

CONSERVATION NEWS

MAXWELL C. WHEAT, JR.

A problem that greatly concerned our president, John J. Elliott, was that of insecticides. This concern is reflected in his message "Your President Says" which appears in this issue and which was completed only a few days before his passing. It was his ambition as president to see the Federation take a lead in freeing not only wildlife, but very possibly humans, from the insecticide threat.

From one of our members comes the suggestion that "One thing that bird clubs can do is to lay the FACTS before the public." I have taken the liberty of quoting this apt comment from a letter sent by Maude M. Brown of the Rockland Audubon Society, Inc. She was reporting on the Gypsy Moth airplane spray attack unleashed on Rockland County this spring only a week after the County Board of Supervisors was first advised of it — this according to one of the supervisors. He angrily demanded that the public should be made fully aware of any Federal or State spraying project far in advance so that objections could be raised and possibly settled.

One of the intriguing aspects of this pesticides phenomenon has been the seemingly 'bull in the closet' manner in which many of these spray outbursts have suddenly loomed in our lives — for instance, the possible subjection of all the fields, forests, farms, animals, birds, people within a multi-mile area to an airplane strewing insecticides which are not known for any partiality as to what they light on or affect.

A frenzied bull could not be any more shouted at for failure to heed warnings of shattered china than the determined spray program implementers could be criticized for their seemingly lack of restraint in the face of so many warnings from reputable authorities concerning insecticides. The Rockland County spray dosing with Sevin went right on even after President Kennedy's Science Advisory Committee at the same time issued its report cautioning the nation against the indiscriminate use of insecticides. The Rockland County Audubon Society very rightly publicly opposed the spraying on the grounds that "there is a lack of information in regard to the effects of the widespread application of the material upon other forms of life."

It was a success story in Dutchess County where the letters and phone calls piled up on the responsible authorities as though a dam of public opinion had burst. Those protests, including those from members of the Ralph T. Waterman Bird Club, caused the Conservation Department to cancel a proposed DDT spraying for Gypsy Moth over some 2,500 acres. "We feel that this a great victory," wrote Mrs. Paul P. Haight, chairman of the Thompson Pond Committee of The Nature Conservancy, "and one that can be repeated in any area with the proper backing and perseverance.

The insecticides issue is one that is coming to the fore, especially as more of the public become concerned. I would like to suggest this as a valuable and interesting topic for a club program this year. If you cannot obtain a professor or scientist from some nearby college or experiment station, perhaps some members would volunteer to read "Silent Spring" by Rachel Car-

son and report on it in a panel discussion. Such a program could cover the gamut from the use of insecticides in your garden to the impact of massive control attempts.

Individuals who can have a lot to say about the future of New York State's woodlands, will be able to discuss these factors in an all-day forum Sept. 6, at the Ten Eyck Hotel in Albany. Registration forms (the cost being \$5.00) are available from the New York Forest Land Use Conference, C/O Room 904, 2 West 45th St., New York 36, N. Y. The five participating organizations are the Conservation Department; New York State Conservation Council; New York Forest Industries Committee; New York State College of Agriculture, Ithaca; New York State College of Forestry, Syracuse. Keynoter will be Assemblyman R. Watson Pomeroy, chairman of the Joint Legislative Committee on Natural Resources.

As a representative of the Federation, I attended a symposium this June dealing with preservation of Fire Island. The program included a field trip, led by the world famous ornithologist, Dr. Robert Cushman Murphy, to the barrier strip and a visit to the beautiful Sunken Forest.

After trudging a quarter of a mile through the softer sand on a summer day when the sun seemed to be dripping down on us, it was a unique and fresh feeling to descend from a dune into the coolness of what effected to be a subterranean woods of Holly, Tupelo, Sassafras, Rum Cherry, Pitch Pine, Red Cedar, Red Maple, and oaks. Who would expect to find Canada Lilies, Solomon's Seal and even Skunk Cabbage while above the low, green roof you could hear the squeals of terns and gulls — a woodland here on a slender strip of sand jostled by the Atlantic surf on one side and nudged by the salt bay currents on the other.

During the symposium the well known conservationist Richard H. Pough struck a meaningful note when he pointed out that we were actually trying to save Fire Island for all America. It actually belongs to every American — to the family in Kansas whose members want to spend a vacation seeing the Atlantic Ocean for the first time. They have a right, he said, to find a part of that beach in its beautiful natural state, which is how they could see it on so much of Fire Island.

The Federation is officially supporting Congressman John Lindsay's bill, H. R. 3693, "To Establish the Fire Island National Seashore." Letters to your congressmen urging a Fire Island National Seashore would be helpful in getting across to them the idea that voters throughout the state want such action.

The Federation certainly has a strong and wonderful momentum in the direction of conservation — something that has been passed on to us by our good leadership of previous years and added to everytime there is need by the interested and quick responses of our individual members and clubs. But at this time, I believe I can also say that a good deal of this conservation effort in the past year and a half has been that of John J. Elliott.

Even if many of us who have worked closely with John had been less motivated, we could not have helped but to have been activated by the earnestness of this man in his desire to save our wildlife and wildlands. He was so dedicated and so concerned that he inspired you to want to work hard to save the birds, animals, marshes, woods and all of the wild treasures that he loved so much.

These are not just words being thrown around. They are certainly inadequate words. But they are words struggling to retain something of the quality of this great man of nature.

What was in back of any anxious statement of his about conservation? This was in back of it. A man who would push through a myriad of weeds and bushes to better hear the Field Sparrow's gentle whistle and who would have a running commentary about why he wanted to hear it more clearly and what its singing had meant to him through the years. He was a man who would travel miles and spend a cold winter afternoon pursuing the glimpse of a Bohemian Waxwing. Yet, when he spotted a Yellow Warbler this spring and I started to move on he said, "let's wait a minute," because it was his first for the year and, as he so often put it about birds, he wanted "to feast his eyes on it."

Although I cannot now collect together the exact words from that so recent and yet now so far off past with John, I can in my mind see and hear him still talking about a Scarlet Tanager with that kind of mobile way he had of expressing his thoughts and the glitter and sharpness and joyousness of feeling that were in his eyes as he talked about this bird. He was a man who could tell you to stop the car by an obscure fence post on a back road and wait and soon the House Wrens that he knew had nested there for years would make their chattering appearance — over and over John could take you to these private homes of the birds.

It was in between such experiences while driving or even while observing and hearing the birds that we would talk of insecticides, bounties, housing developments — or talk would continue back at his home after a morning's birding, for he always insisted that you come in where Mrs. Elliott would have wide cups of coffee ready and a newly made cake in the offing. For all this too was a part of working and birding with John.

The talk would go to other things — maybe James Fenimore Cooper's use of birds, or about how an old Frank Chapman bird guide so carefully delineated between two species of flycatchers. John would move into his detailed monologue about these finite differences and details — technical talk, but even that with feeling, enthusiasm and knowledge that far from making you self conscious about your lesser knowledge, would involve you and spur you to enthusiasm and questions (based on what had just been learned from John). Or he would perhaps pull out from his library another old book, often one of the collection of animal stories by a certain, but now forgotten writer. John would tell how these stories of owls, bears, eagles, etc., had interested him in sharpening his observations of animal and bird behavior — a talent that showed up so well in John's own writings on the Ipswich Sparrow, Tree Swallows, or when discussing such phenomena as the "towering" of raptorial birds. In the front of this book, and on other blank pages were a young fellow's own penciled drawings of a moose, a thrush, and a pair of eagles soaring by a mountain ledge — John's drawings of years ago.

All this was what went back of anything he might say of Long Island's thrushes being depleted by insecticides, a housing development eradicating the habitat where for years he had found Grasshopper Sparrows or Upland Plover, or the threat to the ducks, saprows, and other wildlife through dredging of the salt marshes.

All that went behind this man, and with him, makes you want to save what he appreciated, for he could make you love it more. The intensity and joyousness of his interest and enthusiasm seemed somehow to pervade, color and make your own experiences in nature even more meaningful. It was this spirit that went with working and birding with John Elliott, a feeling that I won't forget in my conservation work and birding — but I shall miss his being there.

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FIELD NOTES

Dutchess County's Singular Eastern-Western Meadowlark Successful Hybridization:

On June 18, 1962 word reporting the sighting of what was presumed to be a male Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*) was received. The place of this first sighting for Eastern New York State was in the northeastern part of Dutchess County, approximately nine air miles from Connecticut. Naturally this news was received with interest by a number of Ralph T. Waterman Bird Club members in the area.

My personal introduction to the bird, so similar in appearance to our Eastern Meadowlark (*S. magna*), was on June 19. The weather was clear and hot, preceded by several such days and by an early dry spring.

The habitat in which this Western Meadowlark was found seemed a far cry from the prairie type environment one may visualize as its home domain. The singster's choice of topography was composed of fairly open rolling, sidehill hay and pasture fields, interspersed with small wooded areas. The observed range traversed by this bird was some two hundred and fifty yards in radius and the land elevation was between 850' and 950'.

Further study on June 20 revealed that the bird seemed to show a preference to sing from a specific area on a telephone line sixty feet away from a country cross road. Here, he frequently perched and gave forth his beautiful, quite flute-like varied songs and calls. Observations by this time indicated that this Western bird was attentive to a female Eastern Meadowlark and a mating may have ensued — a rarity even where the two species' territory overlap and where they are commonly found in the same field.

At times, when the female returned to the singing area, the male flew to meet her repeating the short, guttural, 'chuck, chuck' and/or the gurgling, rolling calls of the Western Meadowlark. These distinctive calls were given intermittently through the day.

At no time was another Meadowlark of either species viewed in the immediate region. Several times observers heard notes similar to those of the Western Meadowlark, raising the question as to the possibility of more than one of that species being about. This, I feel, was not the case, having noted a starling nesting nearby, emitting like calls.

On June 23, attempts to locate the anticipated nest of this pair of Meadowlarks resulted in these observations. At intervals of ten to fifteen minutes, the female returned to the vicinity of the telephone line, circled about and lit on the ground 20' to 30' north of what later proved to be the nest. The female's trips through the short hay to the nest and the subsequent feeding took several minutes. Only on one occasion did the male appear to accompany here to the nest. After watching closely the point of the bird's departures, I made a direct approach to the spot. On the ground, in and under a roughly arched tuft of dry grass and lined with the same material, was the nest. The nest opening, about 2½" in diameter, revealed the presence of five young birds. Natal down was still attached to the ends of their partially sheathed feathers, and the brood all appeared in good health. Some spotting of breast feathers was discernable and also the yellow breast coloring as is present in the adults. During my brief period at the nest, the male made short flights from his perch and gave forth many of his 'chuck' and rolling calls. The