

THE PRESIDENT SPEAKS

(Ed. Note: Before Paul Kellogg left for Africa he prepared an interesting and informative message for the Federation. I am taking the liberty of holding that paper for the next issue and printing instead a letter he sent from Africa where he was visiting the group there recording bird songs for the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Dr. Kellogg is in charge of that expedition.)

1956 East African Expedition
Nairobi, Kenya
6 April 1956

Dear Gerry,

I wish I could tell all members of the Federation, indeed all bird lovers, what a wonderful place Kenya is.

First I was impressed with the variety of species and the numbers of individuals even around the City of Nairobi. Not only are many of the species very colorful but many of them have unusually beautiful songs. One relative of our thrushes, Heuglin's Robin-Chat, may, I believe, be judged to be one of the world's finest songsters, but there is much to be learned about the song of even this fine singer. We have at least 25 minutes of recorded song from three individuals but I'm sure we have only begun to appreciate the bird's ability to vary and improvise.

Most impressive were the Flamingos. In the Bahamas I have seen a thousand birds in one flock. Here I first saw an estimated 20,000 Lesser Flamingos. I could hardly believe it, but then on Lake Rudolf, in Ferguson's Gulf, I estimated a flock to have 30,000 birds and then another 40,000. The larger flock was beginning to nest and the birds did not move far away as we walked among the nests. Already the mouths of the local Turkana tribesmen were beginning to water for what they knew would be a rich harvest and change of diet. We are assured that no egg in this huge colony would hatch, unless by accident, for the Turkana are very hungry and have very sharp eyes. Even though the Flamingo has been declared to be "Royal Game", the Turkana don't understand and continue to eat every egg they can find. Somewhere there must be a nesting ground which is inviolate. It is rumored that it is on an island to the south in the middle of an impenetrable swampy lake which is alive with hungry crocodiles—and believe me, the natives have great respect for the lowly croc.

This letter is getting longer than I intended but there seems to be no end to the wonders of bird life here in an area which seems hardly larger than New York State. Within a range of a few hundred miles you have steaming jungles at sea level, towering mountains up to 19,000 feet which are perpetually snow-capped even on the equator, upland plateaus of 5 to 8,000 feet which remind you of central New York in June, and deserts as dry and hot as almost any in the world. The roads are good but the remote ones are likely to be very dusty and during the rainy season there are likely to be delays of a few hours to several days while the streams subside. However stream-sides are good places to see birds, so we've enjoyed every minute of our safari.

I do hope that everything is going well with *The Kingbird* and with plans for the Westchester meeting. I expect to be in Ithaca after April 15.

With best wishes, I am,

Cordially yours,
Paul