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WINTER POPULATIONS

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Dick Smith said something about bird roosts, and I imagine we have more bird roosts than any other state in the nation. I think we could find 50 bird roosts this winter that have a million or more birds in each of them.

I am really proud that John De Grazio's doing some work on behavior because, model or not, these bird roosts occur around people's homes. When this happens, they call the county agent, who calls me; or they call the mayor, who calls the county agent, who calls me, and we have to move the birds. If you can figure out a way to do it, economically have at it -- we have not been able to do it yet.

Being in Arkansas where some of the research has been done with surfactant control, and where you would think that no one would object to killing birds, I discovered that a lot of people there are not very happy about killing lots of birds. This led me to sort of believe that if we had a really good program that would allow us to kill the birds on 50 roosts in one year, first of all I would have to leave the state, and secondly, it might be the last time we could ever do that.

I am not sure that that is our problem. Our problem is that we have these birds sitting in the wrong place; and we, along with the Wildlife Services people, have worked pretty hard on developing a technique for moving birds from where there are a lot of people to where there are very few people.

We have one other problem in Arkansas -- disease problems with histoplasmosis. The health department will tell you that 60% of us would be positive for "histo" if we took a skin test, and I do not doubt it a bit. Many of the roosts in the state, which are developed in the same place for three or four years in a row, will become positive for the fungus that causes histoplasmosis. As a public health role then, it is my belief that no urban area in Arkansas should put up with a bird roost within its city limits. I believe through the use of broadcast alarm and distress calls and some other techniques it is economically feasible to move birds out of every city in the state.

I did not have much help from the state health department for a long time. I wondered why that was true, until I discovered that the man responsible had observed that in Missouri they had at one time a roost from which a number of cases of histoplasmosis developed. The following legislative session one of the legislators introduced a bill to abolish the Missouri State Health Department, because they were supposed to protect people from this sort of thing. So we did not get much help. The state department preferred to soft pedal this type of thing.

Fortunately they hired a man called an environmental engineer, who was young, ambitious, and knowledgeable; and now whenever we have a little pro-

blem, we can get some help by stressing the health aspect of letting a bird roost sit in the city. Nonetheless, the political aspects are very important when you get right down to the nitty-gritty of doing work out in the field.

I would also like to say that our rice producers develop lots of pressure for bird control work. And a good bit of it has been aimed in the past towards lethal control of birds on bird roosts. Using the data which the Bureau has accumulated through banding and returns, we are pretty well able to demonstrate that our big problems to our grains, the rice and milo particularly, are not from northern birds, but from our own local birds which we grow ourselves in Arkansas. Gradually I think we have reduced this big push for a lethal bird control aimed at winter roosts only. That control might have produced a reduction in blackbirds which helped folks in Ohio, but I do not think it would have helped the grain growers in Arkansas particularly.

In grain fields we do not have any lethal techniques. We have had to try to sell the producers on using the techniques which are available. I might say that we have found that broadcast alarm calls together with carbide guns are effective in some instances; but folks in Arkansas do not care for carbide guns, so we can hardly sell them on using that method. Until the Food and Drug Administration banned the interstate shipment of fireworks, the old rope firecracker would almost promise a farmer that he could move birds out of his field with broadcast distress calls and a little other help from some noise makers.

But of course the birds go to another field. Actually they probably spread around, which distributes the damage, and I do not really believe that the average rice farmer feels that a little damage is bad; he expects it. But when he gets 50,000 birds in one field, he demands an answer; *and* we have to give him some kind of an answer.

I think that is the biggest problem we encounter in Arkansas. We would like some more research, some more techniques. Those of you who have any experience with rice farmers know they would like to be able to call the airplane and have him spray something on the rice that would repel the birds, or preferably, kill them. I do not think we will ever get that, but we are hopeful that some of the research that the Bureau is doing will enable somebody to register some new products which will help us.

I would also like to tell you a little bit about Avitrol and the work that is being done in Ohio on it. Whether it is right or wrong, there was some political input, which in part enabled this research to be done; and we were hopeful that it would leak over into Arkansas and help us with some of our problems.

We have a real problem with some individuals. Our experimental stations have done a lot of work on bird resistant varieties. We have one of the biggest poultry industries in the nation, and our poultry people will not buy bird-resistant varieties because they get poor feed conversions from that when using the non-resistant varieties. So our farmers are going to non-resistant varieties and they are asking how do you keep the birds out of them, and that is the problem we have to solve. If anybody wants a problem to deal with, there it is.

Question: Have you actually put figures on the loss of rice?

Answer: No, not in the last three years. The figures that we have had, have been county agent figures which they have made by polling farmers. These figures have remained pretty stable over a period of years. It is very hard to determine just what the damage is on a rice crop. This year we have had a damp year with a good bit of fungus disease. When the plant specialists come with a damaged specimen of rice and ask us to determine if it is bird damage, or fungus damage, or if it just blanked out, it is really extremely difficult to say if the rice was bird damaged or what. In one field where we had lots of damage, by checking every day, we could pretty well determine that that farmer was losing about one percent of his crop per day to birds. However this situation does not develop very often. He may never have this problem again or it may be in his neighbor's field. So our figures are admittedly kind of off the top of our heads. Statewide, I really would not want to be tied down to saying how much damage we have because some people have none and some have a little that they are willing to put up with.

We probably spend two or three hundred thousand dollars a year in bird repellent methods, but this varies from year to year. Now this year I did not hear very much static about bird problems in grain fields. We had an unusual year in which a few fields were planted early, and then we had a rainy season, and the rest were planted late. Those early fields apparently had a little damage. Actually I got more calls out of Mississippi than I did out of Arkansas about bird damage. It may have been because of our floods down there that covered the land for six months instead of one or two. Possibly this flooded out a lot of our local nesting, and we may not have had as many birds as normal this year. Nonetheless, we do need some new materials, and we do need some new techniques in helping the individual who is having the problem.

Question: What are the auditory methods you do invest in? You made the comment that in Arkansas you invested X hundred thousand dollars a year.

Answer: Oh, this is the rice farmer, and he has not given up completely on the carbide gun. He will use a shotgun and some will fly the birds by plane, or try to herd them by plane. I know one farmer who got a big siren on it, furnished the plane and the noisemaker, and paid a pilot seven hundred and some dollars just to fly his fields. He was very successful; his neighbor was having all kinds of problems. We have some of it invested in amplifiers and speakers, which I am pretty sure I could demonstrate will move birds farther than a shotgun or a carbide gun.

While I am here, I might make one comment about Avitrol and sunflowers. In our Delta field station we have done some experiments on sunflower varieties. Last year the birds ate them all up. Now this station happens to be located next to the Woppanokka Wildlife Refuge and some other habitat which maintains a large floating population of non-breeding birds. They are just there. Sometimes they have lost many sunflowers to goldfinches, but that did not

happen this year.

This year they had a plot a little over a half-acre in size with 48 regional varieties of sunflowers in it. A little plot like that gets pretty heavy bird pressure. So at first, they shot at them, trying to scare them. Anyway, we used Avitrol, the same material you use in corn. I did not believe it would work, but it did, or rather something worked. You would be astounded at how the losses dropped and how many sunflowers they harvested off that varietal test plot. It was worth their doing it, and they are expecting to do it again if they raise more sunflowers in that situation.

We do have one other problem that arises sometimes. Quite often in Arkansas wheat or oats are planted for winter grazing and occasionally we will get a lot of bird damage on that. I have seen a 40-acre field almost destroyed, particularly if it is near a roost. We would like something to help folks in that situation. If someone depends on that wheat for winter grazing, it is quite a loss to him. It is not a big problem, and this is probably why no one is working on it; but to the individual small farmer this is a problem.