

CENSOR YOUR LOCAL EDITOR

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It often seems that the man in the street, the average individual, has little voice in determining conservation principles and practices, especially when we are unsuccessful in our efforts to pass, or to prevent the passage of, some particular piece of legislation. But there is one way in which we can and should make ourselves heard, and that is in respect to newspaper reporting of natural history material. I have been appalled at some of the

articles that have appeared in print in newspapers and popular magazines on such subjects as the killing of hawks, owls, and I might add beneficial snakes. I have raised my voice in protest, usually in vain, and when I have sought help of authorities in conservation, I've often been told: "Oh, you have to get used to that sort of thing in the papers and ignore it. It's the popular point of view and you can't combat it very well." Well, I want to try to combat it, and I feel strongly that if we will make it a practice to write a protest to a newspaper or magazine every time an article or column appears which contains inaccuracies or which advocates extermination of predators, which usually means hawks and owls, our combined voices will get results. Hunters and fishermen who are true sportsmen are with us and will back our efforts.

Ithaca is fortunate in having a newspaper whose editor will not publish lurid items about eagles attacking people, numbers of crows and hawks shot by intrepid hunters, etc., and the paper does publish a weekly column on natural history and conservation which is accurate, factual, and aimed to satisfy the most ardent hunter as well as the "nature-lover" in the narrow (and sometimes derogatory) sense of the word.

But there are cities in our state, larger than Ithaca, which continue to publish pictures of individuals holding a protected hawk which they have shot or clubbed (and which may be identified in the picture as an Eagle, also protected) with captions implying that the killing is to be commended. As recently as December, a column in a newspaper in one of our largest cities advocated shooting every Snowy Owl seen. The Snowy is protected in our state, and even if it were not, educated people know that its favorite items of food are mice, rabbits and pigeons. The writer of this column later apologized for it, because enough people in the area protested. I think that we members of the Federation of N. Y. State Bird Clubs and readers of the KINGBIRD have a real role we can play in cleaning up inaccurate and biased reporting on the subject of conservation. Don't just sputter when an article rubs you the wrong way. Do something about it, and ask your friends to. Editors want to please their readers, and they'll watch their reporting and admonish their columnists if there are enough protests.

Another way in which we can be of service to the papers is in offering our help in identifying birds. Newspapers which would never dream of using an unverified news item about an individual will publish an item to the effect that a strange bird had been reported killed near the City Hall, which had been identified by a bystander as a Kingfisher — following which there will be a good description of a Green Heron. I have in my hand a clipping which describes a Junco as "not as large as a Starling, dark blue, with white visible in the wings when flying."

Suggest to your editors that they call a representative of the local bird club, or get in touch with the biologist at the nearest college, when there is a question of identification, or offer your own services. Let's strive for more accuracy in newspaper and magazine articles on wildlife, and more intelligent write-ups on conservation.

"Aviana", Etna, N. Y.