

CONSERVATION NEWS

BY MAXWELL C. WHEAT, JR.

"I think the insecticides situation is far worse than we realized."

This was the plainness and bluntness of the statement made by Roger Tory Peterson in his talk to Federation members and guests at the annual meeting.

The famous ornithologist, whose guidebook nearly every birder has stuffed into a pocket when in the field, reiterated his concern several times as he pointed to diminishing populations of species and elaborated on incidences of unhatched eggs. He warned that "The Osprey and Bald Eagle may be gone from the east coast in ten years."

"Heaven knows how much DDT we have in our own systems," he declared, citing the findings reported by Rachel Carson in her book "Silent Spring."

Remarking that bird watchers by tradition have always been a little ahead of everybody else in such matters, he said that "it is up to us to combat the expensive campaign the chemical companies are putting on — one company giving a quarter of a million dollars to fight Rachel Carson."

Dr. Peterson suggested that the Federation clubs and members could make a real contribution by taking breeding bird censuses. To prove a point, he said, you can't simply say that the Robins in a locality have suffered. You have to have measurable facts, like the censuses of areas which can be compared from year to year.

"For instance, I would like to see more careful counts of heronries," he said. "Some of the chemicals may be showing up in herons. First, we've got to know if there are fewer Great Blue Herons nesting in New York State."

"I would like to see more careful counts of birds of prey." He alluded to the apparent disappearance of the breeding Peregrine Falcon around New York City. Saying there were once perhaps a dozen eyries within an hour of the city, he said that in 1955 "we noticed the eggs were not hatching."

Actually, Dr. Peterson's call for more breeding bird censuses was anticipated earlier in the convention when Dr. Stephen Eaton of St. Bonaventure University and chairman of the Publications and Research Committee, made the same plea in his report to the delegates attending the Council meeting.

It is significant how far reaching can be the consequences of efforts in which bird watchers have taken the lead. For instance, 20 years ago no one hardly thought that a fight to save song birds was more than just that. But today, in trying to save song birds from the effects of spraying, we may actually be helping to save human beings themselves from health problems caused by these poisons.

Bird watchers are trying to save 10,000 acres of salt wetlands on the south shore of Long Island, which are vital for the breeding, feeding and

resting of birds following their age-old paths of the Atlantic Flyway. But in passing a resolution urging the Board of Supervisors of the Town of Hempstead to preserve these wetlands, the Federation noted that they were important for more than the maintenance of critically depleted waterfowl.

The resolution also read that the wetlands "provide the nutrients that support the production and nurture of fish and shellfish essential for the metropolitan area's fishing and are vital for the maintenance of the Long Island water table."

It was with similar motivation — multi-motivations — that the Council endorsed the idea of establishing a national seashore on the barrier beach of Fire Island fronting the Atlantic Ocean off Long Island. The resolution, urging passage of H.R. 3693 by Rep. John Lindsey "To establish the Fire Island National Seashore" read in part as follows:

"We feel it represents an excellent opportunity to have within the borders of New York State a park operated by the National Park Service, offering, in the tradition of that Service, as much access as possible for enjoying camping, hiking, fishing, wildlife study and other outdoor activities."

It is important that clubs and members write urging their respective congressmen to support this legislation — to let the lawmakers know that people from throughout the state want a national seashore on Long Island. It should be reported that Senators Kenneth Keating and Jacob Javits have both sponsored legislation calling for a national seashore on that strip.

The New York Forest Preserve, another area having multi-fold importance for the public, including that of water supply, is the subject of a proposed new policy announced recently by Assemblyman Watson Pomeroy, chairman of the Joint Legislative Committee on Natural Resources.

It is similar to the one he unsuccessfully advocated two years ago. The new plan would encourage foot trails, lean-tos and public campsites in the so-called non-wilderness areas, according to the announcement. Mr. Pomeroy also maintained that the "forever wild" concept would remain the fundamental policy.

As bird watchers, we have found ourselves in the forefront of an effort that actually has the effect of rescuing man from the terrible consequences of his own ignorance-blessed foolishness in tampering with the delicate balance of nature — whether it be playing around with sprays or "salvaging" marshes or swamps. The individual who hardly knows what a Blue Jay looks like might benefit greatly from the fight a local bird club launches to save the nesting grounds of some ducks or to save some songbirds from poisons. A generation ago, even bird watchers might have been surprised by the far-reaching consequences of their conservation work.

A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF NEW YORK STATE ORNITHOLOGY — 1961

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