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OUTLOOK FOR ORNITROL

M. R. Woulfe
G. D. Searle & Co.
Skokie, Illinois

My comments at this point will concern the application and uses of Ornitrol. My comments are aimed at people who are engaged in actual control work, people in public health departments and PCO's.

Ornitrol is a chemosterilant-one of the first ones which has been registered for sale. It inhibits egg production apparently in most avians. We know it does this in pigeons, sparrows, grackles, blackbirds, and chickens. It is reasonable to assume that it will do this in many other species, and this generalized action is one of the reasons why it has got to be handled very carefully where there are desirable species in the general area or they are a component of the total bird population.

Ornitrol stops egg laying after being fed to the birds for some ten days. The compound is given in whole grain impregnated at the level of 0.1% active compound. It stops egg laying for a period of time dependent upon the total amount ingested. After this phase, we do get eggs being laid which are infertile. In pigeons, the female comes back into laying again after a period of about five to six months.

At the present time, we have clearance for the material in pigeons and we are beginning to get organized towards selling it for pigeon control. Work is promising in sparrows, and this is the other species in which we will be interested from the point of view of practicality. Well, I don't need to tell you folks why we need to control pigeons. Everybody at this meeting knows this.

Why do we use chemosterilants as opposed to going out and shooting the birds, or poisoning them, or something else? Well, again most of us know the public relations problems involved. One of the major problems with poisoning, etc., is the recrudescence of the general population back up to where it was in a short period of time when a major vacuum is created in the total population. We have found that by cutting out the reproductive capacity of the females during the crucial spring period we have in many cities, or in seven cities I should say, been able to diminish the population down to point which is dependent upon the availability of alternative feed resources to our grain. In other words, we can never really get rid of every pigeon in the urban area for the simple reason that there will, with the diminution in the total numbers, arise a super-abundance of alternative feed. This is what we have found has happened.

We have found that the best time to use Ornitrol is in February and March before the onset of mating and nesting. Dr. Elder's work in Missouri on several towns indicated that you can also interfere with egg production during the fall rise and, in fact the duration of the effect is somewhat longer in the fall and winter.

At this time, I can visualize use of a chemosterilant in an urban setting where we have a static population that is relatively concentrated. We have been talking the

last few days here about how to tackle migratory bird populations and at this time I do not think we have an answer to migratory control through chemosterilants.

Some of the problems which we have encountered in selling a chemosterilant control approach is that it is an entirely new concept to be presented to the municipality, the mayor, city fathers or whoever the fellows in charge are. The typical problem of the city is everything is going along fine, when a telephone begins to ring and Mrs. Jones over here and somebody else over there says, "What about these pigeons?" "What are you going to do about them?" The city manager wants an immediate answer, an immediate relief of the problem. This Ornitrol will not do. It will take at least one year or probably a two-year treatment before you will see a reduction in pigeon population.

Thereafter, however, we have found that we can maintain the population at a lower total number. We have done this in the city of Bangor, Maine, where we started out with a population of 2500 birds, and in two years we knocked this down to three or four hundred. Subsequently, the last two years we have made material available free to the health department and Fish and Wildlife folk up there, and we have maintained this level of three to four hundred.

The other problem which we have found is the patronage situation. In certain cities where patronage jobs entail pigeon and rodent control, we have found this to be quite a factor, because nobody wants to disrupt the status quo. This problem takes a very intricate explanation and rational presentation of the facts before you can point out the advantages of using chemosterilants. It depends entirely upon to whom you point them out.

Another question which has cropped up is the cost. We don't agree that this is too high. We have not investigated the cost of removing a pigeon recently except in a few places. Elder (1964) found that it cost approximately a dollar to remove one bird from St. Louis. He also found that within six months this bird was back, or its replacement was back, and sitting on the same perch. In one city in the state of New York, we found that it cost four dollars to remove one bird by the trapping, poisoning and patronage route.

As pointed out by Elder some years ago, the way to use a chemosterilant in an urban population is to knock down the population to where you want it either by trapping or poisoning, or if you have an enthusiastic wild populace, shooting, and then use a chemosterilant to maintain bird numbers at the level that you want.

I think I have covered the salient points. The outlook, I think, is, in the long run quite favorable in view of the public's concerns against toxicants, lethal agents, and what have you. Again, I repeat, we are a long way from using chemosterilants, or Ornitrol as an example of one, in a migratory population.

DISCUSSION: M. R. Woulfe

DELEGATE: In Arkansas, as I see it, the major problem is cost. We just don't have a public relations problem with killing pigeons. Most people in Arkansas want to.

M. R. WOULFE: Well, let me ask you how many times you kill pigeons per annum or per every two years?

DELEGATE: In the city I suspect annually, but I don't know what to tell you.

M. R. WOULFE: Do you know what it costs to kill a pigeon when you take into account the price of the toxicant, the amount of time spent picking up birds and the amount of time in public relations and propaganda to get the thing started?

DELEGATE: I can't say exactly, but considerably cheaper than what Ornitrol costs or the price is the same.

M. R. WOULFE: Good. You're in a lucky situation.

DELEGATE: What is the cost of Ornitrol? More specifically, what's the cost on a per pigeon basis?

M. R. WOULFE: I figure it runs about sixty-five cents.

J. SEUBERT: That's at some minimum population level, I presume? You don't have a mass of birds do you? The cost goes down with increased number does it not?

M. R. WOULFE: In what way?

J. SEUBERT: Well, if you have a population of 20,000 to work with, it is cheaper than trying to knock out a population of 200 on a per bird basis.

DELEGATE: Except that public relations work is built in either way, whether you are working 20,000 or 200.

M. R. WOULFE: Well, yes. I imagine this is true, but you see you don't need very much public relations work after the first time because there are no untoward results such as picking up dead birds or anything. It can be done without anybody knowing it

W. WERTZEL: Dr. Woulfe, if I understand correctly, you say that Ornitrol is a good supplement to an eradication program.

M. R. WOULFE: Yes, I think so.

DELEGATE: Are there any toxicity problems for the applicators and what about secondary poisoning problems?

M; R. WOULFE: There is no toxicity to the applicator. We have gotten some effect in rabbits at six grams dermally, which as you know is a very high dose level, but this was transitory. We, of course, have been handling these compounds for years, and none of our people have noticed effects; I think there was one man who mentioned something about nasal irritation. Ornitrol is a form of steroid, and you don't want to fool around with the pure compound; Acute toxicity is no problem at a tenth of one per cent on corn.

R. WISE: Dr. Woulfe, that sixty-five cents, was that the cost of the toxicant per bird or the total cost of control per bird? Does that include labor?

M. R. WOULFE: No, that doesn't include labor, but our experience with labor in Manchester, New Hampshire has shown that one man was able to distribute Ornitrol in 19 sites. In Basel, Switzerland, two men were able to handle 42 sites. This entailed for each about a two-hour drive each morning