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4th Bird Control Seminar -- INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

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INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

Dr. William B. Jackson, Chairman
Bowling Green State University

My travels the last few years have permitted me to see some aspects of bird management practices in both Asia and Europe. I must confess that had I not seen the Tori gates of Japan or the cathedral spires in Europe, I might well have thought I was in Ohio. Scarecrows were often seen. Fields were adorned with glittering strips of metal or blowing streamers of paper. In Scotland, red balloons flew over a turnip field. The sound of acetylene exploders sometimes fractured the tranquil countryside.

While I saw many essentially useless devices for keeping birds out of man's agricultural acreages, I did learn of some encouraging accomplishments. In Germany Dr. W. Keil (Frankfurt, Institut fur Angewandte Vogelkunde) has developed an acoustic system for reducing starling damage in vineyards and cherry orchards. Broadcasting of the alarm (not distress) call of the female starling with speakers mounted above the trees or vines has reduced damage from 80 to 90 percent to 5 percent. Installation cost was about $70/A.

Bird damage to agricultural crops in northern Europe is not as widespread and of as much concern as in many parts of the U.S. In Germany annual damage to vineyards and orchards, largely by starlings, is estimated at $2.5 million. English sparrows and crows cause additional damage to grain crops.

In Britain the amount is less. Principal damage by wood pigeons in Scotland is to early peas and to turnips and grain later in the summer. In England pigeons and sparrows may invade grain fields. Principal damage to fruit trees is by bullfinches and similar species de-budding trees in early spring; later in the summer, blackbirds (related to our robin) puncture ripening fruit. Linnets may pick seeds off the surface of strawberries.

Bird management problems in Europe may be complex. For example, many of the migrating starlings nest in western Russia. Their numbers have increased because of extensive reforestation and an annual bird day on which citizens hang up nest boxes. Come late summer these birds migrate across western Europe, doing some damage to vineyards, are hunted as a food species (an estimated 1/2 million taken each year) in Spain, and do heavy damage to the North Africa olive crop. How does one achieve international management of such a species under such conditions?

Both attitudes and laws relative to bird control are different in many countries of northern Europe; and the American pest control operator, though he grumbles about the Audubon society and bird lovers, may not recognize his good fortune. Lethal materials generally are not used in European bird control and

chemicals producing pain are absent from the management scene. Even the possibility that Avitrol might have to be officially considered was viewed with some consternation. And the suggested use of a chemosterilant which would deprive birds of a God-given right was rejected immediately.

The work with a narcotic (alpha-chloralose) has proceeded far enough in England so that use permits were being issued this year to a limited number of operators for wood pigeon control. Since the bird is but temporarily immobilized and can be "released" elsewhere, this technique is permitted.

Physical repellents ("scarecrow strip") constitute one of the chief tools of the urban PCO. Shell crackers are available, but their use requires a special firearms permit.

In England the protection of all birds has gone to such extremes that the public safety is endangered. I was appalled by the pigeons in Trafalgar Square, and pigeons in numbers reigned over many squares, parks and other public places. One wag commented that any person foolish enough to attract pigeons to his head with a nut buried in his hair deserved to have ornithosis. In some areas discrete trapping of these pigeons occurs, and likely the use of alpha-chloralose will increase also.

The most recent revision of the English bird protection laws now gives protection to the nest and eggs of even the 16 common and often pest species of birds. One English ornithologist wondered, now with the opportunity for tactile learning by youths who have traditionally collected sparrow nests and eggs or trapped common birds still further reduced, what kinds of ornithologists the new generation will produce.

Many Europeans were clearly concerned about the hazards of a variety of bird species to aviation. Especially with the new, smaller jets (with only two engines low on the body) and the continued use of airport areas by large numbers of gulls and shore birds and the intersecting flight patterns of migratory flocks, the danger is real. Distress or alarm calls have been used with some success. An international committee now is involved in the problem.

Where do we stand in the U.S. in terms of bird management in 1968? How far have we come since our last conference? Some of the same faces are present again; some new organizations are represented. Are we any further along the road to effective bird management?

In one respect we have seen liberalization of attitudes, such that the Fish and Wildlife Service has officially indicated that killing of large numbers of blackbirds may be necessary to provide relief to corn and rice growers. On the other hand, federal registration regulations and concern for pesticide surveillance have grown to the extent that several chemicals about to be ushered into the commercial arena two years ago are still hiding in the wings under limited or experimental registrations. One very real concern is the new role that the federal government may be forcing itself into—that of field testing, evaluating, and marketing candidate toxicants and repellents.

The increasing concern over federal (and state) regulations is, of course, related to increasing interest and tension over all aspects of environmental pollution. While bird control with toxicants has largely used topical applications,

increasing interest in roost treatments does put bird control squarely in the focus. For even treatment of upland roosts with wetting agents raises some questions that we do not have ready answers for. Certainly the use of detergents in marshes or use of organo-phosphates raises other questions. Part of the dilemma is that "wildcat" use of these chemicals by irate farmers may move much more rapidly than our research programs.

Of the many chemicals available, DDT, of course, has been the "whipping boy" for decreases in bird populations. Lethal doses in eggs with resulting death of embryos, decreasing thickness of egg shells, chemical potentiation in the liver, decreased reproductive and survival rates all have been documented, but the actual impact on regional and national populations is still a matter of uncertainty, debate, and concern. Deterioration of the habitat from a variety of other factors complicates the direct cause and effect relationship.

One final concern is that of training. As we have emphasized in previous seminars, bird management requires a special breed of PCO, one who is a bird watcher in the best sense of the word; though this does not suggest he should be a "bird brain." All too few of our universities are providing this kind of applied biological training, and federal agencies in their training programs do no better. The development of adequate training opportunities, materials, and resources is a joint responsibility of all of us.

Bird control programs are expanding. California continues excellent research programs with starlings. (Contact Dr. Robert Schwab, University of California, Davis, for abstracts and bibliography.) Virginia has recently started an intensive and extensive program, including publishing of excellent information leaflets. (Write Mr. Glen Dudderar, VP1, Blacksburg.) The FWS has recently established a blackbird research station in Ohio at Sandusky. And we shall hear more of these and other programs during the next two days.

But now, let the conference speak for itself on the current status of the art and science of bird management.