FIRST CONFERENCE ON STATUS OF NORTH AMERICAN OSPREY

Proceedings of the recent North American Osprey Research Conference are now in preparation for expected distribution in late summer to interested subscribers as well as the 80 participants. The group met in mid-February 1972 at the College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, Va., where Dr. Mitchell A. Byrd, head of the Biology department, presided as host and resident chairman.

Serving with Dr. Byrd on the committee for organization of the conference were John C. Ogden, Research Biologist currently engaged in studies of ospreys and bald eagles at Everglades National Park, Florida; and Robert S. Kennedy, a candidate for a doctorate at Louisiana State, who last year earned his M.A. under Dr. Byrd's tutelage in work involving osprey reproduction in nearby Chesapeake Bay. His technique of inducing second clutches in ospreys by removal of the eggs immediately after completion of the first clutch proved successful.

Beside papers by Mr. Ogden and Mr. Kennedy, 24 other papers were read. The speakers were concerned and active workers in osprey survival studies and projects throughout the nation. Their ranks revealed a wide spectrum of backgrounds and occupations, reflecting governmental, scholastic, amateur, and professional interest. The enthusiastic 3-day gathering was the first of its kind; a proposal is being considered for the scheduling of this meeting on an annual or biennial basis.

At the conclusion of the sessions the participants elected an American Osprey Committee from five general regions of the United States to publish the Proceedings; to implement the aims and activities of the group; to seek Federal cooperation in promotion of direct and indirect protective measures for the species; and to serve in an advisory capacity to the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife with respect to future work on this species. It is expected that at a later date two representatives from Canada will be invited to serve, as well.

The National Committee is presently comprised of Dr. Byrd, from the Central East Coast region; Mr. Ogden from the Southeast; Gilbert and Josephine Fernandez of Dartmouth, Massachusetts, for the Northeast; Sergej Postupalsky, of Royal Oak, Michigan, for the Great Lakes region; and Dr. James Koplin, of Humboldt State College, Arcata, California, representing the West.

Dennis Puleston, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Environmental Defense Fund, recounted the shocking record of osprey decimation in the Long Island area, especially on Gardiner's Island where, from a high of over 300 pairs in 1948, the population has dwindled to 34 pairs, with a concurrent drop of the reproduction rate from 2.2 average per nest to 0.5 rate in 1971. Describing the lack of predation or human disturbance there, he ascribed the disaster to the effects of DDT and derivatives and to PCBs, now found at high levels in fish of the area. Now retired after 23 years as head of the Information Division of Brookhaven National Laboratories, Mr. Puleston found among fellow conferees firm affirmation of his conclusion. They added an ominous suggestion that combining elements, now scarcely distinguishable because so new, may constitute additional contributory factors not yet realized.

Control techniques for increasing the number and success of viable osprey eggs will be used in the East this season, where inroads on the breeding population have reached nearly disastrous proportions in Connecticut; and in Massachusetts last season it was documented that more than 50% of the breeding females in the main colony had to share the services of males because of a sudden decline in the male population.

Other reports and/or surveys revealed conditions in southern Maine, southern New Jersey, the Potomac River area, central and southern Chesapeake Bay, the Eastern Shore, Virginia, North Carolina, Michigan, Idaho, Oregon, California, Montana, and Wisconsin. In addition, two papers included studies of areas in Ontario, Canada.

An over-all survey of National Wildlife Refuges was described by J. C. Oberheu of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. Dr. Charles J. Henny read a comprehensive paper on "Wintering Areas of Ospreys from Various Areas of North America, Based on Band Recovery Data," which he co-authored with

Ted Van Velzen and Brian Sharp, all three of whom are associated with the federal Wildlife Research Center at Laurel, Md. The paper sparked some interesting discussion questions and hypotheses.

A noteworthy and popular feature of the convention was the inclusion of open discussion sessions on directed topics. Mr. Ogden conducted the first of these, concerned with the regional and continental status of the osprey. Paul Spitzer, of Old Lyme, Conn., a graduate student at Cornell University, presided for the evaluation of present and future techniques of osprey research. Stanley N. Weimeyer spear-headed the third discussion, concerning environmental contamination as it affects osprey reproduction. Mr. Weimeyer is currently engaged in environmental studies at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel. Summaries of these open discussions will be included in the published Proceedings.

One highlight on the conference was the report by Alexander Sprunt IV of the National Audubon Society and Tavernier, Fla. He described sightings of ospreys and nest locations in eastern coastal regions of Mexico, Yucatan, and Belize. Hitherto virtually unknown, these may comprise a resident race comparable to the birds of South Florida.

Individuals or institutions wishing to receive a copy of the paperbound, published PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIRST NORTH AMERICAN OSPREY RESEARCH CONFERENCE may do so by writing to Dr. Mitchell A. Byrd, Dept. of Biology, College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, Va. 23185. Sale price is expected to be no more than $2.00. Requests for copies need not be accompanied by prepayment; a bill will be sent at the time the order is filled.

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