

TEAMING WITH WILDLIFE

Editor's Note. Below is an open letter (dated February 1996) from bird book authors on "Teaming with Wildlife." The letter has been disseminated to bird clubs, ornithological associations, and others. We thought you might be interested in this initiative.

We are writing to you because we know that you are interested in the prospects for birdlife in the United States. We signatories to this letter have written (or coauthored) books about birds, and we feel passionately about birds and about securing their future. But we are concerned about getting enough wildlife-funding to monitor and conserve our birds and their habitats, and to make the wonder of birds accessible to many more Americans.

One of the most creative wildlife-funding methods we have become familiar with is the "Teaming With Wildlife" concept, otherwise known as the Wildlife Diversity Funding Initiative. As you undoubtedly know, hunters since the 1930s and anglers since the 1950s have paid user-fees on all the hunting and fishing equipment they buy to the tune of \$350 million per year. These funds, collected at the federal level and distributed to the states, have formed the basis for major conservation and restoration funding in the area of game fish and wildlife. Now it is the time for birders and other outdoor enthusiasts to pay their fair share for wildlife that otherwise has no paying constituency, wildlife that is not endangered and wildlife that is neither hunted nor fished. If a small user-fee (between one-quarter and five percent of the producer costs) were placed on outdoor products (such as binoculars, backpacks, canoes, feeders, field guides, camera equipment, birdseed, tents, mountain bikes, etc.), then up to \$350 million per year could be spent on the wildlife that we are concerned about and for us that especially means birds. All outdoors-oriented people should be willing to pay just a little bit more to conserve the natural world. We know that we are willing to do so, and we think that you should, too.

We hope that Teaming With Wildlife becomes the law, but we are not asking you to write to Congress, at least not yet. We want you to write outdoor businesses to encourage them to be open to this creative system. Already such birder-oriented optic companies such as Swarovski, Swift, and Zeiss have endorsed Teaming With Wildlife. We need to enlist more participants. That's where you come in.

[Teaming With Wildlife has developed a list of companies that] directly serve bird enthusiasts, either as producers of products or major distributors. We would like you to write to them. Tell them that the Teaming With Wildlife approach would help the wildlife we all treasure. Please tell them that you are willing to pay just a little bit more, and that they should support the idea. It would help the natural environment (by investing in major wildlife conservation programs), and the expenditures would simultaneously help their business

environment (helping create situations where their products could be used by an expanding customer base). Although these listed companies have not yet committed to Teaming With Wildlife, some are wavering. Use your own words, and encourage them to get on board and support the effort.

One beauty of Teaming With Wildlife is that it provides for wildlife conservation, education, and recreation without creating any new bureaucracy. The system already exists to collect and distribute these funds through the existing laws. Moreover, the law will specify that the collected funds for these wildlife purposes could not be diverted for other uses . . .

For more information [on this initiative and companies to write to] contact Naomi Edelson, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, 444 North Capitol Street NW (Suite 544), Washington, D.C. 20001.

We know that there are plans for such programs as significant land acquisition, habitat enhancement, statewide bird-monitoring schemes, birding trails, observation platforms, and the creation of interpretive materials for birds that could enhance birdwatching and bird-maintenance in your state. What we and the birds need are the funds, and Teaming With Wildlife is a way to get those funds.

When Teaming With Wildlife is put into place, we will be better off. And so will the birds.

Thank you for your consideration.

SIGNED BY: William S. Clark, Herbert Clarke, Jack Connor, John V. Dennis, Pete Dunne, Frank Gill, George H. Harrison, Harold R. Holt, Paul A. Johnsgard, Kenn Kaufman, Paul Kerlinger, Stephen W. Kress, John C. Kricher, Roger Tory Peterson, Noble Proctor, Chandler S. Robbins, Arnold Small, Richard Stallcup, Donald Stokes, Lillian Stokes, Clay Sutton, Pat Sutton, John Tveten, Richard K. Walton, Roland H. Wauer, and Claudia P. Wilds.

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Date: September 21-22, 1996
Location: Four Points (Sheraton) Hotel
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**For costs and registration information,
contact Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary
at 508-349-2615 after July 28.**