

rocket-ship, we can confidently predict that mineralogy will be very much the same on Mars as it is on this globe of ours. If we find life there, however, the plants and animals would undoubtedly be of quite a different kind; there is no reason to think they will have developed in a parallel way to ours. But it is quite likely that these strange creatures will be built of protein and nucleic acid, with just the same amino-acids, purines and pyrimidines as Nature has found essential for her purposes here. At any rate, H. G. Wells thought so, for his "The War of the Worlds" gives a ghastly description of the invading Martians capturing and feeding upon the inhabitants of this planet, and how humanity was saved because the Martians succumbed to the bacteria from the attacks of which we had become immune. The Martian could not have assimilated his prey nor fallen a victim to the bacteria unless he were built up of the same proteins as all living matter on this globe. With a prophetic insight Wells appears to have realized that the strange and wonderful way in which we are made is not a matter of chance but is a result of the nature of matter itself.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR BIRD PRESERVATION

THE ninth international conference of the International Committee for Bird Preservation was held at Scansf, Ober-Engadin, Switzerland, during May 23-26, and was attended by representatives of the following national sections: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Iceland, India, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the Union of South Africa, the United States of America and Venezuela, together with representatives of the Conseil International de la Chasse and the International Union for the Protection of Nature, and observers from the Irish Republic and Luxembourg.

One of the most important subjects dealt with was the prevention of the pollution of the sea by waste oil, in which the International Committee for Bird Preservation has taken a leading part for many years. The results of the international conference convened by the British Government during April 26-May 12, with the details of the international convention agreed at that conference, were reported, and the fact that (up to May 18) eleven countries had signed the convention, subject to acceptance, was noted with satisfaction. Proposals for immediate action in order to secure the implementation of the recommendations of the London conference and to secure further information for the future conference envisaged were discussed. It was agreed that the support of all other interested organizations and individuals (such as fisheries, pleasure resorts and hotels, yachting clubs as well as animal and nature organizations) should be secured, and that governments be urged to sign and ratify the convention, to carry out so far as possible the resolutions attached to the convention, and to secure the effective enforcement of the requirements by adequate penalties and supervision. In addition, it was agreed that the keeping of a careful record of the extent of oil pollution on the coasts should be organized, especially with regard to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of zones, and to

promote scientific research on the effect of oil pollution on all marine life, more particularly in respect of fish and plankton, not only in the vicinity of the coasts but also in the ocean, and research on the persistence of the different oils. It was also agreed: to carry out active propaganda to keep the subject of oil pollution before the general public and governments; to give strong support to the recommendation that a further conference be held to review the working of the new arrangements within three years, and that efforts should be made to ensure the inclusion of at least one biologist in each delegation; and to propose to countries concerned with whaling fleets that investigation should be promoted with regard to antarctic conditions, and the possibilities of avoiding discharge of oil by these fleets should be explored.

The representatives of the European national sections present reported on the situation with regard to the ratification by their respective governments of the International Convention for the Protection of Birds, Paris, 1950. Austria, the German Federal Republic, Iceland, the Netherlands and Switzerland stated that their governments were preparing to ratify the convention either in the near future or in the coming year, and at the end of the conference a telegram was received notifying that the Netherlands Ambassador in Paris had ratified the convention on behalf of that country. The representatives of the British Section were in the unhappy position of having to report that there was little chance of their country ratifying the convention, despite the high hopes that had been entertained when the joint proposals for new legislation left the hands of the Wild Birds Advisory Committees to the Home Office and Home Department for Scotland, the main difficulty being the refusal to follow the general trend of modern bird preservation in according the same protection to eggs as to the birds themselves.

Birds which are a menace to other species is an important question, and an international sub-committee to consider the situation with regard to the herring gull (*Larus argentatus*) in the countries bordering the North Sea was set up at the last world conference of the Committee held in Sweden in 1950. The reports of members of this sub-committee were submitted, in which detailed records of breeding colonies of these birds over a number of years were included. Opinions regarding the effect of this bird on other species were widely divergent, representatives from Germany and Holland strongly maintaining that in many places herring gulls were far too numerous and caused great destruction to other species, whereas the Danish ornithologists took the opposite view. Various methods which had been used in controlling the numbers of these birds were discussed, and finally the following resolution was agreed: "The Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) has increased, with the aid of disturbances in the balance of nature due to human interference, and in some countries, has, in certain areas, caused a diminution in the breeding populations of other sea-birds. This is only one of a number of biological factors involved, but it seems desirable to obtain the most accurate possible information about the status of the Herring Gull through an annual investigation of breeding pairs and of young reared in the North Sea south of the Skagerrak and the Firth of Forth and in the western Baltic Area. National Sections are invited to arrange such censuses, so far as practicable,

according to circumstances in particular countries and to transmit the results of their censuses annually to the I.C.B.P.”.

The preservation of wildfowl was dealt with from various aspects, beginning with a report of the work of the International Wildfowl Research Institute (in future to be known as the International Wildfowl Research Bureau), and detailed reports from the organizers of the national counts of wildfowl in Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland. Methods of wildfowl investigations and conservation in the United States were explained, and an account of the work being carried out in Australia was given, followed by more specialized papers such as that on the waterfowl of the Venetian lagoon by Dr. L. Leporati and a review of the situation of the brent goose (*Branta bernicla*) by Dr. Finn Salomonsen, of Denmark. Dr. Salomonsen spoke of the serious decrease in numbers of brent geese and the urgent need for measures to protect this bird, as the species is in danger of extinction. His remarks were supported by speakers from other countries, and finally a resolution was adopted urging the governments concerned to recognize that the brent goose at present be regarded as in danger of extinction, and recommending governments controlling its wintering and breeding areas as well as its migration routes to give it complete year-round protection as an emergency measure, to remain in force unless and until it becomes clear beyond possibility of doubt that the future existence of the brent goose is assured. It was further agreed that the International Committee for Bird Preservation should initiate a detailed international investigation into the status of the European brent goose.

The effect of international trade in plumage, cage birds and carcasses of game birds on the populations of the species involved was dealt with at length. The Venezuelan representative spoke of the difficulties being experienced by his country in preventing the export of feathers of egrets, which though prohibited is continuing illegally, to meet the demand of dealers in Europe. The delegates from India referred to the serious depredations in recent years on the grey jungle fowl (*Gallus sonnerati*) on account of the demand for its hackle feathers; though the bird is protected in India its feathers are being obtained by other countries. In order to assist in preventing the illegal export of birds' feathers from countries where they are protected, and Venezuela and India in particular, it was agreed that the European Organization for Economic Co-operation (O.E.E.C.) in Paris should be urged to remove from the list of merchandise the importation of which member countries have not the right to prohibit, feathers of birds protected in their country of origin, in particular birds of paradise and egrets (the feathers of domesticated birds not included). It was further agreed to recommend that all governments, especially that of the United States of America (where the greatest importation takes place) be urged to prohibit the import of feathers of the grey jungle fowl (*Gallus sonnerati*) from all ports in the Indian sub-continent, since the habitat of this species is peninsular India only, and the species has suffered serious depredation in recent years.

The Australian National Section put forward a resolution regarding the prohibition of the exploitation of live birds in view of the great increase in the exports of wild-caught birds from Australia, which

is at present computed to be more than five times that in the years immediately preceding the Second World War, and in 1951-52 was estimated at 48,000 birds. A slightly amended resolution was adopted which recommended that governments of all countries be requested to restrict the export and import trade in wild-caught birds, and only to permit the export of rare and protected species in small numbers to zoos and *bona fide* aviculturists for scientific study and breeding.

The establishment of a series of reserves on migratory routes of birds, initiated at the meeting in Sweden in 1950, was reported upon and maps indicating the position of the reserves were supplied by various national sections.

On the proposal of the German National Section, a resolution was adopted calling for full protection of the white stork in those countries through which these birds migrate in autumn and spring, and on the request of the Danish representatives the black stork was included in this proposal. The need for the better protection of birds of prey was discussed, and the undue destruction of these birds was reported in particular by representatives from France and the Union of South Africa. The importance of birds of prey and the widespread misunderstanding of their value was generally agreed and a resolution adopted as follows: "The Conference learns with regret of the continuing indiscriminate destruction of birds of prey in many parts of the world. This is in conflict with modern biological knowledge regarding the essential part taken by birds of prey in maintaining natural balance of populations. The destruction of birds of prey in general is shortsighted and should be brought to an end, but it is realized that in some exceptional cases properly supervised control measures are sometimes necessary. The Conference recognizes the value of much of the legislation that has recently been enacted and commends the efforts of various governments to enforce such measures. The Conference urges that such measures should be further developed and fully enforced and that educational campaigns be initiated to inform the public of the biological importance of birds of prey". National sections were requested to make suitable representations to their governments to ensure that action is taken in each country in accordance with particular requirements.

Other subjects dealt with were species in danger of extinction. Representatives of various national sections spoke of their concern regarding their native species, among others mentioned being the great Indian bustard and the Australian bustard. The mass destruction of the red-billed weaver (*Quelea quelea*) in French West Africa and the Quaker parrakeet (*Myiopsitta monacha*) in the Argentine by means of fire was discussed; while appreciating that these birds have become pests in these countries, a resolution was passed advocating other less drastic methods of controlling them, and recommending that further investigations be made into the amount of harm caused by their depredations of crops. A report on the International Conference for the Protection of the Fauna and Flora of Africa held in Bukavu in October 1953 was given by Dr. Boje Benzon (Denmark), who had attended the meeting as an observer for the International Committee for Bird Preservation, and representatives of national sections presented reports on the bird preservation situation in their respective countries and on any new legislation that had been introduced.