

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON BIRD
PROTECTION, 1942

The Bird Protection Committee presents its 1942 Report, the fourth in an America at war. This unfortunate condition is encompassing birds as well as men in its disastrous embrace. For years to come the war or its aftermath is likely to affect many species of American birds. Throughout this 1942 report, and perhaps through several of its successors, the War will form an ever-present background.

This Committee believes that the job of winning the war is of primary importance, not only to preservation of our country but to ultimate conservation of such resources as our bird life. In the process, losses are inevitable. Some losses will be necessary and therefore worth while. Others will be unnecessary and wasteful. Conservationists must try to differentiate between the two—then strive to avoid the latter without hindering the war effort.

One destructive and needless step, based on the excuse of wartime emergency, seems likely to have far-reaching effects on conservation. This is the removal of the Fish and Wildlife Service from Washington. The isolation of the technical wildlife agency of the federal government at a distance from the seat of that government and from the offices of many related activities promises little good. Already the loss of trained personnel is serious. Especially alarming is the prospect that facilities for research are likely to be reduced to the vanishing point.

The conservation work of the National Park Service and the Office of Indian Affairs has also been interrupted and seriously hampered by transfers of those agencies to a point distant from Washington.

A recent legal opinion, holding that Indians on certain Indian lands are not subject to regulations issued under authority of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, has somewhat hindered the wildlife conservation program that was begun on Indian reservations in 1941. Resultant practices on some Indian reservations have encouraged disregard of waterfowl regulations by neighboring whites. Conservationists who have read the opinion, however, doubt that it is sound, and there are indications that it may be reversed.

This Committee feels that among the major publications on American birds appearing during the past year the following are worthy of special mention. Bent's 'Life Histories of North American Flycatchers, Larks, Swallows, and their allies'; Mayr's 'A systematic and

faunal list of the birds of New Guinea and adjacent islands';¹ Lehmann's 'Attwater's Prairie Chicken, its life history and management'; Ridgway and Friedmann's 'Birds of North and Middle America'; Hellmayr and Conover's 'Catalogue of birds of the Americas and the adjacent islands (part 1, number 1)'; another notable achievement is the publication of the greatly revised 'Birds of North Carolina'; by Pearson, Brimley and Brimley.

We can recommend also that A. O. U. members obtain and read—and then act upon—'Fading trails: the story of vanishing American wildlife.'

Work of Organizations

Much of the important bird work of the Fish and Wildlife Service was continued this last year although drastic curtailment of research had already commenced. Waterfowl flyway biologists accumulated the information on which shooting regulations are based. Reestablishment of pure strains of wild turkey in the Southeast was encouragingly successful. Studies leading to good waterfowl-management practices in coastal marshes of Louisiana were completed. A five-year study on means of coördinating mosquito control with wildlife conservation was concluded. Numerous experiments in handling waterfowl food plants were made. In the field of wildlife diseases, measures for the control of infectious rhinitis in quail were developed. Despite reduced funds and labor, work on the fourteen million acres of refuges under the Fish and Wildlife Service made good progress. Most of the waterfowl nesting refuges were in better condition than ever before, and several had adequate water for the first time since their establishment.

Biological work on National Forests and National Parks was severely cut during the past year as a result of reduction of funds and loss of personnel. Protection has also suffered, although not seriously as yet, due to enlistments, the draft, and transfers of men to other war work. Few important changes in the areas administered by these two bureaus have occurred recently. Present progress on acquisition of lands for the Big Bend National Park, Texas, promises that this project will become an actuality within a few months. Some important desert species, including several rare or absent elsewhere in the United States, will receive protection.

Bird protection by the Soil Conservation Service is accomplished largely through improvement of habitat on agricultural land as a result of soil and moisture conservation operations. Strip cropping

¹ This important work does not deal with American birds.—Ed.

is known to increase the number of ground-nesting birds, while protection of woodlots from fire and livestock as well as regulations of grazing on western ranges have been shown to double bird populations. Stream bank plantings, revegetation of gullies and galled spots, contour hedges, and field borders for erosion control increase well distributed habitable edge on farmlands. These and other standard practices have been adopted wherever feasible by about 250,000 farmers and ranchers cooperating with the Soil Conservation Service in 736 locally constituted soil conservation districts throughout 41 of the United States. Cooperators have built more than 15,000 farm ponds to date, most of which are fenced and serve as small bird refuges; many of them, as in the Great Plains, are along major flyways where they supplement large waterfowl refuge lakes. Plans have also been made for 7500 additional ponds. Protection and management of marshes for production of muskrats, as part of the well integrated farm plan, afford havens for birds. During the past year such land use adjustments directed toward holding soil and saving water have been extended to about 100,000,000 acres in more than 200 newly formed soil conservation districts. Inasmuch as soil conservation practices are known to increase crop yields ten to thirty per cent, it is reasonable to suppose that there will be little lessening of bird protection through soil conservation during the war and post-war years to come.

Significant results obtained by the National Audubon Society during the past year include:

(1) Completion of monographs of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker and Roseate Spoonbill based on field studies by James Tanner and Robert P. Allen, respectively. These include comprehensive summaries of all previously known work and many new facts concerning the life histories of these two rare birds. It is hoped that these two publications will lead to action to conserve and restore the abundance of the species.

(2) Completion of field studies of the California Condor by Carl Koford. Preparation of the monograph unfortunately has been delayed by his call to service in the Navy.

(3) Sponsorship and financing of field research in Florida of tick-deer relationship, by Herbert Stoddard and Edward and Roy Komarek. This is a cooperative effort with the Federal government to find the facts on the basis of which the current controversy regarding the deliberate kill of deer in Florida may be settled. A report is due in the near future.

(4) A new sanctuary in Greenwich, Connecticut, with maintenance fund, constitutes the largest single gift ever received by the National Audubon Society. Unhampered by personal restrictions, the property is stated to be ideal from the standpoints of research and nature-educational requirements.

(5) The Audubon Nature Camp was kept running despite wartime restrictions on transportation. Applicants for the last session of the summer had to be turned away for lack of accommodations.

(6) The Audubon Wildlife Tours were operated in California, Florida, and South Carolina, but temporary abandonment in 1943 is probable because of rubber, gas, and other restrictions. These tours, though as yet reaching only a limited number of people, are believed to stimulate conservation thought and practice.

(7) Negotiations with landowners at Cape May Point, New Jersey, resulted in greatly enlarging the Witmer Stone Wildlife Sanctuary. It now includes all of the wooded area in which many birds concentrate and in which the shooting of hawks has been notorious.

(8) The feather trade in New York was again carefully checked for observance of existing Federal and State plumage laws.

(9) Every effort has been made to maintain sanctuary warden service in spite of inevitable inroads on personnel for the armed services. The 1942 crop of young birds successfully raised to flying maturity at the Audubon sanctuaries was one of the largest.

SPECIAL SPECIES

Great White Heron.—Reports have been received of a definite increase of this species, as well as a possible extension of the nesting range to the northward. Although subject perhaps to greater human hazards, establishment of colonies north of the present restricted range in Florida Bay is greatly to be desired as insurance against total destruction by hurricane. We are advised that military restrictions prohibit an aerial census this year, but the number using the Federal refuge during May to August, 1942, was estimated at 1,800 birds.

Roseate Spoonbill.—The successful nesting of 1941 was apparently repeated in 1942. In fact, the previous record of approximately 800 nests on the National Audubon Society's Second Chain of Islands Refuge near Aransas Island may have been exceeded this year. Some 2,000 Spoonbills and about 600 nests were estimated on the Vingt-un Islands in Galveston Bay.

Considerable damage to Spoonbill habitat in southern Texas was wrought by the hurricane of September 1, 1942. A number of important nesting islands were much reduced in size by wave action,

and many high shrubs preferred for nesting purposes were swept away or beaten to the ground. Some late-hatched young, and even adult Spoonbills and members of the heron group, were destroyed.

Waterfowl.—The increase in most species of ducks is good news. The Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that the stock of ducks and geese now totals about 110 million birds, or almost four hundred per cent increase over the number in 1935. This, together with an expected decline in hunting pressure as a result of the war, perhaps justifies the relaxation of the 1941 shooting regulations. However, we are yet to be convinced of the desirability of extending the daily closing time from 4 p. m. to sunset. The results of extension of shooting privileges should be carefully watched.

We are informed that the duck population in eastern Canada during the past summer was normal. In the eastern part of the breeding range in the Prairie Provinces, conditions were the best in twelve to fifteen years. Water-levels greatly improved, and the majority of lakes and sloughs carried the heaviest duck-breeding population since the years prior to the great drought. Mallards, Pintails, Baldpates and Lesser Scaups occurred in abundance; Shovellers and Blue-winged Teal varied markedly. Redheads, Ruddies and Canvas-backs showed a perceptible increase but were still low in numbers.

Further west on the prairies of Canada, conditions were spotty and many localities continued poor.

Waterfowl enjoyed an excellent year in western Alaska. The birds arrived early, produced good broods of young, and the normally small kill by natives was unusually low due to a shortage of ammunition. Mallards, Pintails, Scaups and Shovellers were markedly increasing in numbers, while Baldpates and Greenwinged Teal were only holding their own. Eiders (especially Steller's Eider) were abundant. Most species of geese did well. This was not the case farther east in northern Canada, and the total supply of geese, with the exception of Blue Geese, has declined.

In passing, we have received information that shorebirds were very plentiful last summer in western Alaska. The Pacific Godwit, Pacific Golden Plover, Black Turnstone, Pectoral and Red-backed Sandpipers, and the phalaropes were most abundant.

This Committee adopted a policy of watchful waiting toward the legalization of hunting of the Wood Duck. The effects of a strictly limited bag appear to be no more harmful than the violations of the previous prohibition.

Nene or Hawaiian Goose.—With the spread of the war to Hawaii,

renewed fears were expressed for the safety of the Nene. Most of the population of this rare goose is in confinement on ranches and game farms on the Islands, where it would be subject to use for food in the event of invasion or of effective blockade. Thorough investigation by officials of Hawaii National Park resulted in the decision that, because of grave difficulties of transportation, an attempt to move some of the birds to the mainland should not be made at this time. It was also learned that the number of Nene living in the wild state may be larger than the previously estimated total of 50 birds.

Trumpeter Swan.—The count of Trumpeter Swans conducted in August, 1942 by field personnel of the Fish and Wildlife Service indicates that the population may have increased slightly. Their census included 161 birds, as compared with 152 in the previous year. During the past two years, three cygnets from the Red Rock Lakes Refuge were placed with three adults previously stocked in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and one adult and four cygnets were transferred to the Malheur Refuge, Oregon, where two adults had been liberated. Emergencies arising from forest fires prevented the annual swan count in Yellowstone National Park. Judging from records of swan numbers on the same lakes in 1942 and in 1941, the Yellowstone population of adult swans and cygnets has not decreased.

An interesting note on the Trumpeter Swan in western Canada was received recently. In the winter of 1940-41, Indians in the Driftwood River Valley of British Columbia reported that swans were very scarce on Middle River and Trembleur Lake, where they had been common for some years previously. The Indians also stated that decidedly fewer swans than usual were seen during the 1941 spring migration. These observations were confirmed by reliable white observers. It is hoped that this report of sudden scarcity in the Driftwood River Valley indicates nothing more than a shift of population to other localities. Dominion wildlife authorities believe that the situation "continues satisfactory."

Federal waterfowl regulations this year prohibit the taking of Snow Geese in Beaverhead, Gallatin, and Madison Counties, Montana, as well as in Idaho which was closed last year. This should remove the last possible excuse of "an honest mistake" for the shooting of a Trumpeter Swan in the United States.

California Condor.—Systematic records of the California Condor have been continued by the Forest Service for several years. It is definitely believed that the range of the birds has been extended and

that their numbers have increased. As an example, nine Condors were watched for four hours on July 15, 1942 from a Forest Service fire lookout station near Sequoia National Park in the southern Sierra Nevada. Four other separate sight records of Condors were reported during July in this general locality. Fish and Wildlife Service field men later reported seeing fifteen in one day.

We are informed that early in 1942 Mr. Donald McLean of the California Division of Fish and Game obtained a motion picture of 65 Condors. Within sight at the same time was another group of 15, making an astonishing total of 80 Condors!

The Forest Service believes that illegal killing of Condors has been reduced to a minimum. At the request of the War Department, the entire Los Padres Forest has been closed to public entry and specifically to deer hunting. It will be interesting to see if benefit to the Condor results, although Forest officers believe that killing occurs chiefly in feeding areas outside the Forest. To combat this poaching, the Forest Service has carried on an educational campaign aimed at the rural population. It is felt that this program has been beneficial and, if carried further, will help in saving the Condor from extinction.

The Grouse.—This is the peak year of the ten-year grouse cycle from Alberta to the Lake States, and perhaps further. One experienced Canadian observer wrote last autumn: "Sharp-tailed and Ruffed Grouse have recovered. I have already seen them thicker and that, too, I believe, applies right across the prairie provinces." Many states, including Wisconsin, are celebrating the event by lengthened open seasons. In our opinion, this will do no harm at least to Ruffed Grouse. During a peak year the hunters in the north woods do not make an appreciable dent in the population. With Sharp-tailed Grouse and Prairie Chicken the wisdom of a long season is more debatable.

The prairie grouse of this region, and perhaps other regions, are confronted by a widespread infiltration of pheasants into their range. Last year the kill of Ring-necks in central Wisconsin, formerly a pure grouse country, far exceeded the kill of grouse, and heavy pheasant planting continue to be made. No one knows yet under just what conditions pheasants and grouse compete, neither does anyone know that the present mixing policy is harmless. One encouraging bit of news reaches us from Alberta, where Sharp-tails are numerous despite a record-breaking abundance of Hungarian Partridges. The same question of interference has long been de-

bated there. We reiterate our belief that efforts spent in raising and releasing exotic game birds would be more profitably spent for research and habitat improvement to encourage natural propagation of native game birds.

Whooping and Sandhill Cranes.—From all indications, it appears that the status of the Whooping Crane is more precarious than ever. There are few recent reports of the birds in summer in Canada, where remnants of the species still nest. Fewer birds were recorded on the Gulf Coast wintering grounds and the small proportion of immature birds is alarming. Only fifteen birds, of which two were immatures, were noted on the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in the winter of 1941–42. There is a possibility that airplane activity in the vicinity of the refuge is a contributing factor in the present reduced use of the refuge by cranes. Use of adjacent coastal islands and marshes by the Army Air Corps as bombing and machine gun ranges has reduced the available crane wintering ground on the Texas Coast. Oil-well production in marshlands and bay waters and increased activity on the Intra-Coastal Waterway no doubt cause considerable additional disturbance.

The number of Whoopers present in the marshes of southern Louisiana has declined. There is evidence of the wanton killing of at least two cranes in the past year. Two birds spent the winter of 1941–42 on the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge in southwestern Louisiana and a migrant pair spent a short period at the Kit Carson National Wildlife Refuge, Colorado.

Great numbers of Sandhill and Little Brown Cranes have been observed in migration periods in central and western Nebraska and at points north and south of this area. On the basis of these and other observations through the west the total population runs into many thousands.

Woodcock.—The 1941 open season on Woodcock is repeated this year practically unchanged. The state of New York again enjoys a total of 45 open days and the eastern United States a total of 65 open days. The status of the Woodcock has improved but little since the disastrous season of 1940. We are disappointed that restrictions, urged last year, were not adopted.

Wilson Snipe.—Continuation of the closed season on Wilson Snipe in the United States is advisable. Although said to be abundant last summer in western Alaska, the species seems to be steadily declining in numbers. A reliable and experienced observer finds it decidedly less numerous than several years ago, and believes that a

drastically shorter hunting season and lower bag limits in the Maritime provinces would be desirable. A completely closed season would be still better.

White-winged Dove.—Our 1941 report discussed at some length the White-winged Dove problem in the United States. According to the latest information, little improvement has taken place during the past year. Little can be expected, probably, until nesting-ground refuges can be acquired, on which protection from the chief bird predators (two species) might be given. Hunting pressure, also, seems a factor of some importance to the eastern White-wing. Even the short (five half-days) season in Texas should be eliminated. According to our informant, the 15-day season in Arizona results in a negligible kill due to earlier migration of the bulk of the dove population.

Mourning Dove.—Based on findings of a “very material shortage of the eastern form of the Mourning Dove,” the 1942 season in fourteen eastern states has been reduced to 30 days, instead of 42 days as in 1941. The bag and possession limits also have been reduced slightly. It remains to be seen whether these restrictions will markedly lower the kill. Loss of even a small percentage of the dove population by this preventable cause seems regrettable in view of the depleted status of the species.

For the first time in many years, hunting of Mourning Doves has been permitted in Oregon. Careful study is needed to determine the ability of the species in that state to withstand shooting for a 15-day period with bag- and possession-limits of 10 birds.

Band-tailed Pigeon.—Ability of this species to stand up under a 30-day open season has been questioned by some authorities. The tendency to collect in flocks during the fall, to perch stolidly even when disturbed, and the slow reproductive rate, combine to make the species highly vulnerable.

Ivory-billed Woodpecker.—The latest reports on this vanishing species and its habitat are discouraging. Few birds have been seen during the past year. Under the impetus of war demands, timber-cutting on the Singer area in Louisiana has picked up speed. More than half of the tract, one of the possible two or three remaining habitats, now has been destroyed. The extinction of this species within a comparatively short time seems inevitable.

PREDATORY BIRDS

Little information has come to this Committee regarding the Bald Eagle population trends after two years of legal protection in the

United States. In Alaska, lack of funds for bounty payments has discouraged control practices. Intensive naval patrolling of the Alaskan coast may mean some additional destruction of eagles.

An example of predatory bird 'control,' continued after any possible need had vanished, was called to public attention in the June, 1942 'Monthly Bulletin of the Texas Game, Fish and Oyster Commission.' Although antelope in the Trans-Pecos district have increased to the point that surplus stock is removed for repopulating other areas, Golden Eagles are still being killed systematically. A warden of the Commission describes his personal accounting for 1338 eagles since April, 1930, by poison, steel trap, rifle and shotgun. Four hundred of these birds were killed from an airplane.

BIRDS IN WAR

Peace-time losses of pelagic and coastal birds due to oil have been multiplied enormously by the war. Peterson ('Birds and Floating Oil': Audubon Magazine, 44, no. 4: 217-225, 1942) ably reviews the dismal picture on the Atlantic coast. He concludes that "while the war lasts, it seems totally improbable that we can prevent oil pollution at sea. When, however, the conflict is over, not only should public opinion force strict enforcement of existing laws against pollution within the three-mile limit, but every effort should be made to gain international agreement to ban oil pollution on the high seas."

Information on occurrences affecting birds in military areas of the Pacific islands is not available, and in any event could not be published. One has the gravest fears, however, for the unusual bird communities of the islands such as Wake and Midway and possibly others. In the western Aleutians, the several races of ptarmigans on heavily occupied islands may be wiped out. They are readily taken and fresh meat is rarely provided by army rations in such remote places. The actual kill of waterfowl is not likely to be heavy, for the rifle is not an effective bird gun. The normal migration of waterfowl through the Aleutian Island chain may be affected, however, and the wintering and nesting birds will be much disturbed in places due to military occupation.

Construction of the Canadian-Alaskan Defense Highway holds some immediate dangers for wilderness wildlife within a limited distance of the right-of-way. More widespread damage may arise *after* the war as a result of this new accessibility of several fine wilderness areas. Trumpeter Swans, mountain goats, bighorns, grizzlies, moose and caribou are some of the noteworthy animals inhabiting the region. It is hoped that American and Canadian authorities

will unite in a common plan for orderly sensible use of the highway and of the areas traversed.

MYSTERIOUS BIRD MORTALITY ON WASHINGTON COAST

A rather spectacular and unexplained loss of birds occurred in May, 1942, on the coast of Washington between the Columbia and Quinault rivers. Of some 18 species affected, the great majority were California Murres and Pacific Loons. On the basis of counts on a sample mile of beach, the total loss was more than 20,000 birds. There was no evidence of oil, and due to advanced decomposition of the carcasses, proper examination was impossible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee on Bird Protection repeats its Number One recommendation of 1941 and places it again at the head of the list for 1942:

1. Information on military projects that would appear detrimental to *important* bird habitats should be sent at the earliest possible moment to the Fish and Wildlife Service, Chicago, Illinois.

2. The drastic curtailment of federal funds for essential wildlife research should cease. The movement toward unwise economies should be over-ruled by a common-sense standard of relative values.

3. Many of the efforts now expended in raising and releasing exotic game birds should be diverted instead to research and habitat improvement to encourage natural propagation of native game birds.

4. We repeat that market restrictions of the hunting kill of the Woodcock and Eastern Mourning Dove is imperative. A closed season on the Eastern White-winged Dove in Texas and on the Wilson's Snipe in eastern Canada is advisable.

CLARENCE COTTAM

WILLIAM L. FINLEY

ALDO LEOPOLD

VICTOR H. CAHALANE, *Chairman*