

Vancouver fishing company watched prawns turn away from the steep sides of the old-type boxes to negotiate easily the sloping plastic surfaces of the "Igloo". The results were revealing and decisive. The "Igluos" caught an average of 13 prawns apiece while the wood and wire cages came in a poor second with 4 prawns each.

(Pacific Fisherman San Francisco, California January 1966)

### THE BUSTARD

In the early days of settlement the wild turkey or bustard was common throughout Australia in any part where grassland or light scrub was prevalent.

Last century turkeys were hunted and shot in great numbers throughout the Western District of Victoria, along the Murray River, on the grass plains north of Canberra, throughout New South Wales and particularly in the Darling Downs of Queensland.

But now the turkey is almost completely absent from all these areas. Its most-used districts, formerly over almost the whole continent, have been reduced by three-quarters and much of this being done within living memory. It is breeding well only in a few restricted areas, in parts of the Northern Territory, the Kimberleys of Western Australia and the Gulf country of Queensland.

What is the cause of such a drastic reduction in the numbers of this unique bird? Everyone thinks that they know the cause - "Turkeys are being shot". Shooting is one of the biggest factors, and it seems they will go on being shot despite full protection over the whole of Australia and a possible fine of up to \$400 in some parts if the shooter is caught.

But there's the problem. In the remote and un-frequented areas which are the only places the turkey survives, and which it must have for breeding, the turkey-shooter can not be caught.

It has been proven over three quarters of its range that the turkey cannot survive the settlement and development of Australia. Will this also happen in the north? They are subjected to many dangers. The few inaccessible districts where yesterday they were safe are today being prospected, and tomorrow will be drilled for oil or grazed or subdivided for agriculture.

Another hazard is that the birds take three or four years to reach maturity, and apparently, during breeding, the turkey is very vulnerable to disturbance. They lay few eggs.

### A Unique Bird

Most people are interested in the turkey. It is a unique bird about which very little is known. Even where it is still common in parts of North Australia, how many people have seen the large male "gobblers" blow out their necks into a balloon-shaped bag which stretches down over two feet to touch the ground in front of them? The tail is erected and bent forward to touch their head and the wings extended and drooped at their sides. This strange performance has been described only twice. In the London Zoo in 1874, and in the Adelaide Zoo in the early thirties.

### Action Needed

It might be said that there are still large numbers of turkeys in certain places. But these same places are being exploited at such a great rate, that it is only a matter of years, ten or twenty at the most, before the turkey will be in very great danger of extinction unless decisive action is taken now.

Restrictions on shooting have shown not to be enough. The bird has been fully protected all over Australia since 1935. We must try something new.

### A Plan to Save the Turkey

A plan has been proposed and has been adopted with full Government support by the Wildlife authorities of Western Australia, Victoria and the Northern Territory.

Firstly we must find out more about the bird before it is too late. The flocks of turkeys cannot be utilized, managed or preserved unless details of breeding, migration, food and other requirements are reasonably well known.

Secondly we must get the people on our side in what amounts to a race to save this bird from elimination over another three-quarters of its present day range. It is only with the co-operation and local knowledge of the people of the north that such a mighty problem can be tackled.

Thirdly, we must try to restore the wild turkey to at least a few of the areas where once it was common. This means capturing numbers of these birds, breeding them in a protected area and farming out the offspring to suitable protected wildlife reserves. If this is done with sufficient number of birds self-supporting populations might be built up.