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THE GOOD - THE BAD - THE UGLY - THAT'S BIRD CONTROL

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(Editor's Note: This presentation was made with slides. The captions are presented without any attempt to create a normal narrative manuscript.)

The good that most people see in birds is sometimes offset by the bad that birds do under certain situations. The ugly part comes in when misdirected emotionalism and unscientifically-based regulations interfere with effective control measures.

The primary attraction of birds for man is they are good to look at. Bird watching is a delightful occupation.

Birds appeal to the eye with their bright plumage and cheerful songs.

DD

The graceful ease with which they soar through the air cannot be duplicated by any other form of life. Man relates to freedom exemplified by birds, and it would be a drearier world without their presence.

In cities birds offer humans contact with nature. Despite some of the disadvantages of living in close contact with animals that can't be housebroken, birds are certainly more preferable companions than some other wild animals that have chosen to live with man.

Thus man goes out of his way to encourage birds to stay around, even going so far as to cage and tame them for his enjoyment.

While caging wild animals seems cruel and unjust to "free spirits," it is true that caged animals usually live longer and under better environmental conditions than their "free" counterparts.

The true bird watcher may object to utilization of birds as sport by the hunter, but hunter fees and other support have done more for non-game species over the years than, feeble contributions by other "user" groups. Man is basically a predatory animal; and under proper conditions, hunting is a basic management tool operating for the good of the species involved.

Of course the ultimate is to train birds of prey to hunt for you. Falconry and pigeon racing are two forms of recreation that would be very difficult to enjoy without birds. Fortunately the day of the game hog and meat hunter has mostly disappeared. But wild birds contribute to the larder of many peoples.

And there is a flavor to wild-caught game that cannot be duplicated by lazy, pen-reared turkeys.

Furthermore the feather merchants responsible for the atrocious fashions in hats that women and others wore in years gone by have disappeared along with the meat hunter.

This is sad to the extent that it also meant a decline in the picturesque appearance and traditional beliefs of the first Americans.

It is difficult to give a monetary value to bird depredations on insects harmful to agriculture. This is often overrated, but birds are still most important allies in our struggle against the inroads of invertebrate competitors constantly threatening the human way of life.

Birds also serve a minor role in the pollination of various plants and the dissemination of plant species to other areas.

There is also the good work the bird sanitation corps does to recycle the remains of larger animals that might clutter up the face of the earth.

Finally there are the end products of this recycling process. These sometimes collect in recoverable deposits that have been mined for many years to increase human food supplies as well as provide basic phosphorus to make gunpowder thus assisting man in intraspecific control methods of his own.

Thus we can see birds are important. Under no circumstances would the human race be benefited by extermination of birds in general or even individual species.

However, moderation is an admirable trait in practically all things. There are some circumstances when the economic, social, health, and esthetic considerations make it necessary to control bird numbers.

Disease is possibly the least refutable reason for bird control, particularly in urban areas where the crowded contacts between humans and birds make this a serious menace. There are many diseases associated with birds. Among these are cryptococcosis, encephalitis, histoplasmosis, ornithosis, salmonellosis, and toxoplasmosis, as well as a number of other fungal diseases humans don't really need.

Disease transmission by birds is important economically, too, when it affects domestic animals. The recent Newcastle disease outbreak on poultry farms in California was due to wild birds, as is the spread of TGE by Starlings on midwestern pig farms.

There is also the irritation caused by various ectoparasites living in bird nests. They many times get into buildings to annoy the human inhabitants.

Another more drastic effect on humans is collisions with aircraft. The Starlings that knocked down an Eastern Electra at Boston's Logan Airport in 1960, taking 61 lives, is a prominent example. Other lives have been taken and the damage to aircraft runs into the millions of dollars.

This is the nose cone of a sled rocket that collided with a Horned Lark at a speed of 2Gs on the missile range at Alamogordo, New Mexico during test runs. It put a dent in this inch-and-a-half steel plate that gave the bird a terrific headache.

Bird concentrations in urban areas can be particularly annoying, besides a potential health hazard. The white accent color on this building may make for interesting decor from a distance, but on close proximity one realizes Chanel Number 5 it is not.

They also make it difficult for urban lovers to keep their minds on their work on this park bench.

Add the cost of proofing structures, so the birds can't sit on them to enjoy the view. While proofing does save the cost of cleaning and repairing corroded metal gutters and flashing, these devices rarely add to the esthetic appearance of a building.

Then there are those birds that like to build nests in chimneys, interfering with their proper operation.

Add to this other artistic souls who like to make mud pies on walls in which to raise their young.

Birds that go in for untidy nests in machinery and buildings make no friends with the human tenants.

Farmers and workmen in open sheds are not appreciative of the finger painting left by birds on their tools and surroundings.

I imagine there is many a statue in our parks whose sole wish would be to be given the power to fly over pigeons on bank buildings and make a proper deposit.

A further irritation to the city dweller is the Mourning Dove who chooses the early morning hours to woo his lady love outside a bedroom window.

This annoyance is probably exceeded only by those who have to listen to the incessant gossip of a bunch of Starlings and blackbirds as they settle in a tree roost on the front lawn before going to rest. This noise pollution is as much an annoyance to some people as are the odors and mess they leave.

Finally there is the damage caused by fires started by birds carrying lighted tobacco to highly flammable nests. In this case smoking can certainly be dangerous to your health.

Consider also the unsightly damage done to wooden siding on some very expensive homes by woodpeckers who like the rock and roll sounds they make. These same woodpeckers also cost utility companies a pretty penny to replace poles in which woodpeckers drilled for oil, and you-know-who pays for those replacements.

Another headache for utility companies are the large raptors who, understandably looking for homes, have to resort to these poles, as the trees they would normally use have been chopped down.

Various species such as gulls, Starlings, and pigeons are problems on poorly-operated dumps, as they flock there in great numbers, interfering with the operations.

There is also the loss of some of our more colorful native species to competition from more aggressive foreign invaders. Was it really worthwhile to trade the Eastern Bluebird for hordes of Starlings?

The biggest economic loss, however, is on various agricultural crops across the country. Corn damage in Ohio alone has had considerable impact on rural economics.

The grape industry suffers from a variety of species, some of which are sacred cows to the bird watchers, such as Bluebirds and Robins.

Cherries and blueberries are particularly vulnerable to birds.

Even a hard nut to crack like the walnut is vulnerable to some birds like crows.

Sunflowers, which are increasing in popularity as an oil source, are attractive to many bird species.

Damage to agriculture can occur on planted seed, as these gaps in sugar beet crops show the effects of Horned Lark depredations.

Damage also is carried to the buds, thus destroying part of the almond crop on this tree.

And finally damage occurs where grain is stored in poor on-the-farm facilities. Here not only consumption but contamination are loss agents.

There is also direct competition with livestock in feedlots. Birds eat considerable quantities of feed, as well as contaminating additional large amounts that the cattle refuse to eat or drink.

They are also damaging to the forester; large flocks can break limbs by their numbers. The heavy guano deposits that are deposited in concentrated doses can kill all vegetation.

In Oregon, heavy Starling roosts in holly groves ruin the appearance of holly before marketing. Growers can't seem to convince buyers the white-sprinkling effect, such as on this magnolia leaf, adds the proper Christmas touch.

Sapsuckers drill holes in trees, which sap their vitality and open the main stem to invasion from insects and diseases.

Seed-eating birds interfere with forest regeneration to the extent it is necessary to coat tree seeds with repellents.

In some areas, colony nesting birds can kill trees by defoliating them for nesting materials.

The rancher has problems with predatory animals of all sorts in raising young animals. In some areas predatory birds cause important economic losses.

There is also some loss of game animals to predatory birds, as in the case of this deer kill by eagles.

Dispersal of obnoxious weeds occurs when the berries are eaten on such plants as poison ivy and then dropped some distance away, covered with a rich starter coat of whitewash to help them grow.

Thus we can see bird problems under certain circumstances call for drastic methods to get relief.

But as birds sing for most people and their pocketbooks are only indirectly affected, they cannot see why other people have need to combat bird problems. Thus regulations are becoming stricter, because those believing birds can do no wrong are in the majority.

There are -some basic problems in the management of birds, difficult to grasp by the farmer, legislator, bird watcher, and sometimes even control personnel. The first of these is the great mobility that most birds possess in being able to shift from one area to another. Birds move many miles during a single day, crossing private and political boundaries without hesitation.

Inconsistency is a particular problem in research on control. Plans formulated for a certain area badly hit the previous year can be upset by the birds ignoring the area during the current season, spoiling test data completely.

A bird may be a problem at a certain season in a certain location, while his actions the rest of the year may be beneficial or at worst innocuous.

People are basically against killing birds, particularly with poisons. This is dirty pool in the Anglo-Saxon concept of fair play. The layman's concept of poisons is the agonizing torment of a bird figuratively clutching his throat as a burning liquid consumes his innards with painful slowness. He fails to realize the majority of poisons used today block the central nervous system, so it is extremely unlikely pain would be more than a fleeting moment.

Anthropomorphism has so pervaded modern society that direct measures of killing are most distasteful to the average citizen. He fails to realize that indirect methods are sometimes more of a hardship on the birds than a swift death.

Let us look at some of the options we have today in chemical bird control: strychnine which is a good general poison, particularly for birds, is under consideration for cancellation by EPA.

While the registered uses for Avitrol are being expanded, its effectiveness is somewhat limited.

Starlicide is too strictly limited by registration in one bait base to be effective in many situations.

Methiocarb is apparently an effective repellent under some conditions, but reliance solely on a repellent is a losing philosophy.

Thallium sulfate has already been withdrawn from the market.

Endrin in perches and as seed treatment is up for review by EPA. Chances are it will be withdrawn from the market by an EPA cancellation.

Fenthion, which is used as a substitute for Endrin in perches, is not as effective under certain situations. The additional secondary hazard it presents to sensitive raptorial birds halted its registration as a roost toxicant.

Ornitrol and other yet to be registered chemosterilants are expensive, slow, and temporary solutions to a given problem.

This then seems to be the legal status of the art of bird control today. Monetary returns from bird control along with public resentment discourages commercial commitment to an \$8,000,000 attempt to get a new chemical through the EPA bottleneck. So as Confucius says, "When rape is inevitable, relax and enjoy it." Birds are a pretty sight when they are heading someplace else to sleep for the night.

DISCUSSION

Jackson: This is kind of a philosophical question, Bill, you've changed hats over the last year, having gone from government agencies to participating in NPCA activities. As you have come into NPCA, how do you sense the tenor within the pest control industry at this point in time? Are there some real economic concerns to the individual in terms of making his own living. Do you see some changing patterns? What kind of tensions do you feel?

Fitzwater: I feel a tension there. It's frustration and bewilderment, because they don't know which way to turn; and you can't get your answers from any one source. You've got to go to a dozen different sources, and they give you different answers. Unfortunately there's no coordination, and I don't think the change of administration is going to help it too much, either. I think it will just proliferate. That's bureaucracy at its best.

EPA is a fine example. I was there 5 years and we had four major reorganizations. Of course if you ask for anything, somebody else made the decision before, and he's not in that office. That office name has been changed, and there are no records being kept of it, so it's very difficult to get any sensible answers out of the agency. You'll usually get the run-around more often than you'll get anybody who'll try to help you.

I feel there's a very strong feeling of frustration in private industry with government regulations. I think we do need some. I think the industry has picked up considerably over when I first knew it. There were a number of fly-by-night outfits that would come in with a bottle of water and spray the premises. The professional quality has picked up considerably, but there's still a lot to be done. I do feel that the frustration with contradictory government regulations is the big thing in the industry today.

Jackson: Do you see increasing numbers of pest control operators getting into the bird management area?

Fitzwater: Yes. I think there's been a big increase in that in a few years. In the Fish and Wildlife Service the first bird work I did in 1946 was one of the first city bird problems ever done by that agency. So it took years for even the Fish and Wildlife Service to come around to that point. Of course now they're backing off and turning it back to the industry, which is probably where it should be.

Jackson: One of the problems with disease and public health in both rodent control and bird control is the few documented cases in which there has been a bird/man, rat/man incident in recent years.

Fitzwater: Agreed. But take ornithosis for example. This has been diagnosed often as a typical pneumonia. When they run serological examinations they find the incidence is considerably higher than believed. So I feel it's something we don't recognize, because it's unusual. The physicians don't look for it unless we run a study like rabies in bats. Rabies has been in the bat population for many years but nobody thought about it. Now rabid bats start showing up all over the country.

Jackson: I think this is an extremely important point that all of us involved in bird management, particularly as it relates to urban situations, need somehow to get the justification into the public record. So often we deal with the bird problem, "You don't want your car white-washed," "You don't want the park bench covered." We don't really get at saying how many cases of food poisoning can in fact be traced back to bird infestation of grain or food storage areas. And if we're going to use food poisoning as a reason for bird control, we probably ought to be able to say it's more important than one case in 10 million. That doesn't give us a very decent cost/benefit ratio. But how many cases of ornithosis are there across the country? The problem of misdiagnosis is really a nasty one, and I think somehow we've got to get at getting better statistics into the record. To give a parallel example in rat control, we have long been talking about leptospirosis as being an important rat-borne disease, and yet the number of records in recent literature of rat-borne leptospirosis in urban areas is almost non-existent. The Public Health Service has officially said that you control rats for aesthetic reasons. You don't control them because they carry disease. In our own work here under contract with Public Health Service we've been told we cannot use Federal funds to study rat-borne disease. Some people up in Detroit have been sampling rats from the sewer system and are getting over half of the rats positive for leptospirosis. Now here's a statistic that has some public health meaning, and I think we've got to get the same sort of thing documented in the bird area.

Back: Bill, I've got to ask you what you meant by the comment that Fitz has changed hats with Fish and Wildlife and EPA and now with industry. The implication was that his point of view would change, depending upon the agency he is with. Frankly, I have to take issue with that. I think that a scientist should be a scientist, and his results should be the same, regardless of where he is found. If he's in industry, if he's in EPA, if he's in Fish and Wildlife - wherever he is, if his results aren't the same, then he's not a scientist at all, and I didn't think you meant it that way.

Jackson: No. I agree and I think Fitz responded very well to that in saying that it didn't make any difference where he worked, that he was still the same guy, and we're grateful for that. We wouldn't want him any other way.