

RETORTS, REFLECTIONS, AND THOUGHTFUL REFUTATIONS

Enclosed, please find my renewed subscription to *American Birds*. Please understand though that I am very disturbed.

I am put off by the tone of recent articles by Audubon Vice-President J.P. Myers, an able scientist. The chatty style and condescending tone of recent articles was insulting to those of us who have enjoyed *American Birds* for its scientific approach to birding. For the legion of birders in this country who have contributed valuable information on the behavior and distribution of birds, and who financially support conservation efforts world wide, *American Birds* represents a welcome bridge between the rigidly cool scientific journals and popularist publications.

It seems as though *American Birds* has joined the ranks of this latter genre of magazines.

**Wayne S. Scott,
New Haven, VT.**

Volume 43, Number 2 may be *American Birds* greatest issue ever! I have quite a few reasons for saying that, but I want to single out two.

I was grateful for J.P. Myers' brief but profound treatment, both scientific and philosophical, of the complexities involved in managing for a species in trouble by attacking another species that preys on it ("Gulls are what gulls eat"). Thank you, J.P. Then there was the comprehensive review of birds as indicators of environmental change, prepared by Stan Temple and John Wiens ("Bird populations and environmental changes: can birds be bioindicators?" Summer, 1989; Vol. 43, No. 2) and supplied with no less than six sidebars. This paper will be of great value to people engaged in all sorts of projects. It is a fine example of exactly the thing that *American Birds* does best: engaging amateurs in gathering data for professional analysis.

Please keep bringing us this kind of material.

**William M. Shephard,
Little Rock, AR.**

I must respond to Dr. Myers' "Gulls are what gulls eat" (Vol. 43, No. 2). This is a philosophical debate I have with myself practically every day, not because I am a biologist or wildlife manager, but because I work for a conservation organization that espouses such a "management" ethic and it makes me shudder. We—conser-

This is your page. To do with as you please. We hope that you will be provoked, excited, energized, and challenged by Pete Myers' column, and we dedicate this space to your insight, opinions, ideas, recommendations, questions, complaints, challenges, and daydreams. Write to Retorts, *American Birds*, 950 Third Ave., New York, NY 10022.

vationists, biologists, and other so-called wildlife managers—are exercising our beliefs (to preserve the biological integrity of this planet) in a way that merely perpetuates the problem. When we speak of managing wildlife, it is not wildlife we are supposed to be managing—though we are managing *for* them—we are really supposed to be managing *humans*. And this is more than a matter of semantics; it's a matter of accepted practice.

Why, in this case, must gulls or ravens be managed when the demise of perhaps more valuable species (though value is gauged by us) is so clearly the direct result of human intrusion, and domination, into the wheels of nature? *That* is the cop-out. Manipulating wildlife species is more justifiable than controlling the activities of man? Perhaps easier, but certainly not more justifiable. It's the curse of our Judeo-Christian heritage.

It's as if we're wimps (with a big "W"); we'd rather let the ravens and gulls and wolves and other so-called "pest" species take the fall than stand up to our own kind. You say our knowledge and tools are too imperfect and our hubris too immense to go messing around with nature in utter abandon. Wildlife managers *are* mess-

ing around with nature, not with utter abandon, but rather with very deliberate intentions that fall way short of solving the problem. Good intentions are no excuse for allowing the sacrificing of one population for another when we can see the real problem but refuse to do as much as we can about it. Where is our hubris when we need it?

You say that we must manage species and to not do so means we are turning our backs on the crumbling mandscape we created in the first place. I say that managing species—killing one for another—is doing more harm than good because it is a band-aid approach that distracts attention and redirects resources away from the real problem. Isn't that turning our backs?

Most of the time, as in your article, wildlife managers (and everybody supporting their cause and techniques) are presented as being hesitant to control/kill certain species because all life to them is sacred. In fact, they are hesitant because they know the root of the problem lies elsewhere—in us. Our Darwinian philosophies predispose us to the belief that there is something accidental about evolutionary success. To me, killing, in the name of wildlife management, seems a bit too deliberate an act.

Wildlife control measures should not even be considered an interim solution until more can be done to manage mankind: our tinkering with nature all along has had hidden consequences or delayed, terrible repercussions. Why should continuing this tinkering be any different? Regardless of whether or not channeling so much effort and money into managing pest species may be delaying or harming the chances of innovative, better solutions being implemented, can you say with absolute certainty that manipulating species is completely harmless in the scheme of nature? If you can't, then why is it being done, and done in the name of conservation?

**Mercedes Lee,
Smithtown, NY**