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ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE ON BIRD MANAGEMENT

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At an earlier research seminar, Dr. John Seubert observed that available evidence indicated the red-winged blackbird was going to be with us for some time, and perhaps we'd better learn to "live with it." Whereupon a representative of the com growers said if Dr. Seubert really believed that, he'd better look for a new job. I sincerely hope this attitude is not too widespread among corn producers and marketers; because if it is, we can expect a lot of pressure designed to force scientists to abandon their search for a safe method of reducing redwing damage.

"Risk now, find out later" has been the guiding policy of pesticide makers, merchants, and control operators for some 30 years. I submit that this policy has cost the consumer and taxpayer far more than if DDT, and most other hard pesticides, had never been discovered.

Yesterday, when the evidence against persistent chemicals was not all in, risk-now-find-out-later advocates may have had some slight excuse for continuing their policy. Today, the evidence is in, - it is conclusive - there is no excuse (unless blinded by greed) for pursuing this suicidal course.

Whether attempting to control mosquitoes, red-wings, or the most recent outbreak of corn blight, if risk now-find-out-later does not die soon, then we can expect a lot of sick and dying people within the decade. We already have a lot of sick and dying people as a result of environmental pollution. No one denies this. So, there is scant excuse for adding one more bird poison to the land unless and until we are certain of its side effects.

All my life I've been reminded that although the last passenger pigeon died before I was born, I seem to have lived very well without it. The peregrine falcon will never again fly the skies of eastern America; our national emblem, the American eagle, had a total production of one in the state of Ohio this year. The osprey is essentially gone from New England, as is the wall-eye, the cisco, the blue pike, and the white fish from Lake Erie.

So what? We're doing all right without them, ain't we? Or, are we?

Lacking more precise instruments, yesterday's coal miner carried a canary to warn him of poisons which he, himself, could not detect until it was too late. Falcons, ospreys and eagles are not canaries. But, I'll tell you what they are: They are dead. You and I will be likewise if we are unable to halt additional pollution of our ecosystem. Indeed, there is no real assurance we have not already passed the point of no return. One thing is certain: The miner could turn and run from deadly poisons. The human race has no place left to go.

How did we get into this mess? It has been developing since Australopithecus - presumably the first of our real swinging ancestors - came down from the trees and learned how to kill other animals using the long bones of antelopes as weapons. Added impetus was given by the Christians who took the book of Genesis literally: "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it,..have dominion over the fish of the sea. fowl of the air.."

And likewise by the western cultures which encouraged man to consider himself not a part of Nature, not part of his own ecosystem, along with nitrogen fixing bacteria, oxygen-producing phytoplankton of the sea, protein-producing plants and animals of air, sea, and land, but to consider himself a special creation to whom laws of chemistry, physiology, and ecology did not apply.

Well, having lived through the dust storms of the '30's, the floods of the '30's, '40's '50's, '60's, and '70's, - the killing smogs in Newark just last month, and witnessing diphtheria in San Antonio, bubonic plague in Arizona, cholera in the Middle East, cornblight in Illinois -I wonder who is dominating what?

Following World War II, the chemist and the engineer joined the agronomist in the College of Agriculture. This team, confronted with the challenge of feeding untold millions, nodded approval as the Secretary of Agriculture said, in effect, "Our job is to produce the maximum bushels per acre at the least cost in dollars and cents. Extirpated plants and animals? Polluted lakes and rivers? Deformed babies? Elimination of small farms accompanied by mass migration to over-crowded cities and welfare rolls? That's not my department," said the Secretary.

The manufacturer, the merchant, and the military pointed to the exploding human population in justifying their combined assault on the land. Aldo Leopold's warning that the land must be treated with love and respect if it's to withstand the impact of mechanized man was laughed out of court.

The dragline, the bulldozer, and ditching machine marched across the flat-lands, tearing out the brushy fencerows, draining the bluejoint grass swale, pushing the burr oak woodlots that dotted the prairies of Wood County into piles and burning them. Entire counties, from the Prairie Peninsula of Ohio to the Sandhills of Nebraska, were converted into almost solid cornfields as agriculture gave way to monoculture. The SCS offered free advice and financial assistance to landowners making these changes here in Ohio. So, the average acreage per farm went up, the average cost per bushel went down.

Crying in the wilderness were ecologists such as Dr. Frank Engler of Connecticut, Dr. John N. Wolfe of Ohio State University, Dr. Paul Errington of Iowa State. "To reduce a vast area to a single plant species is courting disaster. It is violating that fundamental law of ecology: Environmental diversity promotes stability, while simplicity does the opposite. It is ignoring all the lessons we should have learned from history, from cutting of the Cedars of Lebanon, to the Mormon crickets at Salt Lake, to the dust bowl of Oklahoma." said these biologists.

"Go tell it to the starving millions of the world," retorted the Dean of the College of Agriculture, In many cases, the Dean of Agriculture probably sincerely believed he was doing his duty to the human race. He knew for certain he was on solid ground with the mighty U.S.D.A. and the giant agro-chemical industry.

He was well aware of the generous contributions of the latter to various campaign funds, and grants for research in economic entomology. He couldn't help but notice how the U.S.D.A.. actively and openly promoted use of pesticides at the same time it was supposed to "regulate" such use.

When the seafood industry suffered crippling blows from DDT, when game birds in Montana were rendered unfit for human consumption, when human mammary glands began to exude milk with a DDT content the Food & Drug Administration does not allow in cow's milk, the reaction by Agriculture was: "That's not our department."

Now comes the corn blight, which has a perfect medium in which to spread. Lacking any semblance of environmental diversity, we will be extremely fortunate if the fungus does not spread like *Staphylococcus* across a petri dish of agar. The predictions of Drs. Wolfe, Egler, Leopold, Errington and a host of other ecologists are coming to pass.

My suggestion to the corn growers, and those engaged in controlling insects and plants which compete with corn, is that we remember human food is but *one* necessity without which we cannot live. We must have drinkable water, breathable air, *in addition to* an environment diverse enough to provide *some* hope of escaping the meaningless rush and scramble and sordid routines which monoculture, mass production, and machine age philosophy have created.

Some agriculturists have implied that the Audubon Society is "afraid to kill a single blackbird" - or possibly our emotions are such that we abhor blackbird control. Hogwash! We are struggling to maintain an environment in which people can not only make a living, but have something to live *for*. The Massachusetts Audubon Society, in fact, is currently engaged in a gull control program, trying to restore diversity to the coastal fauna.

We are well aware of the dollar loss to the farmer and the grain elevator. We're aware that the redwing eats the same food as the mallard, the pheasant, mourning dove and bob white quail. The black bird, therefore, affects the pocketbook of the hunter, birdwatcher, and scientist as well as the grocery shopper and corn producer.

But, we submit that another biocide blunder such as DDT will cost the consumer far more in doctor bills and loss of recreation than the value of additional food, whether that additional food be actual or merely hoped-for. To those who say, "Look at the millions of lives saved by DDT", professional entomologists such as Dr. Paul Ehrlich point out that no noxious insect has been any more than *temporarily* controlled by pesticides. On the contrary, there is abundant evidence that the target species comes back with a new strain, with inherited immunity to the poison. It's natural enemies, meanwhile, being predators and, therefore, far less abundant than their prey, are usually wiped out. So the net effect is a more complex control problem than the original. The current ridiculous scheme to spray mirex over 210,000,000 acres of the Southeast to control the fire ant is a sad example.

Even if it were possible to keep additional millions of human animals alive long enough to reproduce, who says this is of benefit to the human race? It is way past time that somebody had guts enough to remind the powers-that-be that as a species, we are very poorly adapted to our environment. There is no evidence that our superior intellect, compared with other animals, has any survival value.

We have very badly over-browsed our range, yet over half our global population is slowly starving. To hold out the hope of feeding more than our present over-crowded population is irresponsible - analogous to winter-feeding the starving deer herds that economic accidents have produced around the country. In my opinion, bird control without human birth control is an exercise in futility.

Madison Avenue reminds the layman of his air conditioned house, frozen foods, color TV and jet travel, thus encouraging the belief that Science and technology will somehow always be able to control our environment, keeping it viable for infinite numbers of consumers.

Actually, there is no evidence that environmental controls offer any hope of any such thing. As Dr. Barry Commoner points out, people's lungs are rotting, not because the internal combustion engine is inefficient, but because the lung does exactly what it was designed to do.

The absurd horrors we see this morning in New York, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles are ample evidence that technology, or environmental "control," has produced an environment in which the average human being is no better off, economically or ecologically, than he was a century ago.

Assuming that we possessed a poison capable of eliminating the redwing, as scientists we would be derelict in our duty to our fellow men if we turned such a compound loose in the environment without knowing, in advance, its side effects, and what would likely fill the vacuum resulting from removal of the bird. Although I agree with Dr. Seubert's contention that we should learn to live with the redwing, this does not mean we must abandon the search for an effective control which we can also live with.

Because the chemical industry, the merchant, and the politician were not permitted to interfere with the search for a specific larvicide for the sea lamprey, a control was found and the lake trout fishing industry was restored. Of course, DDT, mercury, PCB's and other fruits of men and molds have now made the coho salmon and other food fish unfit for human consumption. But, the fact remains, a pesticide was developed, which, as far as we know, affected only the target species.

Control of the European corn borer was brought about, not by chemical poisons, but by research on the life history and ecology of the pest. The same is true of the Hessian fly. The same is true of the screw worm in the southeast. The same *could* be true of the fire ant, and the red-winged blackbird.

But, alas! Environmental controls, based on a knowledge of biology, offer no fat profits to the "ag-chem" industry, few jobs, no dramatic issue on which political parties can make promises. Therefore, I can confidently expect my re-commendations for a return to agriculture instead of monoculture, environmental diversity as the answer to corn-destroying fungi and corn-eating blackbirds, to fall on deaf ears.

I shall be labeled a communist, atheist, neo-Malthusian, calamity howling pessimist. Experience has taught me what to expect. I was labeled a pessimist back in the days when sex was considered dirty and the air was considered clean, and you know how long ago that was!

I do not claim that my views on any particular point are those of every member of the National Audubon Society. But, I can guarantee that the Board of Directors

and the administrative staff will continue to oppose, with every means available, the application of any poison before its side effects are predictable.

Faced, as we are, with an acute shortage of food - possible mass starvation within five years - can we ignore the red-winged blackbird as an abundant, inexpensive source of protein? Mist nets stretched across corn fields and marshes could yield hundreds of pounds of good red meat day after day.

Biological research - and an effort to restore diversity to our environment -may appear as a slow horse in the race against mass starvation, but it is the only horse in the race that's moving in the right direction. In view of the afflictions now plaguing both *Zea mays* and *Homo sapiens*, the alternative, it seems to me, is clear. If we choose to live like lemmings, we should expect to die like lemmings.

DISCUSSION OF JOHN ANDERSON

M. KARE: I might comment that I feel your comments are very restrained for the situation that exists. We now are deciding what people in the world will live and those who will die. And certainly in this decade, we are going to have to sit in judgment as to what populations in the world will survive with the food we have. What plans are you making for what animal species will survive, and which will go, as the pressure becomes greater and greater and the environment becomes smaller and smaller?

J. ANDERSON: As far as I know there are no such plans entertained by the National Audubon Society or any other organization, which shows you my reason for saying that we may already have passed the point of no return. I recall during World War II when the Battle of the Bulge was going on and I happened to be working in a general hospital back behind the lines. The casualties came in so fast that we had to divide them into three categories. Those that were beyond any help from the Medical Corps, those that really didn't need help, and those for whom we might possibly do something to help them. I think that in our attitude toward the peoples of the world we are going to have to be hardboiled enough to divide them up in those same categories. I think certain areas of the world are already in the first category.