half of us are members of the American Ornithologists' Union; less than a quarter of us like reviews of foreign literature.

Of our *Bulletin* we heartily approve. Over half of us would like to see one number of the *Bulletin* each year devoted exclusively to a monograph.

We hope that the membership roll will not be published every year. We would like more reviews of literature. We thoroughly enjoy the general notes. We should like to see the *Bulletin* make some move in the direction of conservation.

The articles published in the *Bulletin* during recent years seem to be satisfactory and well-read by all of us. Some of us would like to see, however, a reduction in the number of local lists. Since many of us have expressed a strong interest in life history work, census work, and bird-banding, it would seem that the majority of articles should be devoted to these spheres of interest.

At our Annual Meetings we would like exhibits, particularly art and photograph exhibits, and perhaps an occasional photographic contest.

A large portion of us are indifferent as to the time of the Annual Meeting. Of those who have expressed preferences for either a Thanksgiving or Christmas meeting, more have chosen the Christmas meeting.

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