

CONSERVATION NEWS

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As far as legislatures and Congress are concerned, the individual citizen finds it difficult to imagine his own occasional efforts (messages he might send for examples) having anything really to do with what finally gets printed in the law books — or, as in the instance of the Great Horned Owl in New York State, what does not go into the books. But anyone who wrote, wired or telephoned to Albany should feel, in great part, personally responsible for the Great Horned Owl victory.

It was a dramatic (I am not taking any license with this word) demonstration of a public's — in this case, the birding public's — penmanship, typewritership, night lettership or whatever means is used to let the lawmakers know. For the messages that kept the mail carrier and Western Union boys running back and forth to the state senator's offices pulled back the Great Horned Owl bill from the precipice of legislative passage.

The bill, that would have removed this species from the State's list of protected birds, had been swept through the Assembly. Quickly afterwards it came within one vote of the required majority (30 out of 58 senators) in the upper house. The tally was 29 to 18.

This was Wednesday, March 14. Senator Janet Gordon of Norwich, the sponsor, was to bring the bill up for reconsideration the next day. The New York Times declared its "approval virtually certain."

But that day (Thursday, March 15) the New York City bus strike was moving toward a climax in Albany where the Legislature was to approve a city take-over of some of the lines. The senators were off in huddles or hearings. Senator Gordon apparently could not rally enough of them in the Senate chamber at any one time to obtain the 30 votes. That afternoon the Legislature adjourned.

This gave birders the long weekend to avalanche the senators with telegrams. However, by early, Monday afternoon (March 19) the bill's approval that night seemed certain. But it was still too soon to know the effect of these telegrams on the senators — something that would not be known until they had started returning later that afternoon in time for the Monday evening session. The week's proceedings do not begin until Monday evening, giving the legislators all day Monday to return.

But the bill was not called up for consideration that night.

By this time H. Everest Clements of Rochester was in Albany calling on the senators — he was to see more than 30. Mr. Clements, who had a lot to do with New York State's acceptance of a model hawk and owl law, had gone to Albany at his own expense. Good naturedly describing himself as the "unpaid lobbyist for the Great Horned Owls in New York State", he explained why the owl should be saved. He reported that he found many interested senators.

Several of them told him that they were receiving numbers of protests and as a result were going to switch their votes. Several of them were men who admitted that, when they gave their votes to Senator Gordon, they had not thought anyone would care about an owl. The messages from the Federation members alerted them to the fact that this was not true, and hence brought about this switch of crucial votes.

Two days before the Legislature adjourned for the year, Senator Gordon moved to recommit the bill to committee.

I must make an important observation about this victory. Being chairman of the Conservation Committee, I was in touch with many of the clubs throughout the state by mail — and particularly during that crucial weekend, by telephone. I was aware of the state-wide proportions of our effort. I realized that in any such effort, each club — although not in communication with the others — can know that the others are also engaged in the same effort. This I feel, is a fine argument for membership in the Federation.

We, of course, were not alone. The State Department of Conservation issued a statement of opposition. Organizations, like garden clubs, responded when asked by birders. Several county sportsmen's groups also sent in telegrams of protest despite the state organization's (New York State Conservation Council) campaign to pass the bill. In fact, the leader of the opposition in the Senate, Senator Harold A. Jerry, Jr., of Elmira, is himself a hunter and a member of several sportsmen's organizations.

Senator Jerry has warned that the bill could be revived in the next Legislature.

Letters from Federation members have also had their impact in Washington. When the Golden Eagle bill was before the House Committee on the Merchant Marine and Fisheries, one of the New York congressman on that committee said he wanted to get the bill reported out, simply to stop the great flow of letters urging protection of this bird.

It was reported out. It was passed by the House of Representatives April 2. It was sent to the Senate Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce. But as of this writing some opposition was developing. New York birders were urged to write the Committee chairman urging him to report the bill, SJ 105, out of Committee — the chairman being Senator Warren G. Magnuson, c/o Senate Office Building, Washington, D. C.

The Forest Preserve, of course, had to be brought up in the Legislature this year. This time it was in the form of a bill that would have rewritten the "forever wild" clause in the Constitution to split the Preserve into three areas: one for wilderness use; one for mass recreational activities; one for fishing, hunting, but where motorized transportation could also be allowed. Although withdrawn from consideration this year, the sponsors, Senator Warren M. Anderson of Binghamton and Assemblyman Richard J. Bartlett of Glens Falls, asserted it would have to be introduced again — perhaps next year.

The New York Times, in an editorial April 5, attacked the bill. But the editorial did say that, in the interests of areas that could usefully be sold or exchanged and also for permitting additional trails and shelters, that "The Constitution does need some revision to permit such changes."

The editorial cited, as a case in point, the amendment to allow Saranac Lake to exchange forest land for Preserve land that could be used by the community as a dump. This amendment was approved this year. If passed at the next Legislative session, it would go before the voters in November, 1963.

The voters this year will vote on an additional 25-million-dollar park bond issue to supplement the 75-million-dollar bond issue approved two years ago.

The Conservation Department expects within a year or two to conduct a study on the Mourning Dove status in New York State. This could have some bearing on future hunting possibilities of the bird here. There is a bill in Congress to prohibit the hunting of the Mourning Dove throughout the Nation. It is HR 9882 by Rep. Joseph E. Karth of Minnesota, to amend the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to effect this.

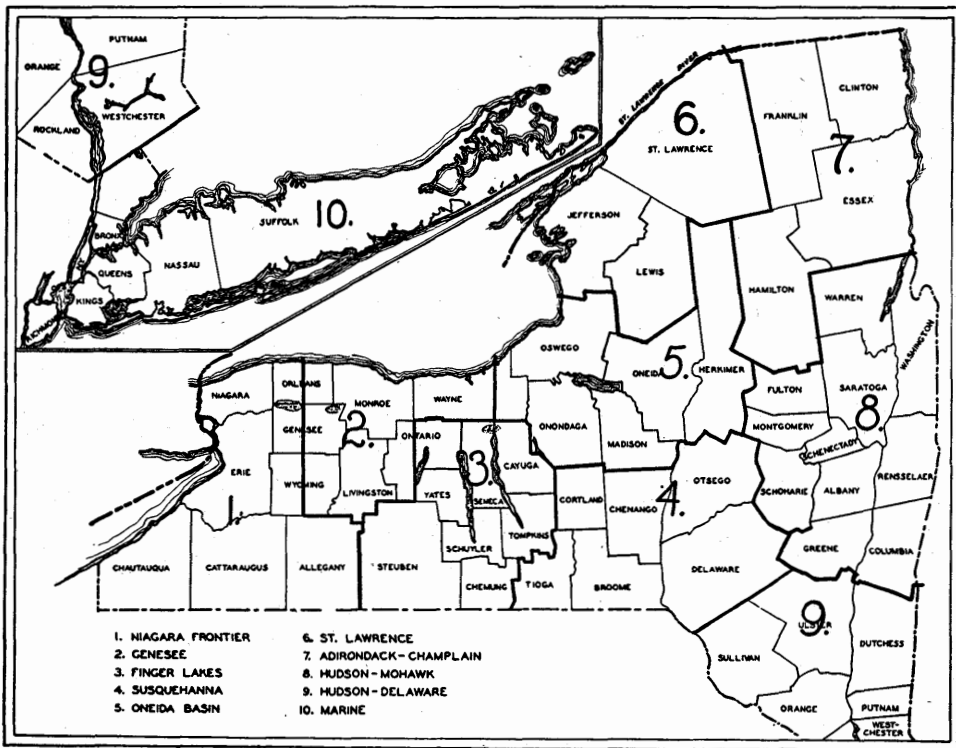
One of the Federation's Conservation Committee members has been appointed a member of the newly created Nassau County Conservation Committee. Cornelius Ward, president of the Baldwin Bird Club, was appointed by Nassau County Executive Eugene Nickerson.

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REPORTING REGIONS



For descriptions of Regions see Kingbird Vol. IV, Nos. 1 and 2