

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

The good news at the time of the University Park meeting was the reprieve given the California Condor by the voters of Ventura County when they turned down a referendum authorizing a local Water Conservation District to enter into a contract with the federal government for a project that would have required building a road across the Sespe National Condor Sanctuary. The decision was close, however, only 7531 nays to 7499 yeas, and the District is currently trying to get another vote authorized.

In June, an 85,000-acre fire ravaged the San Rafael Wilderness Area in the Los Padres National Forest, but the two condor sanctuaries (Sisquoc and Sespe) were still several miles to the east of the fire when it was stopped. The wildlife kill and vegetative regeneration which attends such fires may provide extra condor food in much less disturbed countryside than the birds normally visit.

LAND USE

The above emphasis on habitat conditions stresses the controlling role that our re-making of the landscape plays in the perpetuation of wildlife. Grandiose plans to build Rampart Dam on the Yukon River in central Alaska fortunately may have been dealt a death blow by the perceptive analysis provided by Dean Stephen H. Spurr of the School of Natural Resources at the University of Michigan, and five other colleagues. This study was financed by the nation's several conservation organizations through the Natural Resources Council of America, and represents a sound example of rallying science in opposition to vested interests in development for limited aims. The regional director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said of the proposed dam, "Nowhere in the history of water development in North America have the fish and wildlife losses anticipated to result from a single project been so overwhelming." (see Brooks, 1965; Leopold et al., 1966; Spurr et al., 1966).

That America is at last waking up to the conflicts in land use that are inherent in our current devotion to continued growth in population and production is evident in hearings on Senate Bill 2282, introduced by Senator Gaylord Nelson, Wisconsin. Called the Ecological Research and Surveys Bill (there are now companion measures in the House), it received enthusiastic backing from the nation's research ecologists on 27 April before the Senate Interior Committee.

Some questioned whether this program should be housed in the Department of the Interior, as now proposed, or somehow given higher standing within the Executive Department so that it could impose ecological coordination on the conflicting programs of several of the federal departments. Even Interior has difficult and disruptive conflicts of interest within its own organization, as exemplified by some of the approaches of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries and the Bureau of Land Management.

THREATENED SPECIES

On 13-15 April in Washington, the Smithsonian Institution, with the help of The Conservation Foundation, held an important Conference on the Conservation of the Avifauna of Northern Latin America. As Dr. William Vogt, one of the originators, pointed out, several hundred species of migratory birds which occupy seven million square miles of the United States and Canada funnel southward through somewhat less than one million square miles of Mexico and Central America, and land use changes in these migratory

lanes and in the terminal wintering grounds have been drastic in recent decades. These changes may become serious factors in the survival of many North American populations. We know rather little of the statistics of land use in Latin America, though the trend is toward deforestation, loss of diversity, and dessication of habitats. If hazards to North American migrant birds are to be avoided, we must find ways of helping our Latin friends to educate their own people to the values of wildlife, and press all the land-use agencies, including the U.S. Agency for International Development which administers much of our Alliance for Progress contributions, to adopt an ecosystematic approach. Unfortunately, this involves asking the people of Latin America to do what we have not truly succeeded in doing in our own country!

One outgrowth of this Conference was a new awareness for many participants that there has, of recent years, been a great increase of traffic in birds of all kinds—indeed in almost all animals—for the pet trade, and that this is now of truly alarming proportions and calls for national legislation if it is to be controlled.

Equally surprising to many in attendance was the fact that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has no control over the importation of exotic species, for release and propagation by the several state fish and game departments, many of whom have been enthusiastic proponents of introducing new game species. Gordon W. Gullion's fine article (1965) on this problem deserves wide reading.

Through the Agricultural Experiment Station of Oregon State University at Corvallis, the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife of that State—thanks apparently to the prompting of its chief, Dr. Thomas G. Scott—has begun the publication of a series of Special Reports on "Endangered Plants and Animals of Oregon." Two, on fishes and reptiles and amphibians, have been issued to date. These lists give short status reports, and include distribution maps. They are a welcome and important adjunct to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's "redbook" of threatened species, and are deserving of emulation by all State administrations.

Thanks to a 1965 appropriation of \$350,000, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife has embarked on the first phase of a research and propagation program designed to help threatened species of American wildlife. A new unit is being developed for this purpose at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center near Laurel, Maryland, under the direction of Dr. Ray C. Erickson.

The initial emphasis is properly placed on studies of the ecology of remnant populations. Winston E. Banko has been assigned to Hawaii to study a number of endangered birds there; Fred C. Sibley is extending the basic studies (see Koford, 1953; Miller, McMillan, & McMillan, 1965) of the California Condor; Donald K. Fortenbery is studying the black-footed ferret in South Dakota; and Norman E. Holgersen is studying the Everglade Kite and other rare southeastern species. C. Eugene Knoder is head of a new propagation unit, working with captive Whooping Cranes and Argentine Snail Kites, the latter being studied only for possible methods that might later help bolster the Florida Everglade Kite.

The success of this well-designed program of course depends on continuing Congressional support. Senator Karl E. Mundt has taken a special interest in this work and H.R. 9424, the Endangered Species Bill, passed in the House, awaited clearance by a Senate Committee as this report went to press in late June. One minor hitch was the opposition of the National Audubon Society to one provision of H.R. 9424 which would open all national wildlife refuges to hunting, at the discretion of the Secretary of the Interior. Hunting on federal refuges is now limited to no more than 40 per cent of each such area. The Society has endorsed the bill's other provisions. (Callison, 1966).

PESTICIDES

The chemical pesticides issue continues to be of broad concern, since there have been few official implementations of the 1963 President's Science Advisory Committee recommendation that we bring about an orderly reduction of the use of persistent insecticides. Only Secretary Udall's Interior Department and a few states have directed that the use of DDT and other persistent chlorinated hydrocarbons be stringently restricted. In the case of the states, it was usually only the Conservation Department that acted. Several states now have Pesticide Control Boards, but none of them has yet shown any important leadership in changing the pattern of chemical use. The emphasis is on "safe use," reflecting the naive notion that environmental contamination can be kept "below significant levels" when one is dealing with a long-lived toxin that is cycled through food chains and thus concentrated. A public symposium on the Scientific Aspects of Pest Control was conducted by the National Academy of Sciences in Washington 1-4 February, the fly in the ointment being that Mississippi Congressman Jamie L. Whitten was allowed to bombast the audience with his version of the indispensibility of chemical pest control in human welfare.

Of special interest was the publication of another President's Science Advisory Committee report (Tuckey, 1965) on environmental contamination and its forthright recognition of the fact that a whole generation of agricultural extension workers would have to be reoriented along ecological lines.

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