

our environment

Anti-Cowbird Program Aids Kirtland's Warbler

The trapping of brown-headed cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) may be an important key to ultimate survival for Kirtland's, or the jack pine, warbler (*Dendroica kirtlandii*). Long a rare species, the warbler nests only in jack pine forests of Michigan's lower peninsula, where it is parasitized by the cowbird. The cowbird lays its eggs in the nest of the warbler (among other species). The cowbird fledglings, larger than those of the warbler, get priority at feeding time; the young warblers starve to death.

A 1971 survey showed a warbler population of only 400—a 60 percent decline from a decade earlier. In an effort to combat this precipitous trend, a three-pronged program was begun in 1972 jointly by the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and the National Audubon Society. The program entails management of forest lands to provide young jack pines, establishment of additional forest land for the warbler, and cowbird control.

In spring, 1972, 15 decoy traps baited with sunflower seeds, fresh water, and live cowbirds were set on seven warbler nesting areas. Over 2,200 cowbirds were trapped and warbler egg losses dropped in three of the areas from 65 percent to 6 percent. The number of young warblers reaching the wing that year nearly tripled. In 1973, 19 traps were set in the seven warbler areas. More than 3,000 cowbirds were removed from the

warblers' areas last spring, and a nest survey showed that not one warbler nest had been invaded in three of the seven areas. A population increase of eight percent was recorded. This year the number of traps has been increased to 23. An upturn in the warbler population to 432 for 1974 suggests that the warbler restoration program is having its desired effect.

Foster Homes for Young Whoopers

One of the rarest of North American birds, the whooping crane (*Grus americana*), may well be saved from extinction by a current project of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Only forty-eight of the species are known to survive in the wild. The birds breed in Canada's Wood Buffalo National Park, in the District of Mackenzie, Northwest Territories, and spend the winter on the Texas coast, mainly in Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

For five years in a row, whooping crane eggs have been taken from the nests and transplanted to Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Md. Seventeen birds have been successfully raised from eggs taken in previous years. In May, thirteen eggs collected in Canada were also taken to the research center. The eggs were removed only from nests that contained two eggs. (The removal of one of a pair of eggs does not seem to materially affect the number of young cranes arriving at the Texas wintering ground. Few families arrive there with more than one chick even though two eggs had been laid.)

Twelve of the captive flock at Patuxent have been paired off in separate areas because they have themselves shown indications of pairing. In spring of 1975 an artificial lighting situation will be set up to achieve synchrony in the male and female cycles. Continual light at normal breeding time tends to stimulate hormonal activity which leads to breeding.

Crocodile Shoes Confiscated by Feds

About \$35,000 worth of imported men's shoes were seized recently by government agents when it was determined that the shoes were made from the hide of an endangered species of crocodile. More than 390 pairs of shoes were confiscated, all made from the hide of the Nile crocodile, *Crocodylus niloticus*, one of six crocodile species that is listed by the U.S. Department of the Interior as endangered. The shipments, intended for two importers in Maine and Massachusetts, were seized by special agents of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; a penalty action was also initiated against the importers.

Identification of the species was determined by zoologists who studied the texture of hide used in the shoes and compared samples with museum specimens for the presence or absence of bony material in the scales, and the number and size of the scales.

The forfeited shoes were destined for retail outlets in the United States, with an average price of \$90 a pair. The shoes will be temporarily placed in a government



Adult whooping
cranes (*Grus
americana*)



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