

REPORT TO THE AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION
BY THE COMMITTEE ON BIRD PROTECTION, 1958

On the world-wide scene we find that the 11th International Committee for Bird Preservation was held in Helsinki, Finland, June 1-5, 1958 and was attended by representatives of 20 national sections, 4 international organizations, and an observer from the USSR. A new office, that of President-Emeritus, was created, and it is most gratifying to announce that a distinguished member of the A. O. U. and of this Committee, Dr. Jean Delacour, was elected as its first incumbent. Prior to the Helsinki conference, a meeting of the Executive Board of the International Wildfowl Research Bureau was held in southern France. The Nene Goose of Hawaii, the Brent Goose of Europe and the Laysan Teal were topics of discussion. The effect of airplane dispersal of pesticides, the establishment of reserves for species in danger of extinction, the need for better protection of birds of prey, the White Stork, the Brent Goose and the Great Indian Bustard, as well as control of the Herring Gull where too abundant, were subjects of consideration. The United States, conspicuous because of its failure to sign the International Convention of the Pollution of the Sea by Oil, 1954, was the subject of a resolution passed by the Helsinki conference. This "urgently recommended" that the United States join other maritime nations in signing and ratifying this convention.

In the United States the 85th Congress made commendable contributions to conservation legislation, much of which will have a bearing on the welfare of birdlife. Increase in the cost of the "duck stamp" from \$2.00 to \$3.00 and other related legislation will now permit the allocation of larger sums for the acquisition of wetlands so essential for the perpetuation of waterfowl in North America. With specific limitations on the use to which these funds may be put, there is now assurance that the acquisition of refuge lands may proceed at a rate that will permit, in about 25 years, the attainment of the goal set.

Amendment of the Coordination Act materially strengthens the consideration given wildlife in connection with water development projects under Federal construction. Of utmost importance to the welfare of birdlife was the enactment of legislation providing for adequate research in the dispersal of pesticides, a subject mentioned later in this report. Along with many others, your Committee chairman contributed a letter to the published hearings of the Senate Committee which considered and acted favorably on this legislation. Another measure directly affecting a threatened species gave authority

to the Department of the Interior to provide a program for the restoration and management of the Nene Goose in Hawaii. The creation of a National Wildlife Refuge for the protection of the unique and rare Key deer on the Florida Keys will be as gratifying to ornithologists as to mammalogists and conservationists generally.

Two administrative decisions by the Department of the Interior have important bearing on the welfare of birds. Regulations issued early in 1958 would permit drilling for oil or gas on national wildlife refuges *only* when operations on contiguous areas would result in the loss of these resources to the United States. It was made clear that the primary function of Federal wildlife lands is to preserve wildlife and its habitat. At the Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge in northern California, threatened by encroaching agriculture, an order was issued asserting that the area must be used to protect fully the waterfowl resources.

A matter gratifying to your Committee and, we feel, to the membership generally was a decision made by a large industrial corporation "not to run any more ads on the theme of predator control." This was decided after your Committee and others had called attention to the possible harmful effects of such propaganda when directed against certain predatory birds. The action by this corporation is in conformity with progressive advertising, which, increasingly, is emphasizing sound conservation.

At the time of this writing reports from Canada indicate that at least three young Whooping Cranes were produced in the wild this season. One additional young was raised in captivity at the New Orleans Zoo. Consequently, if we may assume that there were no losses among the wild adults during the spring and summer, the total number of Whooping Cranes now stands at 35.

Through the kindness of Dr. F. C. Lincoln of the Fish and Wildlife Service your committee has the privilege of quoting the following paragraph of a paper he prepared for presentation at the meeting of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature held at Athens, Greece during this fall. It concerns species whose existence is considered precarious.

"These include the Greater Prairie Chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido cupido*), Attwater's Prairie Chicken (*T. c. attwateri*) and the Lesser Prairie Chicken (*T. pallidicinctus*). The continued existence of these prairie grouse is threatened because of habitat destruction due to agricultural expansion. All known California Condors (*Gymnogyps californicus*) are on the Los Padres National Forest where they are jealously guarded by the U. S. Forest Service and the State of California. They are, however, extremely vulnerable and, although no

late reports are available, it was estimated, in 1953, that there might be 60 in existence. As a result of a hurricane some ten or twelve years ago, it was thought that the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow (*Ammospiza maritima*), found only in extreme southern Florida, had been exterminated. Information was received by the Fish and Wildlife Service within the last year that this bird had been rediscovered at a point on the west coast of southern Florida. No estimate has been made of the number present in this new locality. Each of the three kites is considered to be in a rather precarious situation—most concern being felt for the Everglade Kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*), whose habitat is being threatened by drainage and agricultural exploitation. They are, of course, being given full protection on the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge near Palm Beach. The Puerto Rican Parrot (*Amazona vittata*) is found only in the Caribbean National Forest on the Island of Puerto Rico. A report received this year indicates that there are about 200 of these birds."

Results of the waterfowl breeding ground surveys in Canada show no major changes in the populations of the commoner species in 1958, but the decline in water levels is continuing and may be expected to have an adverse effect on the canvasback and redhead particularly. The status of the pond ducks remains satisfactory, except in the Atlantic Flyway. Regulations governing the take of waterfowl remain essentially the same except in Saskatchewan where the bag limit was reduced by 20 percent and the taking of canvasback and redhead has been further restricted. The numbers of Black Brant have continued to decline.

From Illinois comes a sad and disturbing report that the Greater Prairie Chicken population of that State has slipped badly over the past twenty years. Dr. Yeatter states that, in 1957 he was able to count only 23 male birds, whereas in 1938 he recorded 131 males in the same area. Similarly, twenty years ago this colony occupied at least 18 square miles; today, all the birds were in a single square mile.

Field studies by the Fish and Wildlife Service of the "gooneys" (albatrosses) of Midway Island as hazards to aviation were terminated in July, 1958. During the past year the approach was to continue basic biological studies of the two species of albatrosses (*Diomedea immutabilis* and *D. nigripes*); to observe the results of the elimination of segments of the albatross population by killing those nesting individuals and "unemployed" birds along the operational runways; and to make further observations on the relationship between unevenness of the ground surface and the incidence of soaring albatrosses. The conclusions reached were that (1) killing up to 30,000 (*sic*) albatrosses

in the vicinity of the runways did not significantly change the number of birds in the air over the runways and thus will not alleviate the hazard to aircraft; and (2) that leveling of the land will, very greatly, reduce the amount of soaring of albatrosses and, to that extent, decrease the number of birds in the air over that area.

To that end a definite recommendation was made that the land be leveled for 750 feet on each side of the operational runways. The Department of the Navy has indicated that it would carry out this recommendation beginning with the current fiscal year and to the extent that available funds will permit. After this has been done further observations will be made by the Fish and Wildlife Service to appraise the ultimate results. The Service published a summary of the earlier (1956-57) studies as Special Scientific Report—Wildlife No. 38 in January 1958.

During the year concern over the effects on wildlife of the airplane dispersal of highly toxic pesticides, particularly the chlorinated hydrocarbons, has reached an all-time high. The accumulating evidence has become so convincing that the Congress passed, without significant opposition, legislation authorizing and directing the Secretary of the Interior "to undertake comprehensive continuing studies on the effects of insecticides, herbicides and fungicides upon the fish and wildlife resources of the United States, * * *." To carry out the objectives of this Act the sum of \$280,000 was authorized and, to hasten action, \$125,000 was actually appropriated for use in the current fiscal year. (Parenthetically, let it be known that the same Congress appropriated \$2,500,000 [the same as last year] for continuation of the controversial imported fire ant control program in Southern States.)

To recite all the evidence accumulating with respect to the effects of airplane dispersal of these insecticides would make this report unduly long. Reference to some of the published testimony seems desirable so that members of the Union may follow through with their reading.

Under date of May 25, 1958 the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife released a summary of its available information. It was pointed out that the Department of Agriculture was advised of the Bureau's concern and, in December 1957, arrangements were made for exchange of information through liaison representatives. At the same time studies of the effects of the eradication upon wildlife were initiated by the Bureau. This work was augmented through research contracts with Louisiana State University and Alabama Polytechnic Institute and through cooperation with the Texas Game and Fish Commission.

Whereas the effects on wildlife in several southern areas showed losses of birds and small mammals as an immediate consequence of the fire ant control operations, the long-time effects could not be revealed for months. Bird numbers in the two most extensively studied areas were reduced 75-85 percent and in one Texas county the dead specimens found actually amounted to 33 percent of the pre-treatment population.

Another highly informative document released by the Fish and Wildlife Service in December 1957, entitled "Pesticides and Wildlife," was authored by Lucille F. Stickel and Paul F. Springer and appeared as Wildlife Leaflet 392. The subject matter is handled in a direct, question-and-answer manner based on the information available at the time. Supplementing it is a 14-title bibliography of pertinent literature.

An earlier paper by Springer, "Insecticides, Boon or Bane," was published in the Audubon Magazine, May-June and July-August, 1956. It contains a wealth of information on currently used insecticides.

And for those in search of toxicological information on this subject, two papers by James B. DeWitt on the effect of chlorinated hydrocarbons on quail and pheasants will fill their needs. They appeared in 1955 and 1956 in *Agricultural and Food Chemistry*.

Throughout the Middle-west the extensive use of DDT for the control of vectors of the Dutch elm disease is causing increasing concern since some of the long-time effects of this treatment are beginning to show up. Roy J. Barker, in carefully compiled "Notes on Some Effects of DDT—Sprayed on Elms" (*Jour. Wildlife Mgt.*, 22: 3: 269-274, 1958) revealed the ultimate toxicity to robins (and presumably to other birds) of earthworms obtained in DDT-treated areas. Barker, formerly with the Illinois Natural History Survey and now with the Entomology Research Division of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, concludes his discussion with the statement that "the meager data available emphasize that biological effects of toxic chemicals or isotopes cannot be assessed in a few weeks following application."

Field observation of the lethal DDT-earthworm-robin sequence also has been made on the campus of Michigan State University where Dr. George J. Wallace witnessed death and the progressive reduction of the number of breeding robins through their having fed on poisoned earthworms. Still another earthworm-bird complex has been revealed in Louisiana where Federal and State investigators have recorded a marked reduction in earthworm numbers in areas

treated with heptachlor, a chlorinated hydrocarbon used in fire ant control. There, on the principal wintering grounds of the woodcock, this bird may become the victim of either food scarcity or food toxicity through feeding on poisoned earthworms. For a species whose continued existence is the concern of many people, this course of events may prove tragic.

No one familiar with conditions in the area now infested by the imported fire ant, will question the desirability of remedial action of some kind. Though convincing evidence is still lacking, Herbert L. Stoddard, America's foremost authority on quail management in the Southeast, is "very apprehensive that the imported fire ant will prove to be as destructive, or more so (to ground-nesting birds), than we found the native fire ant to be." Faced with such a dilemma, it is highly important that we expedite to the utmost comprehensive research. With airplane dispersal of insecticides proceeding apace, the opportunities to witness and appraise the effects of actual control operations are unexcelled. Hastening and intensifying the investigative program provided by recent legislation is now the most pressing and sensible approach. In facing this problem it must be realized that we are dealing with an accomplished fact. Much as we may object to the action that has been taken in the fire ant program, tearing of the hair and name-calling will avail little.

As a final word on this subject, your chairman wishes to add the following.

"Eradication" is a convincing, appealing and hopeful word. Applying it to the imported fire ant program means nothing less than destruction or removal of the last individual ant having reproductive potential. True it is there have been notable cases of insect control involving complete extermination in specified areas. However, with the exception of the removal of the Argentine ant from several towns in Mississippi, no species of ant has been emphatically suppressed (not to mention completely eradicated) over areas as great as that now occupied by the imported fire ant ("Can Insects be Eradicated?" Yearbook, U.S.D.A., 1952, pp. 197-199). It would appear, therefore, that the word "control" would be more realistic and realizable, though less effective, it must be admitted, for promotional purposes.

Submitted, September 3, 1958.

E. R. KALMBACH, *Chairman*
JEAN DELACOUR
IRA N. GABRIELSON
ROBERT A. MCCABE
DAVID A. MUNRO