

GAME MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Mr. M.C. Downes, Superintendent of Game Management of the Fisheries and Wildlife Department of Victoria, was through the courtesy of his Director, Mr. A. Dunbavin Butcher, commissioned in 1965 by the Department to advise us on our plans for stepping up waterfowl research in this State.

During April Mr. Downes published, in attractive pamphlet form, the result of his survey as a suggested game management plan for Western Australia.

Game management is considered by Mr. Downes to be an essential feature of a wildlife conservation programme which, he says, must be attuned to society's needs. He sees it as the solid basis from which other less economic, but just as essential, studies or projects can be developed.

The hunting of wild duck over the past hundred years has been the greatest and most persistent direct kill of any wildlife in Australia, in the view of Mr. Downes. He writes that game management must have a factual basis of which duck banding, species research, habitat surveys and ecological research are of vital importance.

Habitat management in Western Australia, Mr. Downes believes, must contain facilities for both research and implementation and he warns that the conservationist must beware of too great a separation of research from political and social environments. Research, he stresses, must be kept relevant to the real conditions and the needs of society. Such factors as preliminary fauna surveys, acquisition and management of reserves and land-use problems must be considered under the general heading Habitat Management, but it is stressed in the study that these activities contain a significant proportion of difficult research.

In stressing the need for a realistic programme that meets the requirements of the community as well as of conservation, and identifies one with the other, Mr. Downes uses these forceful paragraphs :-

"Properly designed game work leads to a total wildlife conservation programme, concerned with the community's needs, not just a section of the public with specialised demands. In this way it receives the support from the public necessary for the whole programme. This is not to say that non-game work cannot develop the same broad approach and consequent support. It is just that it has not done so in Australia and probably never will.

"Failure to recognise this important principle often leads to attempts being made to initiate narrowly-based programmes having limited and specialised contact with the general public. These are rapidly converted into the less complicated but more academically acceptable research projects, or worse, stagnate through lack of support from the people. This type of wildlife conservation

programme fails 'to take' because it does not contain the essential core of practical wildlife management acceptable to public thinking, and hence to the Government, in terms of what it needs, what it understands and what it will pay for.

"These considerations are important for several reasons. It must be recognised as a major lesson from Australia's unhappy experience with wildlife conservation in the past, that wildlife will not be preserved unless the people participate, as a society. Wildlife ranges too far and wide for individual ownership of the land to recognise its responsibility as in parts of Europe. In addition our history of land tenure sets as an ideal the sharing of the available game. Society's interaction with the land, rather than directly with the wildlife, is the major force which has acted against the wildlife. So it is through society that our counter measures for conservation of wildlife must act. Man's use of land, regarded as a social habit, cannot be changed nor the decline of wildlife reversed without the participation of the people themselves. Neither Governments nor the natural history societies can force the people into conservation. This can only come through a study of ecology, an understanding of society's behaviour, and consequently the evolution of a new ethic or attitude toward the land and its products. When wildlife conservation is based on the people's real needs, within a whole and healthy community, finance and staff will be made available. In Australia under existing conditions game management has the greatest chance of success in this regard because, through its very nature, it must take into account the needs of the people and wildlife, rather than either one to the exclusion of the other.

"That we live in a technological age is a truism repeated so often that we are in danger of ignoring it. Applied to wildlife conservation, it surely implies that unless technical facilities are used in the race to preserve our dwindling wildlife stocks, we are hopelessly outclassed by the massive, technically organised forces acting against wildlife in Australia today."