

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

President Aaron M. Bagg's address at the Crawford Notch meeting stressed the responsibility of ornithologists in the defense of our common environment and was good orientation for the report of the Conservation Committee. As Mr. Bagg said, "what we do to the environment we do to man himself."

This statement is part of a new wave of awareness that the scientist must accept some responsibility for the use of his data, as so well expounded by Dr. Barry Commoner in a small but important book, "Science and Survival," published in 1967 as an outgrowth of the deliberations of the American Association for the Advancement of Science's committee on the role of science in human affairs. The Wilson Ornithological Society's role should, and can be an expanding one in informing citizens and legislators and other groups of the need for studying the interrelationships of living things and their environment and the implications of applying our technology to the out-of-doors.

One attempt to make the voice of science effective, in this case through the judicial process, is the legal action brought by Victor J. Yannacone, Jr., to bar the use of DDT by the Suffolk County (Long Island, N.Y.) Mosquito Control Commission, because the use of so long-lived an insecticide leads to poisoning ecosystems and depleting populations, particularly those at the ends of long food chains. A temporary injunction granted on 15 August 1966, has continued in force, a one week trial presented the pros and cons of the scientific evidence, and the court has withheld judgment on the constitutional issue raised although it agreed that the use of DDT should be barred because of its effects in the environment. The National Audubon Society has published the transcripts of this hearing, together with pleas, etc., and copies of this 400-page volume are available for \$15.00 each from the Society's New York office.

The Torrey Canyon disaster off the southwest coast of England that loosed 118,000 tons of crude oil in the Atlantic Ocean and the English Channel in March was the most dramatic conservation challenge of the year. Sweeping across the Channel, the oil pollution killed 90 per cent of the nesting alcids of the Brittany Coast in France, and no estimate of the loss of British sea birds was possible. Of some 7,000 birds rescued and put through a cleaning process by volunteers in England, less than 500 survived. A great and continuing out-pouring of suggestions for coping with such disasters, whether by detergents or jelling substances, or otherwise, overlooked the fact that present regulations lack teeth and the imposition of fines high enough to induce adequate care to prevent a repetition of such blundering, or perhaps even halt the trend to larger and larger tankers which makes accidents increasingly difficult to cope with. Mr. James Baird of the Massachusetts Audubon Society pointed out that a challenge of perhaps similar proportions faced the United States in connection with recent requests for permits to exploit the oil-bearing strata underlying George's Bank off Cape Cod, Mass., where 70 per cent of our fish food supplies come from.

The back-up approach to Whooping Crane conservation got off to a good start this spring. U.S. and Canadian wildlife biologists found eight occupied nests in the Wood Buffalo Park area, took six eggs by a quick descent from helicopters, and flew the eggs in specially designed, heated carrying boxes to the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Maryland. One egg hatched en route and the chick died. Another young died shortly afterward, but five young birds now form the nucleus of a new captive flock. Of equal importance, surely, is the return of all parent birds to their nests after having been robbed of that one egg of their double clutch which they were unlikely to fledge in any rate. Disturbance thus appears to have been minimal (see editorial of *The Threatened Species Program*, *Audubon Mag.*, May-June, 1967).

In April the Ohio Farm Bureau succeeded in getting the agricultural establishment to call a North American Conference on Blackbird Depredation at Columbus. The drive for agricultural efficiency (measured solely in return on dollar invested) is obviously in conflict with birds that are attracted to feedlots and crops grown in the wrong place, and certain of the more aggressive farmers are impatient with the conservative approach of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in providing "control" and would like to see this operation shifted to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This demand, to suit the convenience of individual producers, is part of that federal-private combination economist Galbraith calls the technostructure and is thus subject to the serious scientific shortcomings Professor Commoner warns about. The Congress, fortunately, moderated the dispute by appropriating \$800,000 for a program centering on the establishment of a field research station in Ohio. As this report went to press, however, at least one Congressman was attacking the appropriation as an unnecessary luxury in view of impending tax increases proposed to counterbalance the Vietnam War outputs. Whether or not the research station is built, ornithologists had better keep a wary eye on the control establishment.

In March the National Audubon Society spearheaded a civil suit against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to prevent the "pulling of the plug," in Canal 111 where this crosses U.S. Route 1 below Homestead, east of Everglades National Park. It was insisted that this section of Route 1 should not be excavated until suitable barriers have been built in the canal to prevent salt water intrusion into the Park.

In May it was learned that the Corps of Engineers had directed its Jacksonville office to provide Everglades National Park with fresh water on "a basis parallel to the requirements of municipalities, industry and agriculture." No copies of the directive were provided other agencies or conservation organizations, but if the above paraphrase is at all accurate, the Park has to all intents been assured an equal diminishing share of the water it needs to keep it viable. What must be done is to give the Park priority until its minimum needs have been met.

In southwest Florida, the National Audubon Society had to purchase nearly four sections of wetlands, at a price of \$650,000, to protect its famous Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary against drainage by land speculators; and in Texas, conservationists, led by Congressman Bob Eckhardt of Houston, opposed the granting of permits to dredge the oyster reefs of Galveston and Trinity Bays. Legislation (H.R. 25 introduced by Congressman John Dingell) to prevent wasteful dredging of estuaries was compromised in early July when the Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of the Interior entered into a Memorandum of Understanding which would give Interior the privilege of reviewing all applications for dredging permits in estuarine waters. Conservationists immediately pressed Secretary Udall's office with examples of projects needing review, and the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife made the Galveston Bay problem its first test case.

Of growing concern to many of us is the burgeoning trade in imported wild species for the pet trade. Hummingbirds from South America bring \$50 and up in a Denver pet shop, and hordes of individuals of scores if not hundreds of species seem available to anyone willing to pay the price. This is commercial exploitation that rivals the plume trade of the turn of the century. California, a principal port of entry, is reviewing its laws and regulations, and it is hoped that this review may give the nation a new perspective on a problem created by the advent of inexpensive air freight.

WOS CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

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