

Reports and Journals

Grouse Management Symposium. *Journal of Wildlife Management*, Vol. 27, No. 4. Wildlife Society, Washington, D.C. \$3.50, post free.

This issue of the journal is devoted entirely to North American grouse. The nine species are considered in seven groups (blue, ruffed, sage, sharp-tailed and spruce grouse, ptarmigan and prairie chickens) with two to eleven papers on each group by forty-seven American and Canadian biologists. In addition two introductory papers define the scope of the symposium and the range of the species concerned, two general papers discuss disease and exotic introductions, and there is a seventeen page abstract of the thirty-nine papers presented.

The purpose of the symposium is to "focus attention . . . on what is currently being looked for, found out, and actually being done for (N. American grouse) in the way of management". It is of special interest since the papers presented consider about half the world's species of Tetraonidae, so that it can be regarded as an authoritative account of the progress of two of the world's great nations in the conservation of a group of species of major recreational interest. One may ask what management is achieving and what progress has been made. However only about one-third of the papers are actually concerned with management; the remainder are mostly concerned with status, food habits, movements or behaviour, and with techniques for population studies. One paper describes a notable three-year study of white-tailed ptarmigan, now discontinued. In some cases papers describe initial stages of research into natural history from which management programmes will develop subsequently.

Most papers on management are concerned with blue and ruffed grouse, with one paper each on ptarmigan, sharp-tailed and sage grouse, and two papers on prairie chickens. Management of North American grouse primarily involves assessing changes in numbers so as to determine bag limits for each season, and conserving habitat suitable for the survival of each species. Hand-rearing does not yet seem to be practicable except for research purposes. Introductions of wild-caught ruffed grouse have been successful on five islands in the Great Lakes, but introductions of Old World Tetraonidae have failed and are to be discouraged.

Most North American grouse live in or on the edge of thick woodland or in long grass where it is difficult to count them. Counting therefore depends on indirect methods, the accuracy of which is seldom assessed in this symposium. It is clear from the studies of one of the best known species, ruffed grouse, that "confidence limits of population estimates were sometimes discouragingly wide," and that North American grouse biologists have not yet overcome fundamental problems involved in counting. These problems are of course a basic priority in management schemes. However, except for prairie chickens, it seems that North American grouse are plentiful. Prairie chickens have unfortunately declined so much through destruction of their habitat in most areas that assistance for the conservation of one race is sought from the World Wildlife Fund. Sharptails have decreased locally as a result of hunting, but more generally through the overgrowth of scrub woodland, and Michigan biologists have adopted the apparently drastic methods of burning forests or spraying 2,4-D from the air. Breaks in continuous woodland, and control of browsing by domestic animals and deer are in demand for other species elsewhere.

A general conclusion from the symposium is that most species are holding their own despite a lack of management, and that control of shooting may

rest on counting methods that even the biologists concerned find questionable. The symposium gives the impression of a piecemeal approach to national problems. Some of the writers are working on more than one species; other valuable projects are clearly short-term. Research effort is duplicated in different regions, resulting from state rather than federal organisation because grouse are usually non-migratory. Thus, while the continental approach to North American waterfowl problems is the envy of overseas observers, the regional approach to grouse problems does not seem to have resulted in management policies of equivalent value.

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The Countryside in 1970. Proceedings of the Study Conference at Fishmongers' Hall, London, November, 1963. H.M.S.O., 25s.

Countryside Conference Report. The National Trust for Scotland, 5 Charlotte Square, Edinburgh 2. 3s. post free.

The Countryside in 1970 Conference, held under the Presidency of the Duke of Edinburgh last autumn, was one of the most hopeful developments in the field of conservation in Britain for some time. It brought together for mutual discussion and contact a remarkably wide spectrum of interests, from bird protectionists to the gas industry, from caravanners to foresters. They were split into three working parties, headed by Lord Strang of the National Parks Commission, Sir Christopher Hinton of the Central Electricity Generating Board, and Dr Richard Beeching of British Railways, and the results of their deliberations are contained in this report. A secretariat was appointed to continue the work of the conference, which is expected to reconvene to report progress in 1965, and has recently circulated eighty-eight quarto pages of individual suggestions for improving the co-operative use of the countryside made during the two days at Fishmongers' Hall.

The National Trust for Scotland are to be congratulated for seizing the initiative by holding a similar conference at Inverness on 24th April, 1964. Its membership was if possible even more widely representative, and included six County Councils, three universities, Macbraynes, Ltd., and the Aviemore and Rothiemurchus Village Council. This also represented a useful exchange of views, and set up a standing working party to continue its work.

Annual Report of the International Council for Bird Preservation, British Section, 1963. British Museum (Natural History), London, S.W. 7. 3s.

Another year of progress in bird protection is recorded in this report, especially in the fields of the prevention of irresponsible shooting, the effect of toxic chemicals on bird life and the control of oil pollution. A useful section includes an account of the steps taken to counteract the effects of the cold weather of the 1962-63 winter in various parts of Europe. Austria, Belgium, France, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Norway and Sweden all officially prohibited shooting during the emergency. The Minister of Lands in Ireland appealed for a voluntary ban on shooting all birds, and in Britain an appeal for a similar voluntary ban on wildfowl, which was observed in some areas, was made jointly by the Wildfowl Trust and the Wildfowlers' Association. One good result of the hard winter was the rescinding by the Home Office of the order permitting the taking of the eggs of thirteen common but otherwise protected birds in England and Wales, in order to build up breeding stocks once more. The existence of this order had hitherto been one of the main obstacles preventing the United Kingdom from signing the 1950 Paris International Convention for the Protection of Birds.