

REPORT OF THE A. O. U. COMMITTEE ON BIRD  
PROTECTION FOR 1947

A REVIEW of bird protection activities in the last 20 years might encourage us to think that much progress is being made if we did not know of so many kinds of destruction that are affecting adversely or threatening the animal life, either directly or by affecting the places that it may inhabit. The churning of the human population over this continent in the last decade, the accelerated penetration of mountains, deserts, and forests by the tractor, and the increase in the kinds of outdoor recreation which destroy living things must be recognized as important influences on the native bird life. Loss of our wilderness has been permitted, possibly because too few people had any acquaintance with it. We may have more success in preserving the remaining small inadequate tracts than the large ones which are more difficult to maintain.

Along the lines of the last report of this Committee we have had many requests for help in the protection of various tracts of land that have been set aside, both locally and nationally, as some form of reserve. These areas have many values besides the sanctuary they provide for birds and other animals and plants. But these values are threatened by the over-use that is taking place as well as the demands that come for special kinds of use. The Union has a special interest in these natural undisturbed areas because of their value for ornithological research. We emphasize especially the desirability of making population studies of all species on natural areas, song birds as well as game species, as a background for the treatment of modified areas.

The following are examples of specific problems which, however, are duplicated in many other areas on the continent.

Point Lobos Reserve in California was established under state auspices to preserve for everyone an outstanding example of picturesque rock and surf scenery in combination with unique vegetation, especially the stand of Monterey cypress. It is on the western shore of the United States, one-third of the way from the Mexican border to the Canadian border. The elaborate care that has been given this small tract has met successfully the threat of many adverse treatments that have been suggested for it. Now the prospect that the integrity of this area will be destroyed by the visitors is causing great concern. This concern develops with every effort to protect land and the animals that live on it.

One of the major conclusions of the exhaustive study made at Point Lobos in 1934-1935 was that it was in the public interest to keep this

land unmodified even at the cost of considerable restriction of use, for thus only could its highest values be perpetuated. At that time it was anticipated that the heavy use such as that brought about by the recent increase in attendance would be so injurious as to require some limitation.

In this tract of land the values depend on strict preservation of those conditions which must be maintained naturally and which cannot be modified or restored by artificial means, no matter how well intentioned. It is important to distinguish the kind of need which is served by these unique natural conditions from the need for playgrounds and other types of outdoor recreation which do not depend on a very specialized type of natural conditions. The ground for the latter need can be made, modified, or extended by the ways known and practiced generally by administrators of parks.

In a study of the ways in which visitors respond to Point Lobos, it was learned that people with widely varied purposes came to the area. Fishermen made up the largest group and most of them appeared to come solely on account of the accessibility of the ocean, paying little attention to anything on the land. Picknickers, another large group, appeared to be even less aware of the details of their surroundings. Since they usually came in parties—as many as fifty were seen together—they were likely to be so preoccupied with their own activities, chiefly social, as to miss almost entirely any contact with their natural surroundings—unless these involved discomfort. Moreover, they occupy the belt of shoreline which is most attractive to the visitor desirous of becoming acquainted with the segment of the out-of-doors represented here. This latter type of visitor is the one which should be encouraged and helped in as many ways as possible even if this involves restricting the pleasures of the crowds on this area. Other sites outside the Reserve can be provided for their use.

The injury that is now taking place at Point Lobos can be stopped and the situation can be greatly improved for all the people who want to come to the area because of its unique qualities. The small size of the area requires special care of the soil to maintain its natural character. The land will not withstand the heavy use which the recently increased number of visitors imposes. We believe that a satisfactory remedy would be to discontinue fishing and picknicking.

Another kind of injury to lands set aside for protection in a natural state was proposed when the California Legislature in 1945 adopted a resolution requesting the Park Commission to investigate the matter of permitting hunting in the State Parks, and to modify its present rules where hunting could be permitted without prejudice to estab-

lished park procedure. Some reasons for not modifying the rules are as follows.

The problem of protecting land from the destructive effects of the more injurious human use is of great concern to nearly all naturalists. Many organizations have as a major objective the preservation of samples of natural types of land to serve as standards for comparison with the more heavily used areas. A stage has been reached in this country where few examples of the original landscape are left. The State and National parks contain some of the best tracts available for protection for this purpose. Most of the uses made of them by visitors do not seriously interfere with these values. Nearly all of the areas, however, deserve better protection than they now receive. And we can think of none where it would be justified to permit hunting in any manner.

As an important policy in maintaining any area in its natural state it would seem necessary to preserve the animal life intact and free to follow natural changes in population unmodified by human disturbance, because the animals are important agents in making and preserving the true character of the landscape. Their importance in determining the nature of the soil, the vegetation, and even some features of the topography is not always apparent to superficial examination. Careful study usually reveals that every animal fills some niche which contributes to the welfare and organization of the natural community. They are important in small areas as well as in large ones. It is the whole assemblage of animals and plants that needs protection, including every species, including predators.

The areas in the deserts are especially important because their nature is so easily changed by harmful modification such as shooting. Because of the fine balance of nature imposed by difficult climatic conditions, slight changes cause widespread results and recovery is slow. Plants and animals are likely to be represented by sparse populations, in which the organisms are far separated, dependent on delicate adjustments to their surroundings, and slow to recover from destruction.

Great harm may come to the friendly tradition of public appreciation now partly built up toward parks, if shooting within them is sanctioned officially. People generally expect to find any park immune to this kind of injury, and on many occasions we have seen visitors concerned over what they consider a likely violation, as by possession of weapons in a park. Also, it seems certain that the safety of the visitors, who have recognized claims to go to the areas, requires that there be no shooting.

On a wider scale the problem of adequate protection has come up in connection with the studies of the National Park Concessions Advisory Group. We have prepared the following paragraphs to represent our views concerning park use. In general our acquaintance with this problem indicates far too little regard for the capacity of the land and the plants and animals that live on it to maintain their characteristics without help. At the same time we generally seem to underestimate the ill effects of disturbance that accompanies improvements. Overpopulations of such ungulates as deer and elk may result in special problems on park areas.

National Parks may be kept in a state of greatest value to visitors and other people if adequate protection is given the normal processes of nature. All parts of each park should be freely accessible to any person able to get to it without injury to the park. Most valuable kinds of use are those which enrich personal experience with natural elements of the landscape. Factors which permit people to get this experience are to be encouraged; those which interfere are to be discouraged.

Protection of the landscape to keep it available for study or enjoyment implies deliberate efforts to avoid disturbance by human-made structures including buildings, roads, trails, lakes, canals, power lines, and signs. When these injuries or distracting elements cannot be escaped, they should be allowed to affect as small an area as possible, and they should be kept on the least valuable part of the land. No livestock should be kept for profit within any National Park. No part of the soil, water, vegetation, or animal life should be intentionally disturbed, or harvested for profit. Contracts permitting such interference within the parks should be terminated as soon as possible, or the land concerned should be eliminated from the park.

Responsibility to all the people requires that the parks be kept continuously intact and free from injury by human activity. Adjustment of boundaries should be made with proper consideration for permanent needs and for local concern with the area. Responsibility to visitors involves the provision of living facilities suitable for their minimum needs as long as these are compatible with requirements for protection of the area. Additionally, some help in the interpretation of, and direction of attention to, the character of the area is justified, though under no circumstances should this develop into unsolicited instruction or time-consuming entertainment. The aim should be to allow the visitor to discover the true nature of his environment as represented in the park.

Parklands recently acquired or improperly managed may need a

special kind of treatment to reestablish the normal existence of the set of native organisms that belong there. We should thereafter make no artificial change either to help or to hinder the natural changes that occur. Administrators need to develop confidence that the natural processes are capable of maintaining an area with all the desirable qualities. They may then help visitors and other people to recognize the importance of these natural principles in the care of land everywhere. The demonstration of these relations will depend on seeing the land, the plants, and the animals as they exist in response to seasonal and other changing elements in their normal surroundings.

Still another problem, which concerns us because it involves the direct killing of rare birds and the despoiling of their habitats, is the preservation of birds on the Pacific Islands occupied by the United States Navy.

The American Ornithologists' Union recently adopted the following resolution. "The Council of the A. O. U. in session at the 63rd meeting at Cambridge, Massachusetts, wishes to record its concern in the fate of the native flora and fauna of Pacific Islands throughout the zones of military occupation. It hereby emphasizes to Government authorities the importance of continuing steps to safeguard such animal and plant life which is unique and hence irreplaceable."

Special studies bearing on this problem were made in 1945 on the Midway Atoll by naturalists representing the Board of Agriculture and Forestry of the Territory of Hawaii and the United States Department of the Interior. These have provided reliable information about the effects of the war on insular populations of birds on the Midway Atoll of the Hawaiian Archipelago. The results of this survey have been published and they show that two species, the Laysan Rail and the Laysan Finch, have been exterminated and certain other bird species have been greatly reduced in numbers.

It is fitting that the A. O. U., along with other organizations, again call attention to this urgent situation and request that action be taken where possible to carry out the following suggested means for alleviating damage to oceanic birds.

Provide protection for all birds native on the islands and for their nesting grounds by preventing the shooting, capture, or disturbance of the birds or the gathering of their eggs and by preventing the bringing in, possession of, or release of any birds or mammals not native on the island. This requires the removal of introduced animals such as rats that are already established. Also necessary is restriction of vehicular travel to roads and special care in placing additional structures where they cause little interference with the special kinds of birds

which live on the islands. Overhead wires, towers, and barriers no longer needed should be removed and unused pits should be eliminated and used ones screened. Other kinds of disturbance resulting from military use of the islands can be reduced by following the advice of competent naturalists.

As to the fate of the waterfowl in North America, we think of this as a permanent problem and not one that will be settled in any one year. Also it is clearly not the concern of the A. O. U. to help provide great numbers of birds for hunting nor, on the other hand, to hinder hunting when this does not endanger the continued existence of any species of bird. It may be more appropriate for us to try to define a sound, long-term policy relative to the waterfowl population and its maintenance than to become engrossed in the many temporary expedients involved in the yearly regulations. At the same time we should express opinion concerning the current regulations when they do not seem to be compatible with existing conditions.

An urgent but long-time problem is the loss of habitat which is occurring over the whole continent and especially in the south where the waterfowl are highly concentrated in winter. The great oil fields of the Gulf States, now being extended eastward, have destroyed large areas of aquatic habitats and the concentrated activities have driven the birds from wintering grounds. Saltwater intrusion resulting from the systematic development of the Intra-coastal Canal by the Army Engineers has injured thousands of freshwater duck marshes. This canal extends from New York along the coast to Galveston and Brownsville, Texas, and it goes through the very heart of the southern coastal wintering grounds. Further extension and completion of gaps in the canal will bring saltwater into many thousands of acres of remaining freshwater marsh. Much of this intrusion can be prevented by proper routing and the construction of plugs to keep out the saltwater. The canal will run through, or contiguous to, many of the important wintering ground refuges planned by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Diversions of entire rivers over to other river valleys have resulted in the destruction of thousands of acres of wildlife, and especially waterfowl, habitat. The Santee-Cooper diversion is an example. Other diversions of this kind are being promoted, such as the Colorado-Big Thompson diversion by the Bureau of Reclamation, the Klamath-Trinity diversion being studied on the west coast, and many others still on the drafting boards. Canalization of rivers is still another factor reducing suitable waterfowl habitat in the South. The Lower Mississippi River, the Rio Grande, and other large rivers formerly

maintained large duck marshes in their bordering overflow swamps, bayous, and secondary channels. Now they are speedily being straight-jacketed by enormous levees which result in great reduction of waterfowl habitat. Drainage of other kinds is again being undertaken on a large scale and by new agencies with resulting great destruction of habitat unless sufficient refuges are established soon. Industrial development in the South and West are bringing still other kinds of serious damage to aquatic habitats and the organisms which inhabit them.

In an extended statement about the waterfowl program, issued this summer, the Fish and Wildlife Service described the nature of its responsibility for the welfare of the waterfowl and pointed out that hunters and other people interested in game also have important responsibilities. The Service invited participation in the gathering of needed information and help in the care required if the birds are to be kept at adequate numbers. The program falls into six main categories: Production, Breeding Grounds, Migration and Wintering, Law Enforcement, Mortality Causes, and Inventory. The outline is comprehensive enough to be useful to waterfowl biologists everywhere, and it indicates certain means by which other agencies can help to solve the problems presented.

When this report was being prepared, in May, we were assured by federal officials that there does not seem to be any reason to believe that any one species of waterfowl is approaching extinction. Species showing decreases in the 1947 winter inventory included Blue-winged Teal, Black Duck, Buffle-head, Wood Duck, Brant, and Snow geese. At the same time there were published reports that the 54 million waterfowl inventoried in January were only 43 per cent as many as had been tallied three years earlier. It was reported also that 2 million hunters in 1946 had killed 14 million ducks. The number of hunters then was three times as great as in 1935. The opinion given before meetings of hunters throughout the country was that the generally conceded decline in duck numbers could be checked by additional restrictions and that at the same time some shooting could be allowed during the next open season. Our opinions are indicated in the following brief outline of the situation as regards North American waterfowl in 1947.

*Main interest of the A. O. U.*—To encourage restoration of numbers of waterbirds sufficient to preserve the species as prominent members of the avifauna in all parts of the continent where they are native.

*The situation as it concerns these birds.*—The former extensive marshy areas have become so reduced that insufficient habitat, both as to

variety and extent, is available. The artificially flooded area, together with existing natural marshland, does not provide suitable, year-round conditions for all the kinds of birds concerned. The restriction of wintering habitat through mosquito control and other human activities is particularly serious.

Combined with the generally unfavorable environmental conditions, the continued increase in effectiveness of shooting makes a greater drain than the ducks can withstand.

People generally, and hunters in particular, have been encouraged to want larger waterbird populations than can be supported under present environmental conditions.

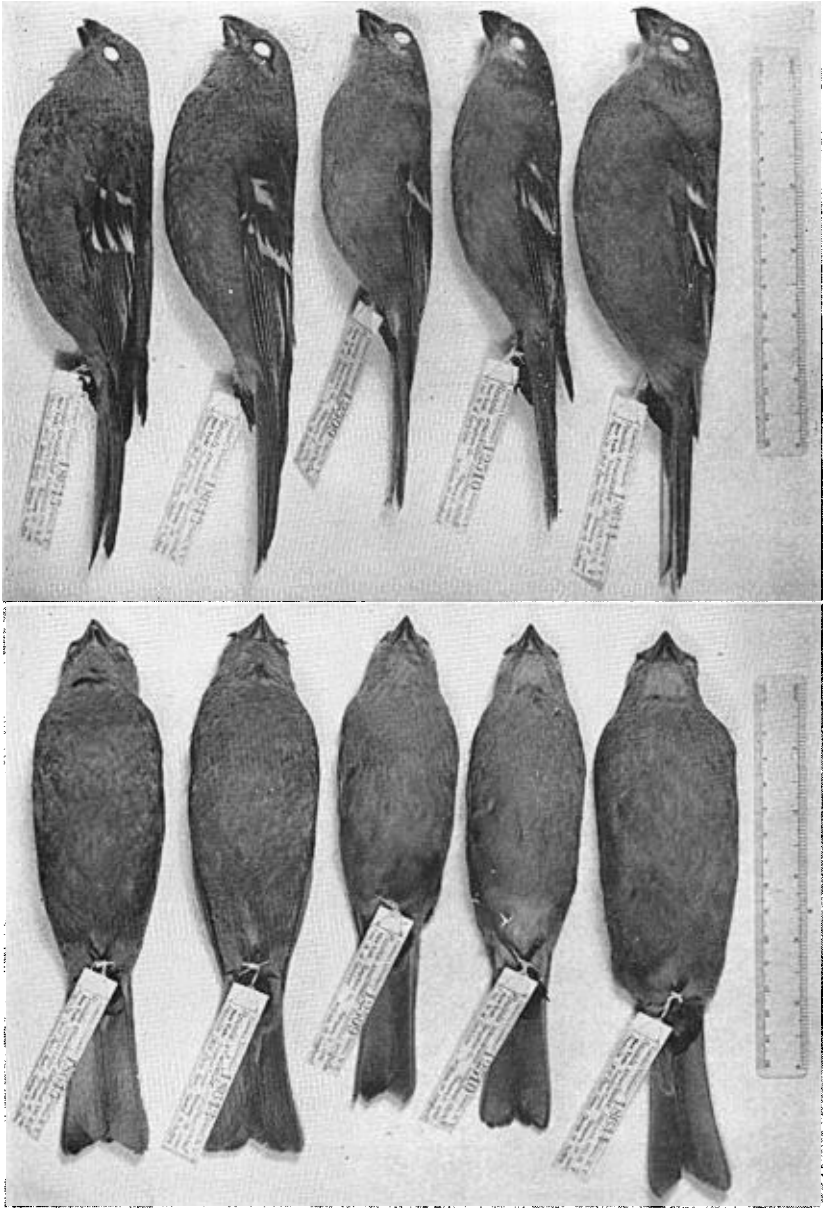
*Conclusions.*—Too many persons want to shoot ducks to allow the continued existence of all the kinds of waterbirds in desirable numbers unless more discriminating treatment of the environment is practiced.

More drastic regulation of shooting will be necessary than any in force in past years. Neither improvement of habitat nor stricter regulation of shooting will, however, solve the waterfowl problem satisfactorily. The final solution must be some combination of these.

Better information concerning the status of the birds, the limitations which control their numbers, and the prospects for continued hunting should be made available to hunters so that their needed help will be forthcoming in making effective the necessary restrictions to hunting, and so that they will give support for desirable improvement and protection of the marshes.

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PINE GROSBEAKS FROM ITHACA, NEW YORK. (Left to right): TWO ADULT MALES, ONE IMMATURE MALE, ONE FEMALE (*Pinicola enucleator eschatosus*: ONE FEMALE *P. e. leucura*).