

REPORT OF THE AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON BIRD PROTECTION

This report can only attempt to review the highlights of conservation events during the past year or more, report on the present status of certain rare species for which special efforts are necessary, and describe current threats which now appear to endanger some of the conservation gains of past years.

The waterfowl regulations in the United States were generally liberalized by permitting additional days of shooting in some flyways, by increasing bag limits in several cases, and by permitting shooting until sundown in all flyways instead of an hour before that time. An "experimental open season" on Wilson Snipe and a change in the Woodcock season from 30 to 40 days were announced without much data to support these changes. In addition, portions of five refuges were opened to public shooting for the first time this year. These changes were made despite the fact that the combined data from all sources indicate a decrease of ducks in all flyways except the Atlantic, where an increase in diving ducks was indicated.

This represents a departure from previous policies of basing the hunting permitted on the current trends in waterfowl populations. The sole justification presented was that these changes, especially the later closure of the shooting day, would help reduce crop damage in certain areas. The logic of nation-wide liberalization of hunting privileges for the purpose of handling local problems is open to question.

The Canadian regulations governing the issuance of crop protection permits have been revised, and such permits previously issued in Ottawa will now be issued by local game officers or by provincial authorities. Such a procedure will unquestionably permit more rapid handling of real crop damage problems but can also be abused unless local officials are exceedingly careful to limit permits to cases of actual damage. Several unfortunate experiences in the United States, such as the Band-tailed Pigeon episode in California several years ago, emphasize the danger inherent in such a program.

On the brighter side, several important new sanctuaries have been added to the refuge system.

The Richardson Lake Bird Sanctuary, established January 30, 1953, in the Athabasca Delta region of Alberta, provides added protection for Ross's Goose which stops in this area in numbers in both fall and spring migration.

The Interior Department appropriation for 1954 gives the Fish and Wildlife Service authority to lease and manage lands within the

natural habitat of the Key Deer. Under this authorization the Service will be able to take over the cost of patrol and fire prevention, borne the first year by the Boone and Crockett Club and other organizations, and during the past year by the National Wildlife Federation. Unsuccessful efforts were made during the last two sessions of Congress to secure passage of a bill which would give the Fish and Wildlife Service authority to protect these animals and grant funds for purchasing a refuge. The present authorization, while far from ideal, can provide continued protection for this smallest representative of the white-tailed deer. During the past two years, there was practically no loss of Key Deer except from speeding automobiles. Actually, during this interval, the population increased from about 30 animals to more than 70.

The Key Deer range on the few islands east of Key West is used for nesting and feeding by Great White, Würdemann's, and Ward's herons and as a nesting ground by White-crowned Pigeons. It is also used by many other species of wading birds, shorebirds, gulls, and terns for nesting and feeding. Alligators and Florida Crocodiles are found in the range area as well as wild orchids, tree snails, and tropical plants and trees, which add general interest to the area.

Establishment of the 141,000-acre Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge in eastern Florida will provide an area of outstanding importance for water birds. This refuge is being developed on a multiple-use project southeast of Lake Okeechobee under a joint agreement with the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control District and the Department of the Army. In addition to waterfowl, it is expected to benefit herons, ibises, limpkins, and the Everglade Kite.

A first unit, comprising 2,247 acres, has been acquired in the Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge in Rio Grande County, Colorado, and the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission has approved purchase of an additional 2,133 acres on which options have been obtained. This is the first successful effort to secure a national wildlife refuge in Colorado, where large concentrations of ducks, particularly mallards, have created crop-damage problems. It represents an approach to waterfowl management problems which merits support from all conservationists.

The Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge in Saginaw County, Michigan, was authorized by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission when the purchase of a unit of 2,246 acres of land was approved. This refuge will adjoin an area which the State of Michigan is purchasing for management as a public shooting ground.

The fact that the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1909 and extending for 1,500 nautical miles northwest from Honolulu, seems assured of closer supervision is worth mentioning. An agreement between the Board of Commissioners of Agriculture and Forestry and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, approved on December 28, 1951, provides for the joint administration and supervision of this island group. The Board will undertake the posting of these islands, using the Fish and Wildlife Service boundary markers. Permits for entry will be issued by the Board, while permits for the taking of specimens for scientific purposes will continue to be issued by the Service. Conservation officers, as designated by the Board, have been made deputy game management agents. Included in this refuge are a number of famous bird-nesting rocks and islands, particularly Laysan Island on which the Laysan Teal (*Anas laysanensis*) and Laysan Finch (*Psittirostra cantans*), continue to survive, although the Flightless Rail (*Porzanula palmeri*), the Miller Bird (*Acrocephalus familiaris*), and Honey Creeper (*Himatione sanguinea freethii*) have become extinct. These islands also include the largest nesting colonies of albatross in the Northern Hemisphere.

The reports on several species of rare birds in which there is widespread interest are both good and discouraging:

In the opinion of the National Audubon Society, the Ivory-billed Woodpecker may now be extinct. It has been many years since it has had any reliable reports of birds in or near the Singer tract. The birds have not been seen on the Florida sanctuary for these birds since it was established. It was made a sanctuary after two birds were observed there on March 3, 1950, by Whitney H. Eastman. The Society believes that there may still be a few birds in certain areas in Florida but has received no reliable reports of such birds in the past two years.

The status of the Whooping Crane has also become increasingly precarious. Three 1951-52 surveys by the Fish and Wildlife Service showed only 21 birds, including, however, five young. In addition, two crippled birds are being cared for in the Audubon Park Zoo in New Orleans. When the Aransas Refuge, on which the birds winter, was established in 1937, only 14 Whooping Cranes were known. This number increased to 34 in 1950. The present status of the birds cannot be determined until they again arrive on their wintering grounds.

The California Condor seems to be holding its own, and there may have been a slight increase in the number, estimated by Koford at about 60, of which about one-third are immature.

Considerable concern has been aroused by a permit issued to the San Diego Zoo to trap two adults, a project which has not been carried out so far as is known. The opposition to this proposed action brought about legislation, which became law in June, forbidding the issuing of any further permits to take condors and terminating the existing permit on January 15, 1954. This legislation will, unless the efforts to trap birds is successful before January 15, remove a threat to the small condor population which ornithologists best acquainted with this species consider a serious one.

The 1953 fall count of Trumpeter Swans revealed a total of 577 in the United States, the highest number found in the 19 years of annual censuses. This figure includes those of the Red Rock Lake Refuge, which has the greatest population, the birds in Yellowstone Park, and the smaller numbers on the National Elk Refuge in Jackson Hole, Malheur Lake Refuge in Oregon, and Ruby Lakes Refuge in Nevada. The census showed 478 adults and 99 cygnets. The latter was six more than in the 1952 census, while the number of adults remained the same.

Serious threats exist to established national wildlife refuges, national parks, and national forests which provide the solid framework on which wildlife conservation programs have been built. Perhaps the most dangerous legislative proposal is H. R. 4646 which is on the House Calendar. It would, as reported out by the Committee, permit certain timber landowners to go into any national park, national monument, wildlife refuge, or national forest and select land to replace any of their own lands taken by Federal construction agencies for reservoir purposes. The bill is loosely drawn and practically compels the administering agency to give the timber owners what they want. Any national park, refuge, or forest could be legally gutted under this proposal. The bill is backed by the National Lumber Manufacturers' Association and the U. S. Chamber of Commerce, and opposed by practically all conservation organizations.

There is a concerted effort under way to break up the national forests and turn much of the land over to private interests on one pretext or another.

In addition to such sweeping proposals, there are specific attacks on many areas. Bills to authorize Glacier View Dam and the dams in the Dinosaur National Monument have been introduced. Continual efforts are being made to eliminate the rain forest areas from the Olympic National Park, efforts to get oil concessions on the Souris Refuges in North Dakota and the Okefenokee Refuge in Georgia have been renewed, more or less advanced schemes are being promoted

to take lands of at least three Atlantic Coast Wildlife refuges for development as public beaches, and numerous other schemes to invade parks and refuges which have previously been turned down are being brought to life.

Of a somewhat different type was an effort to open to shooting the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge in California. This brought the welfare of the Ross's Goose (*Chen rossii*) into sharp focus. After careful review of the matter, Director John Farley of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided that no change would be made in the status of the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge at the present time. A study of the numbers, movements, and habits of the Ross's Geese on their wintering grounds will be made. Particular attention will be given to the relationship of the refuge and its future development to the present and future welfare of the geese.

All in all, conservationists do not need to look for any small issues on which to do battle; the prospects are that there will be plenty of critical battles ahead. It will take concerted effort to protect the ground that has been gained in the past, to say nothing of developing and carrying out constructive programs to meet new problems and new needs.

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