

CONSERVATION NEWS

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If you have felt uncomfortable with that appellation "bird watcher", but embarrassed to admit it, you can now replace this label with no apologies. It's out of date. Today many more persons are watching birds closely; the more precise yet all-inclusive term would be "bird observer".

"To see, perceive or notice", one set of meanings for *observe* in the dictionary, would encompass those who notice and watch — those who will joyfully keep eyes focused through a kitchen window on a Chickadee hanging upside down on a piece of suet, or who will stand on a beach entranced at a flock of Tree Swallows pirouetting against the backdrop of a late summer sky. Others might whip out notebooks to record how long a Chickadee maintains that skyward view of his repast or how many swallows are in the flock. "To watch, view or note for some scientific, official or other special purpose", says the dictionary, thus embracing the growing numbers of note takers and census takers in birding ("birding" which can become synonymous with bird observing as "birders" can become synonymous with bird observers).

Closer watching and counting of birds is increasing, largely because of appeals for the quantity of information that only myriads of amateur bird observers can provide. In particular demand are observations and counts of breeding birds. Last year Walter E. Benning, R.D. #1, Clyde, asked Federation members for the location of heronries and figures of active nests. Such compilations might substantiate reports that Great Blue Heron populations are down — for which pesticides have been suspect. Two young observers in the Linnaean Society of New York have been giving informative "pep" talks urging bird observers to take breeding bird censuses. Jeffrey Zupan and Fred Heath in the *Linnaean News-Letter* (Feb. 1965) wrote that "The cause of conservation can often be positively advanced with the aid of definite quantitative material . . ." For example, it is one thing to claim that breeding birds have decreased in a wooded, swampy portion of a New York City park because of the Park Department's bulldozing and paving. It is something else to be able to report, as these two breeding-bird census takers can, that in 1962 there were 29 nesting species, but that only 5 can be expected this year. If this prediction is close to the 1965 census figures, the claim against the Park Department will have effective substantiation.

The Federation can "observe" with pride that a nest-record card program successfully conducted by one of its clubs was put on a nation-wide basis last January by the Laboratory of Ornithology, Cornell University. The Onondaga Audubon Society and Dr. David Peakall have been working with the Laboratory for the past two years on this effort. Observations on nest sites, heights from ground, hatching success, etc., are recorded on cards provided by the Laboratory. "Everyone", says the Laboratory, "seriously interested in birds can participate, whether a seasoned nest finder or one who merely watches a nest from a window."

Let the Federation, already a leader in conservation, become a leader in cooperating with the breeding heron counts requested by Walter Benning; in conducting breeding bird censuses as advocated by the two young New York observers; in finding nests and reporting data about them as urged by the Laboratory of Ornithology. You will be putting figures and documentation in the pens and speeches of conservationists.

This is a country where everyone is from one state — Missouri. "I'm from Missouri. Show me! So you say there aren't so many robins around this town since we've been sprayin' for mosquitoes. What figures have you got to prove it?" Through these data compilation programs you can help conservationists "show" the public.

We have to help because too often the necessary research has been neglected — brushed aside, I would suggest — by a chemical manufacturer with a potent new pesticide that will meet public demand for backyard relief from mosquitoes, or by a huge power company or other industrial giant making more "progress" to meet a "public need". Nowhere can that "bull in a china closet" phrase be better applied than to an industrial Paul Bunyan in the wild. It is not only the industries that can be blamed, but often the government agencies that give them license.

For example, conservation experts have asked for three years to study the ecology of the Hudson River to determine what effect a new power plant there might have on the fish — and on fishing. No. The Federal Power Commission bluntly, by a 3 to 1 decision, told Consolidated Edison Power Company to go ahead with its multi-million dollar (there's something magical about millions of dollars) power plant at scenic Storm King Mountain on the Hudson. Belatedly the company offered research funds to study the possible effect on fish. But if the findings were adverse, would it be realistic to expect the company to abandon such a gigantic project?

Perhaps this will be an instance when powerful federal agency formidability and multi-million dollar aura have been pushed too far. What right, people are asking, has the Federal Power Commission to rule on the fate of fish and fishing or the disposition of natural resources — for that, in effect, was what it was doing when it approved the Storm King plant. Congressional hearings were scheduled to get underway this spring by the Fisheries and Wildlife Subcommittee of the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee to investigate the FPC's licensing of this plant. Bills to create a Hudson Highlands Scenic Riverway have been introduced in Congress. Citizens are being urged to write asking Secretary Udall to assert his Department's right to have some authoritative say about such scenic and conservation resources. Legal action is also being instituted to reverse the decision that would otherwise be final.

Leading and coordinating the fight by the public is the Scenic Hudson Preservation Conference whose honorary chairman is the New York State enthusiast and writer, Carl Carmer. Contributions to finance the fight are being sought. Five dollars will pay for a membership in this organization located at 205 East 42nd Street, Room 318, New York, N. Y. 10017.

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