

AUSTRALIAN COMMITTEE ON WATERBIRDS

The Fourth National Conference of the Australian Committee on Waterbirds was held at Rottneest Island from 8th to 11th November, 1972. This Committee is a technical sub-committee of the Australian Fauna Authorities Conference and the members are professional biologists representing all States, Territories and the Commonwealth of Australia.

Delegates to this year's conference were:

Dr T. L. Riggert (W.A.; Chairman)
 Dr L. W. Braithwaite (C.S.I.R.O.; Canberra)
 Mr S. J. Cowling (Vic.)
 Mr L. B. Delroy (S.A.)
 Mr M. A. Elliott (A.C.T.)
 Mr F. Gnauck (N.T.)
 Mr A. K. Morris (N.S.W.)
 Dr F. I. Norman (Vic.)
 Mr R. C. Longmore (A.C.T.; Secretary)

The delegates lived and worked at the Biological Station on Rottneest Island, and five members of the Department's staff were present to make their stay as comfortable as possible.

Because the Committee is a sub-committee of the A.F.A.C. it is not possible to give full details of the meetings held during the conference, but basically the Committee's objectives were to examine current and proposed research and management programmes on all species of waterbirds found in Australia and Papua and New Guinea.



A.C.O.W. Delegates—l. to r. Dr L. W. Braithwaite, Mr M. A. Elliott, Mr L. B. Delroy, Dr F. I. Norman, Mr A. K. Morris, Dr T. L. Riggert, Mr F. Gnauck, Mr R. C. Longmore, Mr. S. J. Cowling.

The field of waterfowl research is one in which close co-operation between States is essential. Waterbirds migrate throughout Australia and species to be found in one State are generally found in others too. (Grey Teal banded in W.A. have been found recently at Mackay in Queensland). It is essential therefore that biologists from all over Australia have the opportunity to get together and discuss their work and also their problems, which in many cases are common to all. Of special importance is the conservation of each species in relation to the sport of duck shooting

and in the light of Australia's rapidly diminishing wetlands; also the research requirements necessary to prevent certain rare and endangered species from becoming extinct.

The Assistant Editor who was at Rottneest throughout the conference can vouch for the hard work put in by members of the Committee. Meetings commenced before 6 a.m. and generally delegates were still working late into the evening. Little time was available to enjoy the relaxing atmosphere of Rottneest Island, but committee members did take the opportunity to study the fauna of the island. Of particular interest to the delegates were the very tame quokkas, the dugites and the lizards—one species of which is thought to be a sub-species found only on the island.

On November 10th, a Seminar Day was held which was attended by about 40 guests. Delegates explained the structure of their departments and outlined the recent research work carried out in their respective States. Additional 'bonuses' were a very interesting talk on the Magpie Goose given by Dr Stephen Davies of the C.S.I.R.O., and an address by Mr Tom Spence, Director of the South Perth Zoological Gardens, who explained how duck shooting is organised and controlled in Scotland and other European countries.

Space does not permit full reproduction of the delegates' talks, but there were several points arising which will be of interest to readers.

Mr Cowling from Victoria—

Up to 42,000 game licenses are issued each year; 33,000 last year.

Surveys of shooter's habits have been carried out with over 1,000 hunters interviewed. Three States combined in this survey in 1971.

Mr A. Morris from New South Wales—

Problems are encountered with ducks feeding on rice fields in the Riverina area. This has been overcome by establishing a damage license system.

In 1960-70, 60% of the coastal wetlands were drained.

Pesticide residues in wildlife are being studied.

About 11,000 game licenses are issued each year—the license fee is \$4.00.

Mr L. Delroy from South Australia—

The conservation of waterfowl is compromised by the need to maintain an adequate water supply to Adelaide.

The possibility of growing feed for waterfowl is being examined.

Mr M. Elliott from the Australian Capital Territory—

Canberra is experiencing the river pollution problems associated with all large inland cities and one officer is fully employed in this field of research.

Mr F. Gnauck from the Northern Territory—

An assessment of Magpie Geese numbers is continuing, and indications are that numbers are one-quarter of those of 5 years ago. Causes are the loss of habitat through pastoral activities and the deterioration of habitat brought about by buffalo.

Aborigines are selling Magpie Goose eggs in tens of thousands.

Dr T. Riggert from Western Australia—

The major problem is the reduction of wetland habitat.

Freshwater swamps are deteriorating through the inflow of brackish or saline water.



Guests arriving on the Department's new patrol vessel "Freycinet" for the Seminar Day.

Following the seminar, delegates and guests enjoyed a barbecue and were shown some films on waterfowl from overseas.

During the first few days of the following week, the delegates joined Dr Riggert on the annual aerial survey of the South-West and Eucla Land Divisions. The results of the survey and the decision not to hold a waterfowl hunting season in Western Australia are reported elsewhere in this issue.