

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON BIRD PROTECTION
TO THE AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION, 1956

As anticipated, this has been a hectic year in conservation circles so far as national legislation is concerned. There are both good and bad things to report. On the whole, the good results outweigh the bad and to this extent represent progress.

The Upper Colorado River Storage Project was finally passed with Echo Park Dam in Dinosaur National Monument deleted, and in New York State conservationists resoundly defeated another attempt to invade the Adirondack wilderness area with the Panther Mountain Dam. Persistent attempts of the Army to get legislation (in spite of opposition of the Department of the Interior) giving them a large block of the Wichita National Wildlife Refuge lost when the House Committee failed to report out the bill. Incidentally, Congressman Wickersham from the Lawton district in Oklahoma, one of the sponsors of this legislation, was defeated in the Democratic primary. A carefully organized drive by commercial fisheries interests tried to destroy the Fish and Wildlife Service and take over the administration of all fisheries in the interests of the commercial operators. The final legislation kept the Fish and Wildlife Service united but divided it into a commercial fisheries unit and one for sport fish and wildlife.

More generous appropriations were given to the conservation agencies, including the Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, the Forest Service, and the Soil Conservation Service, so that they should be able to do a better job than before.

Federal lands around the Jim Woodruff Reservoir leased to the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission were saved for public use by last-minute legislation. The Corps of Engineers was proposing to resell them to former owners on give-away terms. A number of other bills seeking authority to dispose of federal lands on other reservoirs were prevented from passing by objections of conservation-minded members of the House. These are important because of the precedents that they might set.

A major conservation victory was the inclusion of forestry and wildlife conservation sections in the new Soil Bank agricultural bill which is now law. These were kept in the bill over the opposition of the National Lumber Manufacturers Association, which worked against them to the bitter end.

The federal pollution bill which was due to expire on June 30 has been replaced by a stronger and better law. The Public Health Service was given more money to carry the federal end; the enforcement features of the legislation were strengthened.

The worst defeat for conservation was the authorization of Bruce Eddy Dam on the Clearwater River in Idaho which was attached as a rider to the Omnibus Bill in the Senate. The President vetoed this record pork-barrel bill, and the Clearwater was saved for the present. However, an all-out fight by the conservationists will be required in the next session to prevent this invasion of one of the two remaining important salmon spawning tributaries of the Columbia River.

Two other meritorious pieces of legislation failed to get through the Senate in the closing hours, although both were passed by the House. The Key Deer bill failed when it was objected to by Senator Smathers, himself the author of the companion bill in the Senate. Congressman Engle (California) and all of his Committee introduced bills restricting the military land grabs and requiring the military to observe state laws when they hunted or fished on military lands. A good bill passed the House but failed passage in the Senate in the closing hours of the session.

Numerous other good conservation proposals failed somewhere along the line. It will be seen from this brief resumé that the House is much more conservation-minded than is the Senate, although there are a number of staunch conservation Senators. The House killed a number of bad bills that were passed by the Senate, including the one that would have given the Army the 10,700 acres of the Wichita Refuge and passed the two above-mentioned bills that were good conservation measures that failed in the Senate.

A rapidly growing number of members of the AOU have asked to be put on the conservation mailing list, and their response to bulletins on various legislative proposals has been both prompt and effective.

In other conservation activities, there are a number of items which deserve brief comment. Of growing concern is the rapidly increasing use of insecticides and herbicides in both the United States and Canada. This use is expanding before there is any adequate research on the effects of such sprays on wildlife and other valuable resources. Just at present, the province of New Brunswick, with a tremendous spruce budworm spraying program that is already known to have killed many young salmon in its most famous stream, is in the forefront of the news. This program is so carelessly supervised that the spray was recently reported to have killed all the fish in a fish hatchery.

Despite successful campaigns in a number of states to enact and enforce better laws protecting the valuable hawks and owls, the unrestricted killing still continues in Pennsylvania along many of the old shooting stands with the sole exception of the Hawk Mountain

Sanctuary. An educational campaign undertaken by the Pennsylvania Game Commission apparently has had little effect upon those who indulge in this illegal sport. The word *illegal* is used advisedly because the majority of the hawks and owls, despite an almost complete lack of enforcement of this section, are protected by Pennsylvania law. Maurice Braun recently called attention to this situation in an article in 'Nature Magazine' and emphasized that in spite of every effort made by conservationists to get better protection for these valuable birds, the slaughter still goes on.

Representatives of the International Committee for Bird Protection, in a recent report to the Pan American Section, outlined the sad state of wildlife affairs in most South American countries. To summarize their report briefly, except in Venezuela and Argentina, there is very little progress in conservation education and little or no law enforcement. From other sources we learned that Dutch Guiana is making progress.

In regard to the rare species with which many have been concerned in the past, there are no reports of any change in the status of the Condor and Ivory-billed Woodpecker. No information is yet available on the nesting success of the Whooping Cranes this year. Everyone is probably aware of the well publicized fact that the captive pair in the New Orleans zoo produced and hatched two eggs. One of the young disappeared and the other died, and so another year of failure in the efforts to breed these birds in captivity must be recorded.

Such reports as are available indicate that the situation of the Atwater Prairie Chicken becomes increasingly precarious as more land is developed for intensive agricultural purposes; and the long-continued drought and the low water levels in Okeechobee Lake have resulted in a disastrous nesting season in 1956 for many water birds as well as for the Everglade Kite. So far as is known, the kites succeeded in raising only three young, and many of the water birds failed to nest or did not succeed in bringing off young. If this drought continues into another year, the results could be disastrous.

Hudsonian Godwits, one of the rarer of the shorebirds, were reported in unusual numbers from national wildlife refuges in the Mississippi Valley in the spring of 1956. The greatest concentration seen in years was the 370 birds reported on the Squaw Creek Refuge in Missouri on April 25.

The Trumpeter Swan population is maintaining itself fairly well, and there are definite reports of swan nesting on the lower Copper River in Alaska, a fact which has been suspected for a number of years but which now seems to be confirmed.

The intensive studies the Fish and Wildlife Service initiated on the Ross's Goose have resulted in an estimate of about 12,000 wintering birds in 1955-56, a somewhat greater population than even the most optimistic estimates of previous years, and one which indicates that there may be some hope of saving this diminutive goose if some of its wintering areas can remain protected.

Since the establishment of the federal refuge system, particularly in Minnesota and the Dakotas, both Prairie Chickens and Sharp-tailed Grouse have nested on the marginal grounds around these waterfowl refuges. An intensive study last year on the Lostwood Refuge in North Dakota indicated a population of 17 Sharp-tailed Grouse to the square mile. This and other refuges in the territory are serving a double purpose of providing some protection to the prairie grouse as well as to the waterfowl, and efforts are being made to modify management practices to give these birds added help.

A report received by Phil DuMont of an expedition to Laysan Island indicates a definite increase in the number of rare Laysan Teal which are confined to that island only. On February 10, 1955, 161 of these birds were counted, and the party of observers secured several Kodachrome slides, one of which shows a flock of 52 of this species on the lagoon. The last previous count, in 1951, showed a population of about 39 birds.

The Cattle Egret which was mentioned in last year's report continues to thrive and spread. There are reports of this bird from Texas and Louisiana, as well as the huge flocks of nesting birds in Florida. They also have been reported from numerous places along the Atlantic Coast and up the Mississippi River valley.

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