

# Historical aspects and current projects of the ICBP

**T**HE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL for Bird Preservation (ICBP) is the world's oldest international conservation organization and is dedicated wholly to the protection of wild birds in their natural habitats. Birds are an essential part of our ecosystem and are certainly among our most treasured natural resources. Because birds are highly sensitive to changes in the environment, they often reflect very subtle but dangerous shifts before we ourselves experience them. In that way, the problems of bird survival are early-warning cues of problems for man's own survival.

The ICBP was founded by T. Gilbert Pearson in 1922. He was then the President of the National Audubon Society. The Council's inception followed a visit by Pearson to Europe during which he met with the bird conservation leaders of Britain, France, and the Netherlands. The meeting was called to discuss commonalities in bird conservation. In the years immediately following this initial meeting in 1922, National Sections were added to the Council from other European countries, Japan, and British dominions such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Since the early 1920s, the ICBP has played a prominent and highly visible role in conserving living birds on all of the world's continents, oceans, and numerous islands. A perusal of the issues pursued by the ICBP over the past 50 years reveals that those original concerns still underpin the activities of the Council today: habitat loss and deterioration, massive killing and capture of birds (especially migratory species) by hunting and trapping, oil and other forms of pollution, and more recently, the application of pesticides. The ICBP has worked successfully in creating natural reserves in critical areas, establishing international treaties protecting birds in migration, and sponsoring research on endangered and threatened bird species.



Warren B. King  
Chairman

Many of the issues named above are now on the agendas of other international organizations with broader-based conservation appeal, but, it should be remembered that it was through its worldwide coverage of birds that ICBP provided one of the earliest forums where such global issues could be discussed at an international level. Through its work with birds, ICBP has promoted the conservation ethic to governments and people throughout the world.

Within this international arena, the ICBP is closely associated with and participated in the establishment of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) in 1948, the International Waterfowl Research Bureau (IWRB) in 1954, and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in 1961, the last named created expressly to fund the programs of organizations like IUCN and ICBP. Owing to historical precedence, the International Council for Bird Preservation handles and is responsible for bird conservation matters for the more broadly focussed IUCN. In the same way, it has provided counseling on projects that involve birds for the WWF.

Operation of the ICBP is mainly through its National Sections. These are composed of leading ornithologists and conservationists throughout the world. The National Sections act as a source of national information and opinion and as channels through which action can be affected. The composi-

tion of each National Section is determined by its country; however, the ultimate goal of ICBP has been that each section rest on as broad a base as possible—that is, includes elements of the scientific, conservation, sporting, etc. interests.

Until the mid 1970s, the narrow focus of the Council enabled it to persist largely as an organization of dedicated volunteers; but, in 1978, it concluded that a professional secretariat was the only means of fulfilling its role as the preeminent international bird conservation organization. With headquarters in Cambridge, England, ICBP currently employs a small professional staff to deal with the business of international bird conservation.

To further its initial goal of information dissemination, ICBP offers a wide range of publications. In addition to a newsletter entitled 'World Birdwatch,' it publishes a series of *Technical Publications*, recent volumes of which provide a comprehensive treatment of five major conservation topics: new world parrots, seabirds, birds of prey, island birds and tropical forest birds. Additionally, ICBP is responsible for preparing the birds' volume in IUCN's Red Data Book series, the compilation of the status of the endangered organisms of the world.

The Birds Red Data Book was first published in 1966 by the IUCN. The second edition, completely revised and expanded, followed in 1977-1979, and was reprinted by the Smithsonian Institution Press in 1981. While this remains the authoritative comprehensive treatment of the world's endangered birds, the first part of the third edition, the Red Data Book on African Birds, was published in 1985 by both ICBP and IUCN, with three volumes covering the remainder of the world to follow over the next several years.

**T**HE COUNCIL'S CONSERVATION PROGRAM has grown dramatically as ICBP's professional capability has ex-

panded over the last decade. It presently includes over 150 projects. Unfortunately this is just a small fraction of what needs to be done, and time is running out. The accelerating rate of natural resource exploitation has forced ICBP to target its work on areas where many species can benefit simultaneously. Particular targets include centers on endemism (e.g., the Bamenda Highlands of Cameroon, Madagascar, Atlantic forests of Brazil and Pacific islands). These involve many species restricted to relatively small areas all suffering from common threats, the most frequent being loss of habitat. Other examples of important areas for conservation are sites supporting significant populations of colonially breeding birds (herons and seabirds), and migratory bird wintering, stop-over, and passage sites (Kiritimati Island, Straits of Messina, Senegal delta). To focus priorities, important bird conservation issues have been identified, and framework strategies for tackling them will be developed. The ICBP/IWRB Migratory Bird Campaign and the establishment of an Oceanic Island Data Bank are examples. A Wildlife Research and Conservation Agreement has been signed between the Government of Mauritius, ICBP and the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust.

Mauritius, home of the long-extinct Dodo, is currently the scene of long term conservation efforts to save the Mauritius Kestrel (*Falco punctatus*), now estimated at 16 pairs; the Pink Pigeon (*Nesoenas mayeri*), captive-bred individuals of which have recently been released into the wild; and the Mauritius Parakeet (*Psittacula eques*), which has become the emblem of school-based naturalist clubs whose activities embrace all of Mauritius' endemic wildlife.

A similar agreement has now been signed between ICBP, the Government of Ghana, and Britain's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). The agreement is aimed at protection of migratory birds, including birds of the seacoast like the threatened Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*).

Whatever the link, ICBP is committed to encouraging the support of affluent countries for the conservation needs of the developing world.

The network of ICBP's National Sections now extends to 65 nations and

over 300 member organizations. In the United States, the National Audubon Society is one of 23 member groups which include regional and national conservation organizations, professional societies, major museums, and bird observatories. While the bulk of the United States Section's business is undertaken by the member organizations' delegates, individual contributing members provide badly needed support.

The United States Section publishes its own journal, entitled *Bird Conservation*, the second volume of which has just been released. Each volume covers a theme of particular interest to United States conservationists. The first volume dealt with the status of this country's threatened birds of prey; the second assesses the status of birds on United States islands, including the Hawaiian group, Guam and Puerto Rico. On each of these, heroic conservation efforts are being undertaken to safeguard critically endangered species that appear in the public limelight far less frequently than do Whooping Cranes and California Condors, but all of which are every bit as important to save.

The United States National Section provides its organizational members with a forum for the discussion and development of bird conservation policy. It offers the views and recommendations of the scientific ornithological community, based on the best current biological evidence, to the federal and various state governments. Additionally, it keeps a watchful eye on the activities of United States interests abroad in terms of impact on birds and their habitats and the well-being of United States-breeding migrants during their sojourns to the south.

One week before the International Ornithological Congress in June 1986, in Kingston, Ontario, the ICBP will celebrate another four years of conservation efforts at its XIX World Conference. Special symposia will be held in conjunction with the World Conference on wintering habitats and migratory birds in the Western Hemisphere, birds as a socio-economic resource, conservation of birds of steppe-like habitats, and disease and management of threatened bird populations.

Recently a rapid increase in support for the ICBP from individual contributing members and the added momentum

from new member organizations have resulted in increasing capacity to meet the challenges of bird conservation. And yet so much more needs to be done. Many people in many countries want to save birds, and where an interest in birds has been awakened, the door to broader conservation awareness has been opened.

—North Groton Road,  
Rumney, New Hampshire 03266

## PUBLICATIONS OF THE ICBP

(These titles will be available at the IOC)  
*Endangered Birds of the World — The ICBP/IUCN Red Data Book* (2nd edition) Comp. W.B. King, 1981. Available from the Smithsonian Institution Press. Hardcover/\$22.70, paperback/\$8.95.

*Threatened Birds of Africa and related islands — The ICBP/IUCN Red Data Book, Part 1.* Fully revised 3rd edition (Part I) Authors: N.J. Collar and S.N. Stuart, 1985 Available from ICBP. Hardcover £24 00

*South African Red Data Book — birds* R.K. Brooke, 1984. 213 pp. Paper cover Free from: The Liaison Officer, Nature Conservation Research, FRD, CSIR, P O Box 395, Pretoria 0001, South Africa

*Bustards in Decline*, P.D. Goriup and H Vardhan (Eds.), 1983. 392 pp. Comprehensive review of bustard biology, ecology, and conservation requirements Papers presented at the International Symposium on Bustards, India, 1980 Available from ICBP. £15.00.

*Birds of Lebanon and the Jordan Area* (English text). S. Vere Benson, 1970 218 pp. Available from ICBP. £4.50.

*Birds of Lebanon, Syria and Jordan and for use in neighboring Arab states* (Arabic text). S. Vere Benson, 1984. 127 pp Available from ICBP. £5.00.

*Bird Conservation*. Volume 1, 1983. 148 pp. Volume 2, 1985. 180 pp. Stanley A Temple (ed.). Each volume: hardcover \$17.50, paperback \$12.95. Available from the University of Wisconsin Press.