

REPORT TO THE AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION  
BY THE  
COMMITTEE ON BIRD PROTECTION, 1960

Many events having an impact on birds have transpired since our last A.O.U. meeting, and many serious problems confront all our people who have an interest in bird life. Our exploding populations, competition for land, land management and mismanagement, and particularly the promiscuous and irresponsible use of pesticides and unrestrained drainage (both of which are often encouraged and supported by federal agencies), all are having a serious effect upon wildlife.

Other events and developments have improved the situation for birds. The American public is gradually becoming more conscious and appreciative of birds and is, therefore, accordng them better protection. Habitat development by both government and private citizens and agencies has made the environment more attractive and safer for many species and in many areas. Perhaps the greatest contribution this past year has been the constant effort of many understanding and dedicated groups in preventing the destructive march of organized forces from doing even more damage to wildlife and its essential habitat than has already been done. Much effort has been made both individually and as members of organized action groups and by members of your committee to prevent destruction of bird life and its environment. This, we fully realize, is largely a rear-guard delaying action and is not enough, even though it is important.

DYNAMIC ACTION NEEDED

Professional ornithologists, interested, though casual, bird watchers, and naturalists generally constitute the segment of our citizenry most concerned when practices and influences deplete our bird populations. It seems not illogical, therefore, that this group should be articulate and positive in expressing itself and in doing something about any situation that destroys bird life and its habitat. Democracy is safest when citizens accept their obligation for tactful but dynamic and positive action that is in the best public interest. As the senior ornithological organization on this continent, the A.O.U. and its respective members might, therefore, be expected to do more than passively document the problems and situations that adversely affect our birds. An objective review of the past might suggest that we have done little more than this, although many of our members, working as private individuals and with action

groups, have been among the most effective workers in protecting birds and improving their environment.

Each member of the Union, we feel, should do his utmost to protect local birds and habitat areas in his neighborhood. Local strategic areas should be secured as public property or purchased by a bird group or organization to insure that essential local habitats are permanently secured for endangered or specialized groups of birds. The penalty of delaying specific action is well illustrated by the Stone Harbor, New Jersey, heron rookery. This 31-acre tract, that has in it virtually every species of North American heron, along with the Glossy Ibis, was tax delinquent and was foreclosed by the community not many years ago. Now this tract is valued at \$500,000!

#### TULE-KLAMATH WILDLIFE REFUGES

During the past year effort has continued by land-grabbing groups to try to despoil and take over important wildlife refuge areas and use them entirely for agricultural purposes. An irrigation district in the Tule-Klamath area of southern Oregon and northern California under agreement had been given the operation of this sump basin. Obviously, in an attempt to ruin these great waterfowl refuges (probably the most important in the United States), the water level was dropped and held at the minimum low in order to drive the waterfowl away and then make the area available for agriculture. With courage and forthright action Secretary Seaton of Interior took control out of the hands of the irrigation district, and water levels were restored.

#### PADRE ISLAND

The membership will be glad to know that President Lowery in the name of the Union sent a strong and effective appeal to the Senate Investigating Committee looking into the merits of the Padre Island seashore area of coastal south Texas. Nearly all of this 117 miles of sandy Gulf beach and coastal marshes attracts many species of birds. It is certainly in the public interest that this area be protected and be permitted to retain its unique attractiveness. This positive appeal has helped considerably in winning public support for the area. The proposed Cape Cod, Oregon Dunes, and perhaps other areas merit equally effective support.

#### ALBATROSS

President Lowery and various members of your committee, along with many other ornithologists and other private citizens, protested the pro-

posed order of the Navy to slaughter the albatross in certain units of Midway Islands because the birds had become a hazard to the important military air base there. The air base was constructed in the midst of the birds' ancestral and firmly established nesting grounds. We protested the cruel slaughter and suggested more effective study be given the problem and alternative approaches sought. It was feared that such slaughter of these confiding and interesting birds might result in complete extermination of another majestic member of our avifauna. The protests have caused the Navy to rescind the premature and unnecessary order.

#### WATERFOWL SITUATION

An early August report from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shows that, while nesting habitat for American waterfowl was somewhat improved over the unfavorable conditions of a year ago, the situation is still far from satisfactory and there is "no reason for real optimism that ducks are on the upward trend this year." The Service report indicated that restrictions of the past hunting season decreased the kill of ducks by 42 per cent or approximately six million birds. Even so, the breeding population seemed to be down about one fifth over last year's low, which means there are still a lot of vacant nesting homes for ducks even in the most favored areas. The situation is most serious with some of our inland divers, particularly Redheads, Canvasbacks, and Ruddy Ducks. The first two species are now placed on the fully protected list for this year in the United States. The Canadian hunting regulations limit the take of Redheads and Canvasbacks to one in the bag or one in possession. We hope the gunners can identify them. The improvement in water conditions should reflect some increase in populations of some species by now. A press release just received indicates that we may expect about the same populations this coming season as last year except in the Pacific flyway where the situation has worsened somewhat.

Illegal and outlaw trapping and market hunting is reported to continue to be serious in some extensive marsh areas of the United States. Here informed local citizens believe the illegal take exceeds the legitimate harvest. It is to be hoped that administration will concentrate enforcement at those times and places where best results can be expected and where the more flagrant violators can be brought to justice.

#### RARE AND VANISHING SPECIES

Whooping Cranes, 33 in number and consisting of 31 adults and 2 juveniles, utilized the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and adjacent areas this past winter (1959-1960) from mid-October to late March and

early April. Two adults obviously with no urge or opportunity to nest could see no point in the long migration, so are spending the summer on Matagorda Island. Some improvement over last summer in nesting in the far north is reported, as at least four pairs of birds are known to have one young each. If history repeats itself, we may yet have one or more young to add to this summer's known production when migration gets under way. The membership may have seen accounts that a railway may be constructed near the known nesting grounds of the whooper in the Northwest Territory of Canada. Canada's Minister of Northern Affairs has given assurance that the tracks will bypass any nesting area. While this might still seem a threat, the difficulty of summer travel in this great muskeg region would seem to minimize any serious danger.

The six whoopers in captivity (five adults at the Audubon Park Zoo, New Orleans, Louisiana, and one at San Antonio Zoo, Texas) show no increase. Josephone and Crip, the parent cranes at New Orleans, hatched two chicks from five eggs laid this spring. Three eggs were infertile. Unfortunately both young died, one when only one day old and the other at 17 days old. It then stood 12 to 14 inches high and apparently died of a lung infection. It is unfortunate, and we believe contrary to the public interest that all of these captives continue to be held in one place. Certainly the San Antonio bird cannot reproduce without a mate! Most of us have more interest in the wild birds than in those in captivity. However, with such a majestic species (our largest and most publicized wading birds) so precariously close to oblivion, it would seem that more effective action would be taken and some of the New Orleans birds sent elsewhere in the hope that the species can be saved from extinction.

The Nene Goose or Hawaiian Goose in captivity probably has been handled most of the time with more skill than has the captive whoopers, and, while their status is still far from satisfactory, the bird is breeding fairly well in captivity on the Hawaiian Islands and at the Wildfowl (Severn) Trust in England. In 1958-1959 nine nests were found, and 11 young were produced in the wild. Possibly because of volcanic activity only one nest in 1959-1960 was found, and no young were produced. At a special game farm on the Island of Hawaii the Nene is propagated. Following the last breeding season, 19 birds were moved to an open-top pen where release was desired with the hope that following the molt the birds would be well acclimated and would fly out and establish themselves in this part of their ancestral range. The bird is the subject of an extensive ecological study in Hawaii. Effort is being made to liberate the birds on Maui Island where it formerly occurred.

Recently a convincing, and probably accurate, but still unconfirmed

report of a pair of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers in East Texas has been received. It seems advisable to determine the accuracy of this before reporting details.

#### LARGE WADING BIRDS

Concern has been felt for several years for the future of some of our larger wading birds—herons, ibises, egrets, spoonbills, etc. According to the accumulated records of the Audubon Society, most members of this interesting group fared a little better than average this past season. Some, like the picturesque Roseate Spoonbills and the Wood Ibis, or Wood Stork, which have been alarmingly scarce for many years, have shown a most encouraging increase. The Glossy Ibis also has fared well, as have most herons and egrets. However, the Reddish Egret, for reasons unknown, has shown a rather alarming decrease. A study of this species is needed.

#### THE GROUSE FAMILY

(In part condensed from a summary report by Dr. F. N. Hamerstrom, Jr.)

The current status of North American grouse is primarily determined by man's use of the land. Consequently, with land abuse and with intensive agriculture, some species of grouse are in a precarious condition because they are not very adaptable and cannot adjust if their favored environment is appreciably altered. The ptarmigan, which are species of the far north and high mountains, are widespread and successful, and it is not likely that much of their habitat will be seriously altered by man.

The forest grouse are much more influenced by man because of clearing, lumbering, and fire. In wilderness areas they have been affected but little. Blue Grouse are probably more abundant than in presettlement times. Lumbering and fire have increased their breeding range. Their habit of nesting on the lower slopes and migrating up the mountains for winter causes scattering and makes them generally less available and harder to bag. The Spruce Grouse is uncommon now in many areas, but its ecology, life history, and population dynamics are not well understood. Research is needed on this species.

In much of its range the Ruffed Grouse is probably more abundant than it was in presettlement times. Because it is a bird of the clearings and edges and young stage forest succession, its habitat is improved by many but not all forestry practices. It is, therefore, most abundant in rather close proximity to man and is perhaps our most important forest game bird.

The grouse that have suffered most at the hands of man are those whose restricted habitat is most valuable for farming and intensive grazing. In this there is no absolute distinction along species lines, as Ruffed Grouse have been driven out of most of the belt of deep hardwood soils that lie to the east of the prairies. The three northern sharp-tailed races have scarcely been affected by civilization, while the three southern races have been seriously depleted.

The prairie grouse, including the prairie chickens, Sharp-tailed Grouse, and Sage Grouse, generally have suffered most at the hands of man. The heath hen became extinct in 1932. The Attwater Prairie Chicken certainly is on the skids, and only a change in land management or a series of well-managed refuges of considerable size can save it. And this will have to come soon. With the plowing of the coastal prairie grasses, its range has melted away like an ice-cream cone in the hands of a hungry boy. Its former range limited largely to Texas extended along the coast from Corpus Christi Bay a short distance into Louisiana and inland as far as Austin and the Edwards Plateau. By 1937 the bird had lost nearly three-fourths of its former range and then existed in a series of disjunct and largely isolated patches within the original periphery. By 1960 the colonies or disjunct populations are very much smaller and more isolated. A number of counties have lost all their birds, and others have only a few small colonies. It is doubtful that the present population is over 3 to 5 per cent of what it was 30 years ago. The need is a concerted effort to buy range habitat and more effectively use and manage all suitable public land within its present range.

Like the Attwater, the Greater Prairie Chicken is dependent upon grassland. Plowing for farming and overgrazing have both been effective in removing this race. These widely distributed birds are now found sparingly in about 15 per cent of their former range. Where grazing is less severe, they seem to be making good recovery. Dictated by economics, the grazing regimen of "take half and leave half" is found to be a satisfactory standard that is best for the cattlemen and that favors the prairie chicken as well. Because of the importance of this species, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Missouri, and Minnesota have recently purchased land for management of these and other game species. Perhaps equally as encouraging, private resources have contributed to the purchase of many acres of additional land to save and manage the Greater Prairie Chicken. Many federal as well as state refuges are now being managed more and more to benefit these birds.

The Lesser Prairie Chicken continues to hold on in its small ranges in the arid southwest. The species requires both grassland and some brush.

Overgrazing here is more serious than is farming. The excessive use of herbicides in brush removal and payment of federal subsidies for land clearing are new threats in places to this species. New Mexico has bought and leased well over 23,600 acres to manage more effectively this species. It is hoped that Kansas may follow a similar course.

Less is known about the ecology of the Sharp-tailed Grouse. The Columbian sharp-tail of the west has been seriously affected and restricted both because of overgrazing and agricultural practices. The two other southern races are in much better condition. The Sage Grouse has lost about one half of its former range and much of its present distribution is on public lands in the sage brush belt of the west. Sound management and the prevention of overgrazing should insure the increase and perpetuation of this species. The need to save all our grouse species is definitely dependent upon our ecological understanding and ecological conscience.

#### REDISCOVERY OF HAWAIIAN BIRD

Based on newspaper accounts in the *Honolulu Advertiser* of 28 July 1960, the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* of 27 July 1960, and on personal correspondence, it appears that a rare bird on the wet island of Kauai thought to have been extinct for 60 years has again been discovered by Dr. Frank Richardson of the University of Washington and John Bowles, a local school teacher. The bird is the Ooaa or Moho (*Acrulocercus braccatus*). Several birds were seen near a large swamp. A number of other rare birds were also found in this secluded area.

It is gratifying to learn that with support from the Hawaiian Board of Agriculture a study of Hawaiian birds is under way. The Hawaiian Conservation Council points out the urgent need for sanctuaries on the islands. It points out that because of excessive drainage on the various islands the Hawaiian Gallinule has already largely disappeared from its former haunts on Oahu and that the bird is likely to become extinct at least on this populous island unless sanctuary and habitat are soon provided.

We are informed that a two-year detailed life history and management study of the Hawaiian Duck is to be undertaken on the Island of Kauai. A similar study is needed on the Hawaiian Crow, as it continues to decrease and may soon be added to our extinct fauna.

A major threat to native forest birds will result if the proposed plan to "re-zone" forest areas is carried out. This proposal is to convert the native vegetation into timber-producing crops. Certainly this shows the need of establishing wilderness areas or sanctuaries for native plant and animal life on these islands.

Hawaii is now a land of exotics. More foreign birds and mammals are still being introduced. Some of these introductions have had an adverse effect on the unique endemics of the Islands, and more adverse effects can be expected in the future.

#### BIRD INTRODUCTIONS

During the past year renewed attempts were made to introduce more exotic birds into the United States. Pastures always seem greener farther away. Attempt was made to bring in European robins and obviously with little knowledge or awareness of previous attempts that had proved unsuccessful. Your committee strongly advised against promiscuous introductions unless previous competent studies showed the unmistakable need of some foreign bird to fill a niche that currently was not occupied, and further that there was little likelihood of the introduction eventually proving to be more of a liability than an asset. The Fish and Wildlife Service deserves credit for disapproving the requested introduction.

#### THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

(With help from Jean Delacour, Hoyes Lloyd and several others.)

It is gratifying to report the successful Twelfth Conference of International Council for Bird Preservation held in Tokyo, Japan on 24-29 May 1960. The U.S.S.R., Korea, and Belgian Congo were the latest additions joining this council. Many countries were represented at this international meeting. Resolutions adopted urged more sanctuaries and called attention to dangers in Antarctica from release of sled dogs, discharge of oil, and interference with native fauna. The World Health Organization was wisely advised to deal with pesticides because of ignorance regarding biological effects including the danger of mutant insects and other organisms. It urged that Japan be the center for study and protection of migratory birds in Asia and Pan-Pacific areas. It also proposed that Pan-Pacific countries should conclude conventions to protect migratory birds and that countries in Asia, particularly India and Russia, should do likewise.

It urged that the Nene be made the state bird for Hawaii, and we understand that strong effort in Hawaii to accomplish this is well under way. Other countries were advised to choose state birds to make people conscious of the value of bird life. It was also recommended that birds have a special place in the program of the World Forestry Congress in 1960.

Oil pollution at sea was reported to be a continuing problem and



source of great destruction to bird life. Countries were advised to support the proposed international convention to minimize this problem.

Hoyes Lloyd appropriately calls attention to the fact that this World Council grew from the A.O.U. Bird Protection Committee as reported in *The Auk* of October 1884 via the efforts of T. Gilbert Pearson and others in 1922. Pearson at that time was a fellow of the A.O.U. and President of the National Audubon Society.

#### GRAND RAPIDS POWER PROJECT

In the so-called march of progress we may expect that some great developments may adversely affect wildlife. The proposed Grand Rapids Power Works may largely destroy the great Saskatchewan River delta marshes from the Pas to Moose and Cedar lakes, Manitoba. Those who know these great waterfowl marshes class them as among the very best on this continent. That this represents a prime breeding area makes the situation doubly serious for migratory waterfowl. It is to be hoped that through a cooperative study by competent wildlife biologists and engineers most of this damage can be averted. If these great delta marshes are destroyed, this will be a catastrophe.

#### THE DRAINAGE CRAZE

Water is the lifeblood of a nation ; consequently, it should be used and managed wisely and not wasted. Certainly there are times when drainage is necessary and in the public interest. Where water is in short supply, water management rather than drainage should be the criterion. While we heartily support the full right of free enterprise and the public responsibility that goes with this, we do not believe drainage, per se, should become a political football nor a selfish means of cruel exploitation at public expense.

Subsidized drainage as it has become in some parts of the Prairie States is of questionable biological value and is a paradox in governmental administration. Certainly this drainage of potholes is doing irreparable damage because it is fast destroying the most essential and best waterfowl nesting habitat in the United States. A few facts may put this problem in perspective :

1. As of April 1959, the U.S. Commodity Credit Corporation, the price support arm of the United States Government, reported it had approximately \$9 billion invested in the price support program. Before the beginning of the new harvest it then had on hand 1,084,090,690 bushels of wheat in storage.

2. The same Department of Agriculture through its field employees

and subsidy was encouraging farmers to drain their potholes and was financially supporting the drainage. This would raise more grain for an already glutted market for which it would pay price supports and pay for storage for a pyramiding surplus.

3. In these same drainage areas the same Department was paying millions of dollars for the Soil Bank Program to take land out of production.

4. Also payments were being made in these same areas to build farm ponds.

5. A sample survey some two years ago revealed that 48.1 per cent of the acreage of wheat or agricultural land brought into production in the Prairie States was drained in violation of the Department's stated policy of not bringing new land into production.

6. Another arm of the same government is urgently buying waterfowl refuges in these same counties of the Prairie States to save waterfowl habitat.

7. Both federal law and international conventions obligate the government to protect and support our waterfowl and the resources connected with it.

#### THE GROWING PESTICIDE PROBLEM

Chemical warfare against pests, insects, mites, fungi, disease, obnoxious plants, and rodents has become so widespread, so commonplace, and so promiscuous that it threatens the well being of man and society as well as bird life. Controls wisely and skillfully used are in the public interest and were developed in response to a public need. Improperly and extravagantly used, they are doing serious damage to wildlife. Only time can tell what injury may befall our citizens because of their misuse and overuse.

Well over 12,500 brand name formulations and more than 200 basic compounds are now on the market for the uninformed public to buy and use as it pleases. Big business, high-pressure salesmanship, and even government agencies have fostered public demand for control. Probably three billion pounds of dry and liquid chemicals are sprayed annually in the United States on over 100,000,000 acres of crops and timber land. In many places this has been damaging to bird life.

Despite the brazen statements from some pesticide manufacturers, salesmen, operators, and from too many officials in the control arm of government that no significant damage has or will result, there is an ever-growing array of facts indicating that serious damage in local and sometimes extensive areas is occurring. The indirect and long-term effects of all poisonous pesticides are imperfectly known, but enough

facts on a few of the more common pesticides (not including the more poisonous) give warning that it is the point of wisdom to be cautious and careful and keep control to a minimum until more facts are known.

The cranberry episode of last Thanksgiving and the ruling of zero tolerance of various pesticides in foods, particularly in milk, milk products, meats, and vegetables by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration should give convincing evidence that the dangers to human health may be real and serious. If these poisons are dangerous to humans who have every protection, isn't it likely that birds and animals in the wild that subsist much more heavily on foods that have been sprayed would be affected?

Despite claims to the contrary by some control workers and some officials of the control arm of the United States Government, considerable unimpeachable data are now accumulated showing that some control operations have been unnecessarily damaging to other interests, particularly wildlife. After three years some quail populations have not yet returned to pretreatment levels nor to population level of quail on comparable untreated areas, in the same type of habitat. Probably most control has been well handled, but during the past few years there has been a growing tendency on the part of some control groups to give little or no consideration to other national or local interests and values. It is exceedingly unfortunate that dangerous toxicants are being used in excessive quantities on a huge operational scale without adequate research to guide such use. Probably the fire ant "eradication" program of the Southeast United States, under the United States Department of Agriculture, is an example of this. The program is supposed to be fully cooperative. In the nine states where this mislabeled "eradication" operation has been carried out since 1957, most of the states have either refused to contribute or after two years have withdrawn all or most of their financial contribution.

As further evidence that this program has not been on a very high scale of efficiency or at least has not given satisfaction, it may be reported that the program has been unanimously condemned by both the Southeastern Association and the International Association of Fish, Game and Conservation Commissioners as being unnecessarily destructive and uncooperatively directed and without due consideration of other interests. It is also of interest to note that the resolutions of those responsible organizations encouraged the submission of a Congressional bill requiring that pesticide programs be coordinated with wildlife interests in the federal and state services.

We need pest control, but it is imperative that it be guided by responsible and objective leadership and that other interests be appro-

priately coordinated with the objectives of control. There is urgent need that big operational programs be preceded by an adequate degree of competent research on the effects of the poisons on man and his domestic and wild animals and birds. The minimum rather than the maximum dosages should be used. There is great need to develop specific control agents of minimum satisfactory toxicity rather than to strive constantly to obtain ever more toxic broad spectrum poisons. Every effort should be made to use biological and cultural control wherever they can be successful. The philosophy that "if a little is good, more control must be better" has no place in a sound control program.

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