

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

The period between the 1964 and 1965 meetings of the Wilson Ornithological Society will prove of special interest to historians of conservation as the year in which the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service got back into wildlife conservation in earnest, in contradistinction to the game management emphasis that has preoccupied it in recent decades.

Conservationists everywhere applauded the appointment of John S. Gottschalk, a former fisheries biologist, as director of the Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife within the Service; and they backed H.R. 9424 and H.R. 9493, identical pieces of legislation "to provide for the conservation, protection, and propagation of native species of fish and wildlife, including migratory birds, that are threatened with extinction. . . ." Senator Karl Mundt proposed an amendment to the Department of Interior appropriations bill for fiscal year 1966 that would provide extra funds to establish a research program and center to implement these same objectives. The provisions of the recently approved Land and Water Conservation Fund Act may soon provide additional funds, collected as entrance fees on federal refuges and parks, that may, in part, be used for land acquisition on behalf of threatened species.

The Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife published an attractive booklet, "Survival Or Surrender for Endangered Wildlife" (available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., for \$0.15), that makes an eloquent plea for a concerted national effort on behalf of 78 endangered species, including giving closer attention to the status of 44 additional rare forms, and 21 whose occurrence within the United States is peripheral to the principal range of their species.

The booklet gives thumbnail sketches of a mere 15 of these endangered species, but the complete list has been published in a "Red Book" distributed to a limited group of conservationists and zoologists for comment.

It is the consensus of this committee that the full list deserves wider, if controlled, distribution. The present list is understandably provisional in character, since our knowledge of the status and needs of most species is still highly fragmentary. It must continue to remain "fluid" because man's activities in influencing wildlife, directly or indirectly, are subject to continuing change.

It is true that—given the relatively low level of biological understanding that still characterizes American society as a whole, and the nature of so much of America's politics, where ridicule is often substituted for discussion—there are dangers in distributing such a list too widely. The inclusion of species like the humpback chub or the Block Island meadow vole, if only provisionally or as a matter of scientific consistency, is sure to invite derision from certain elements.

Nevertheless, the setting of priorities and the development of a conservation program must have a starting point, and the way to round out our meager understanding of the status and requirements of various species is to begin with a list. Land acquisition will actually be only a part of this big task of ensuring the perpetuation of these rare forms. Circulation of the list to a wider circle of competent university zoologists will help call attention to the extensive field research opportunities inherent in rounding out the list, and in collecting the life history and ecological data that alone can form the basis for sound management. Such a list will also allow us to enroll the cooperation of the scores of land-use agencies whose programs affect the survival of *all* wildlife. The engineers who are remaking the American landscape, and indeed the landscapes of the world, do not know these requirements. It is up to the naturalist to supply them in advance, so that they may be incorporated in engineering design.

The Bureau's plans place a commendable emphasis on field research in this new program, and will, in addition, involve considerable experimentation with the potentialities of captive propagation methods to reinforce wild populations. There is growing awareness that all approaches must be explored, but, also, a counterbalancing insistence that action programs must not outrun understanding.

Several students (e.g., Allen, 1965; Clement, 1964) are convinced that illegal shooting remains a serious limiting factor for many large bird species. It is therefore important that we all insist on more effective protective laws and a much greater enforcement effort, lest even this new federal program be rendered ineffective by failures of enforcement. There is great cultural lag here, since failures of enforcement are, in many cases, failures of the judiciary to back State and Federal enforcement agencies.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Though its Florida population seems still healthy, an air-land survey of the entire Texas-Louisiana coast by A. S. Sprunt, IV in June 1965, revealed that the *Brown Pelican* failed to produce young on that coast this year, and that only three or four pairs attempted to nest at all. Disturbance by an oil-drilling operation may have been responsible for the failure of the Second-Chain of Islands Sanctuary colony this spring. The 1966 nesting season will show whether or not this is the end of a decade-long decline for this species on the western Gulf Coast. There are no more than about 30 birds on the Texas coast at present.

A 2-year field study of the status of the *California Condor* (Miller, McMillan, and McMillan, 1965) reports a 30 per cent decline in the population of this species—from about 60 to only about 40 individual birds—since Karl Koford first detailed the status and life history of this ancient bird in 1953. The decimating factors held responsible for this decline were the gun, government poisoning programs, and disturbance of nesting and roosting areas. As a result of these disturbing revelations, the U.S. Forest Service—in whose domain all remaining California Condors nest—the California Fish and Game Department, and the National Audubon Society have joined forces to weld a more effective education and law enforcement program on behalf of the condor and other large raptors in southern California.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will help extend the research work already done. All these agencies will soon have to pass on the biological feasibility of building a road across the condor refuge in the Los Padres National Forest and developing a water reservoir on its northern border, insofar as effects on the condor are concerned. These two work projects have been proposed by the local United Water Conservation District, but the Condor Advisory Committee, which advises the Forest Service, has already expressed itself against the project, and public opinion, it is hoped, will soon force recourse to alternative sources of water for the area. As Carl W. Buchheister wrote of the condor (in Miller et al. 1965), "All it needs is elbow room and to be left alone. What space we leave or fail to leave for it will be a measure of the level of our civilization."

Thirty-two collaborators in the *Bald Eagle* Research and Conservation Program of the National Audubon Society gathered at the Winous Point Shooting Club near Port Clinton, Ohio, 29–31 May 1965, to review their understanding of eagle biology and focus attention on the many unanswered questions in this species' future. Most intriguing was a report from David Hancock of the University of British Columbia that his field studies suggested a delayed effect of disturbance among nesting eagles. A further check of this phenomenon is under way.

Whooping Crane.—Eleven young wild birds were produced in 1964, the best produc-

tion year on record. One of these young was injured on the nesting grounds, however, and subsequently rescued (Novakowski, 1965). With 42 birds on the wintering grounds, this crane may have surpassed the condor in abundance.

Eskimo Curlew.—On 4 September 1964 a gunner in Barbados—the easternmost of the Lesser Antillean islands, and thus the interceptor of the long over-water flights of shorebirds which come down from maritime Canada in autumn—killed a bird which, fortunately, was eyed as different enough to be submitted to professional examination. The specimen was shipped to Dr. James Bond of the Philadelphia Academy of Sciences and there identified as *Numenius borealis*. It is the first specimen record since 1932, when a bird taken in Newfoundland Labrador was preserved. Barbados has always been a notorious shorebird gauntlet; this incident points up the importance of better laws and adequate enforcement.

ANIMAL CONTROL

Two bills, H.R. 4159 and S. 1952, were introduced in the Congress to attempt to reorganize the federal predator control program, making it a research and advisory, or “extension,” service instead of an end in itself. The Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife attempted to clean its own house by changing the name of its Branch from Predator and Rodent Control to a Wildlife Services Division, and by appointing a thoroughly competent wildlife professional to head it. Immediately, however, pressures from western stockmen made it questionable that a scientific approach to reorganization would suffice.

(During discussion at the Black Hills meeting, R. C. Clement warned of a quiet move on the part of the agricultural community to bring the U.S. Department of Agriculture into the blackbird control program, even though the Department of the Interior is already charged with responsibility in this field, and doing active research and experimental control work. “The pattern,” he said, “is that typical of all ambitious bureaucracies: convince the farmer he has a big problem, even though complaints were heretofore local and occasional only—to do this, lump everybody’s losses from problem animals; beat the drums for more funds to solve the newly created problem; and get your friends to introduce and pass legislation declaring the organisms pests that shall be eradicated.”

(Commenting on the socioeconomic background of this problem, it was suggested that the success of the federally supported land grant college approach has so increased production and narrowed profits by increasing costs that both the agricultural bureaucrat and the farmer are in trouble. The declining number of farms require fewer government advisors, and the farmer can less and less afford the tithe of his production that has always, heretofore, gone to his natural competitors, the insects and the wild vertebrates.

(As was pointed out, the objective of these comments is not mere criticism of the Department of Agriculture, but an attempt to understand what is happening. A bureaucracy faced with obsolescence does what industry does—it diversifies. Staff jobs must be maintained. This being so, we had better work out a plan to support people for conserving all our nation’s natural resources, rather than subsidizing their destruction, as is so largely the case today.)

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