

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

(The following address was presented by Douglas James, President of the Wilson Ornithological Society, first at a recent conference on the amateur in ornithology held at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, and later at the annual meeting of the Society this past May in West Virginia.)

Among the diverse facets of science and natural history, the study of birds has been particularly captivating to the lay person, the so-called amateur. Because of this rather unique and continuing interest, the science of ornithology has benefited through favorable public support. In return, the interested public has enjoyed the good feeling associated with becoming involved. The ornithologist seldom has fostered a schism of alienism that often pervades other scientific disciplines. Some would argue that this accessibility of ornithology to the general public actually has retarded progress in ornithology due to the inertia against changing concepts frequently encountered in the views of the non-scientist. This, of course, is a debatable point. A consideration that is not controversial, however, is the acknowledged large contribution lay members of ornithological societies make through dues payments in supporting the ornithological journals. Thereby the amateur greatly expands the opportunity for publishing the fruits of scientific labors produced by the practicing ornithologist. This has to count as an outstanding contribution of the amateur to the success of ornithology. Admittedly, this large lay audience may exert a subtle negative influence on the quality of the journal contents, but this factor certainly must be outweighed by the implemented great increase in number of journal pages. Because of this kind of amateur support, there are 5 ornithological journals in this country that receive national and international circulation. This is an enviable position not enjoyed by any of the sister sciences in vertebrate biology. On inspection of membership rolls of the societies supporting these ornithological journals, it is strikingly obvious that the proportion of amateurs as members is much higher than the proportion of amateurs that publish in the same journals. The professional ornithologist is overrepresented in the publications and thus benefits greatly from support from amateurs.

The Wilson Ornithological Society is one of these journal societies. An appraisal of its activities clearly indicates that its main focus pertains to maintaining a quality journal in ornithology, *The Wilson Bulletin*. The only coordinated group activity of the Society is the annual meeting, which is attended by merely 10% of the members. This is comparable to meeting attendance ratios of the other major ornithological societies. Therefore, the Wilson Ornithological Society, like the others, reaches its membership, stimulates their interest, and attracts their support primarily through the publication of a journal devoted to papers in original research in ornithology. I cannot emphasize enough the importance to ornithology of the amateur's role and interest in supporting this enterprise.

Recognizing this present day situation, it is interesting to note that The Wilson Ornithological Society was indeed founded by amateurs, and by perhaps the most uninitiated cadre of amateurs, depending on one's view. In fact, the charter members in 1888 were a group of pre-college boys. The details have been stated before, so I need not dwell on them here, except to say that many of these 36 youths previously had become acquainted in an organization called the Young Ornithologists' Association. Most originally had met through correspondence in response to egg exchange advertisements in *The Oölogist*, but they were interested in more than just data gathering, and lacking a

deep knowledge of anatomy, physiology, and taxonomy, they wanted to conduct meaningful studies in field ornithology. Even in those early years the membership had a coast to coast scattered distribution united only by a publication that eventually became *The Wilson Bulletin*.

All this emphasizes the early tradition of the amateur in ornithology in the Wilson Society. And I purposely say "the amateur in ornithology" which is vastly different from what would have been incorrectly implied by the phrase "amateur ornithologist." Some of these lads eventually became professional biologists. George Hall, who has reviewed all the past issues of the *Bulletin*, informs me that this prevalence of the amateur characterized the Society until the time of World War II. After that, the proliferation of professional ornithologists was conspicuous and it continues to be a significant trend in the Society.

So far I have described how the Wilson Society was at first a wholly amateur enterprise, becoming transformed more recently into a noteworthy support of ornithology through amateur participation in Society membership. This latter, of course, is a passive relationship. The Wilson Ornithological Society also provides an active support of the role of the amateur in ornithology. I think more properly stated, it provides the amateur with the opportunity to become significantly involved in and make contributions to ornithology. The Society directly encourages ornithological research by amateurs through the annual Margaret Morse Nice Awards, which are grants in support of research given to deserving applicants who are not professional ornithologists. The annual Edwards Prizes for the most significant papers in *The Wilson Bulletin* reward amateurs when they happen to be the prize winning recipients. And, in fact, the *Bulletin* is an avenue for publication of research projects conducted by amateurs, whether members or not. Many amateurs have taken advantage of the open forums at annual meetings of the Society to present the results of their research on the program for scientific papers. Also, amateurs frequently are officers of the Society, and thereby play an especially significant role in ornithology. Finally, the Society offers a particularly important opportunity to amateurs, and all members, in maintaining the Van Tyne Library at the University of Michigan. Holdings in avian biology in this library collection are available on loan to any society member; this provides access to items that are not available in most local libraries used by amateurs.

Everything about the encouragement of amateurs by the Wilson Society, and the involvement of amateurs in the Society, speaks to a personal rather than a coordinated group participatory relationship. There are no programs comparable to the Christmas Bird Counts, Breeding Bird Survey, bird banding efforts, or nest record schemes, specifically originated and coordinated by the Society. I do not view this as a mindless deficiency on the part of the Society. The amateurs in the Society who have made really significant ornithological contributions have described to me how their inspiration derived from personal contact with scientists in the Society, made possible of course by the existence of the Society, but not arising from any special group program sponsored by the Society.

Therefore, Kenneth Parkes is correct in reminding me that the Wilson Society has been very instrumental in encouraging amateurs on an individual basis, but has not been especially concerned with developing group participation projects that mobilize amateur efforts focusing on specific ornithological problems. Nevertheless, elsewhere there certainly have been significant group efforts of this kind, more should be developed, and The Wilson Ornithological Society would be pleased to offer its facilities to assist in any way it can.

In view of the successful experience of the Wilson Society with regard to the participation of the amateur, I would make a recommendation concerning group projects in ornithology. I think that the reason the Wilson Society survived and flourished under the blend of amateur and professional expertise is that both groups realized a common goal of accomplishment. This means that amateurs like professionals were encouraged not only to gather pertinent data relative to their studies, but also could follow through in data analysis, and could develop the conclusions pertaining thereto. If more group projects are forthcoming that involve the mobilization of amateurs to collect ornithological data relating to important avian research problems, then the same amateurs, to really become involved and motivated, should have the opportunity in these projects to participate in the data analysis, data interpretation, and in forming appropriate conclusions. This to me is the real lesson arising from the past experience of The Wilson Ornithological Society and is the overriding dominant principle that spells success to the cooperation between the amateur and professional in producing significant advances in the science of ornithology.

ORNITHOLOGICAL NEWS

NOTICE TO CONTRIBUTORS

Effective immediately, new manuscripts to be considered for publication in the Wilson Bulletin should be sent to editor-elect, Dr. Jon Barlow, Department of Ornithology, Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 2C6. Correspondence concerning volume 90 of the Wilson Bulletin should be sent to the present editor.

HAWK MOUNTAIN RESEARCH AWARD

The winner of the first annual Hawk Mountain Research Award was James C. Bednarz of Iowa State University for his studies of the "Status and habitat utilization of the Red-shouldered Hawk in Iowa."

The Board of Directors of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association announces its second annual award of \$250 for support of raptor research. The Hawk Mountain Research Award is granted annually to a student engaged in research on raptors (Falconiformes).

To apply, students should submit a description of their research program, a curriculum vitae, and two letters of recommendation by 31 October 1978 to: Mr. Alex Nagy, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association, Route 2, Kempton, Pennsylvania 19529.

A final decision will be made by the Board of Directors in February 1979.

Only students enrolled in a degree granting institution are eligible. Both undergraduate and graduate students are invited to apply. Projects will be judged competitively on the basis of their potential contribution to improved understanding of raptor biology and their ultimate relevance to conservation of North American hawk populations.