

THE RUSSIAN ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESSES

Russian ornithology has become increasingly active, as indicated by the account of "Ornithology in Russia" 1920–1950 (Johansen, *Ibis*, 94: 1–48, 1952) and the sequel on publications of the decade that followed (Vaurie, *Auk*, 81: 238–241, 1964). Another phase of Russian activity takes the form of periodic meetings or congresses. Some are regional only, such as the two for the Baltic area, at Riga in 1951 and Tallinn in 1954, but others are nationwide and are called All-Union Ornithological Conferences.

The Soviet Union lacks the counterpart of a society such as the A.O.U., which holds annual meetings; the Russian congresses are more nearly akin to International Ornithological Congresses, but with attendance entirely from within the Soviet Union except for a few ornithologists who are invited from foreign countries. The first All-Union conference was held at Leningrad in January, 1956, the second at Moscow in August, 1959, the third at Lvov in September, 1962, and we attended the fourth, which was held at Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan, 1–7 September 1965. Attendance has averaged about 300 and, at Alma-Ata, foreign guests who were able to accept invitations totaled 10 (Denmark, 1; German Peoples' Republic, 6; Poland, 1; U.S.A., 2). About the same number of invited guests attended the first congress, but some other countries then were represented. We understand that among countries receiving invitations to attend the conference at Alma-Ata were Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and France.

The conference lasted seven days and all the scientific sessions were held in the monumental modern building of the Kazakh Academy of Sciences, under the presidency of Prof. G. P. Dementiev of Moscow. The secretary and head of the local committee was Prof. I. A. Dolgushin of the Academy.

Two days were devoted to four symposia held from 11 A.M. to 3 P.M., and from 6 P.M. to 9 P.M. One symposium was on systematics, another on ecology, and the other two were on "practical aspects of ornithology" and "objectives of the study of ornithology in the USSR." Two days were devoted to the presentation of individual papers and the starting hour was moved up to 10 A.M. This seemed hardly sufficient because 163 papers were scheduled for the first day and 144 for the second but, fortunately, some were read by title only. Two days were devoted to field trips in the Tian Shan and on the remaining day those attending were left to their own devices. We were invited for that day to the Institute of Zoology (known worldwide for its studies of plague) on the outskirts of Alma-Ata. There we were guests of the Assistant Director, Dr. E. I. Stroutman, and of Prof. A. A. Sludskiy, who showed us their experimental animals—among them a fine group of Saiga Antelopes (*Saiga tatarica*)—and an excellent collection of specimens of birds and mammals. The Institute's library is quite good and welcomes exchanges or donations of literature, especially on mammalogy and on mammals as vectors of disease. We also paid a brief visit to the Botanical Institute, in the city. Its collections are well housed, meticulously taken care of, and said to be very complete.

Certain conference papers were published beforehand in a small volume on "Modern problems of ornithology." It contains 242 pages and was printed in Frunze, Kirghizia, in 1965, in an edition of 500 copies; it was sponsored by the Institute of Biology of the Kirghiz SSR and the Institute of Zoology of the Kazakh SSR. Eventually, however, a conference Proceedings may be expected; we list here the titles of a few representative papers to give a cross-section of the interests of Russian ornithologists. These, freely translated and abbreviated, are: "Sexual dimorphism and adaptation in the genus *Certhia*," "History of the Quarternary avifauna of the Caucasus," "Electrophoretic study of the proteins of the blood serum and haemoglobin of woodpeckers,"

"Adaptive features of the eyes of ducks," "The sublingual pouches of fringillids," "Damage done by rooks to maize fields," "Effects of DDT [and other insecticides] on pheasant reproduction," "Commercial utilization of game birds of the USSR," and "The speed of migratory movements of some species." The variety of subjects was very great indeed; one can note also with interest the existence of an ornithological station set up only for children which was reporting on its experimental work.

The two field trips were held in the Transilian Ala Tau, the northernmost and relatively low range of the Tian Shan; nevertheless, they tower majestically to more than 16,000 feet over the city of Alma-Ata. The name Tian Shan signifies "Celestial Mountains." The Transilian Ala Tau is very jagged and capped by eternal snows which feed innumerable torrents which race through the high loess hills that are backed against its great wall. These torrents flow toward the Ili River and the desert—never very far away—but much of the water is utilized to irrigate a great belt of orchards, vineyards, and gardens. The name Alma-Ata signifies "Father of Apples" in the Kazakh language.

Along the torrents grow small forests, in some places with closed canopy but pleasant glades below, and the various forests, together with the cultivated areas, provide diversified and very favorable habitat for many bird species. The lower slopes of the Tian Shan are clothed in a dense forest of spruce and fir which reaches up perhaps to 10,000 feet. In September, snowfields seemed to extend down to 12,000 or perhaps 11,000 feet. On one of the trips buses, and then army trucks (very deficient in springs), took us to subalpine meadows above timberline where shepherds and herders were tending sheep and small herds of cows and horses that are driven up in the spring and down again toward the end of September. We then walked down through the junipers and part of the forest. The second trip terminated with a very convivial banquet.

A field trip consisting of many truckloads of ornithologists—more intent on exchanging ideas than on observing birds and far better equipped with cameras than binoculars—is not the best arrangement for seeing many birds. Nevertheless, a respectable number was seen on the trips and in or around the city. We did not keep a list, but Gottfried Mauersberger of the Berlin Museum gave us one which added to 99 species. This is quite a fair number, considering that it includes only one duck and four species of Charadriidae. Families best represented are Motacillidae, Corvidae, Sylviidae, Turdidae, and the diurnal birds of prey with 10 species including the Booted Eagle and Golden Eagle. To Vaurie, the most interesting bird was Severtzov's Tit-Warbler (*Leptopoeile sophiae*), a handsome and very lively tiny bird related to the kinglets. At the last minute—unfortunately too late to change our flight reservations—we were invited to take part in a fox hunt on the desert with local falconers who hunt on horseback with Golden Eagles.

At the close of the congress several resolutions were passed. Perhaps of greatest interest to foreign ornithologists was a decision to hold future congresses every fourth year, alternating with the International Ornithological Congresses, which presumably signifies that the next All-Union conference will be held in 1969 and the succeeding one in 1973. These gatherings are of a very high order scientifically, most interesting in other respects and, no doubt, might be attended by a larger number of non-Russian ornithologists if they were announced ahead of time in the ornithological journals of other countries. The present policy of inviting foreign ornithologists would have to be modified, if this were done, but we believe that this is not beyond the realm of possibility.—CHARLES VAURIE and RALPH S. PALMER.