



SECTION II

CONSERVATION AND RESEARCH

NATIONAL WILDFOWL REFUGES

Wildfowl Conservation Committee

IN 1954 the Nature Conservancy began to hold a regular series of informal meetings with leading wildfowlers and conservationists, including representatives of the Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland, the British Field Sports Society and the Wildfowl Trust. At that time the feelings aroused by controversial parts of the Wild Birds Protection Act of 1954 had produced deep divisions between wildfowling and "protectionist" interests, but the meetings have been notably successful not only in achieving the reconciliation of diverse views but also in achieving active co-operation. It is now recognised that an adequate and suitably administered series of wildfowl refuges form a desirable and, in some conditions, an indispensable means of conserving and increasing wildfowl stocks, in which wildfowlers are no less interested than protectionists and scientists. Three refuges have already been set up, on the Humber, at Southport and at the Caerlaverock National Nature Reserve. It is intended to develop a National System of Wildfowl Refuges which will form the main British contribution to a projected international network of European refuges. The plan for this system has been in recent years one of the principal concerns of the informal group.

In December, 1960 the Nature Conservancy announced that, in view of the importance of the work of the group in this respect, it was to be formally constituted as the Wildfowl Conservation Committee, with the status of a special advisory committee of the Conservancy. The terms of reference of the Committee are: "To consider all matters affecting wildfowl, in particular the establishment of a National System of Wildfowl Refuges, and to advise the Nature Conservancy accordingly." The committee consists

at present of nineteen people with Mr. E. M. Nicholson, C.B., Director-General of the Nature Conservancy, as its Chairman. Three other members of the Conservancy staff also sit on the Committee: Dr. J. Berry, F.R.S.E., Dr. E. B. Worthington and Mr. R. E. Boote. The Wildfowlers' Association has six representatives: Colonel J. N. Vallance, O.B.E., T.D. (Chairman of W.A.G.B.I.), Lieut. Cdr. J. W. Anderton, V.R.D. (Hon. Sec. of W.A.G.B.I.), Mr. J. L. Hirst, Brigadier G. D. Holmes, O.B.E., Mr. E. L. Parish, M.B.E., and Dr. G. W. Storey. The British Field Sports Society has three representatives: Major J. G. Morrison, T.D., D.L., J.P., M.P. (a member of the Nature Conservancy), Brigadier A. H. Pepsy, D.S.O., and Colonel Sir Ralph Clarke, K.B.E. There are two independent members: Colonel H. J. Cator, M.C. and Major General C. B. Wainwright, C.B. General Wainwright is of course a member of the Council of the Wildfowl Trust, which is officially represented by the Hon. Director, Mr. Peter Scott, C.B.E., D.S.C., and three members of the staff, Dr. G. V. T. Matthews, Mr. G. L. Atkinson-Willes and Mr. H. Boyd.

During 1960 an informal working party drawn from the group met on three occasions to consider in detail the present distribution of wildfowl in Great Britain and to make preliminary suggestions about the policy for wildfowl refuges and about possible sites. This working party comprised Mr. E. M. Nicholson, Dr. J. Berry, Lieut. Cdr. J. W. Anderton, Dr. G. W. Storey, Mr. Peter Scott, Mr. G. L. Atkinson-Willes and Mr. H. Boyd. Their discussions resulted in a statement on general policy which was subsequently accepted by the Committee and which is reproduced below.

A Policy for Wildfowl Refuges

1. The Purpose of Wildfowl Conservation

(a) To safeguard the species of wildfowl. Although no British wildfowl are in danger of world extinction, the moral responsibility of preventing such a possibility must be set above all other issues.

(b) To maintain existing stocks in at least their present strength and *in their present distribution*; this being not only a human requirement based on the pleasure that wildfowl give to many people, but also a biological necessity in order to maintain the ecological relationships between wildfowl and other animals and plants. The main factor to be considered is not so much immediate disturbance as the outright loss of habitat through development or unsuitable management.

2. The Role of Refuges in Wildfowl Conservation

(a) In the case of a species with a limited distribution in this country, Refuges may be needed to safeguard some or all of its main resorts. Should the species be readily identifiable, statutory protection may be a more suitable measure; if this is not practicable or adequate the necessary Refuges should be given priority.

(b) More usually a Refuge will serve as a strongpoint for a number of species to ensure their status in the district. Such Refuges will form wildfowl reservoirs, increasing the stock to the advantage of sportsmen and naturalists alike, and will also provide centres from which some of the less common species may be encouraged to extend their range.

(c) Refuges may likewise be used to mitigate the local effects of overshooting or unsporting practice, while still affording controlled shooting to responsible wildfowlers.

3. **International Co-operation**

Finally, as wildfowl are migratory, there is the international aspect and the need for Great Britain to continue to play a full part in the European field of conservation, so that all countries may be brought to fulfil their responsibilities for conserving and increasing the stocks.

The Wildfowl Trust and Refuges

It may be helpful to place on record the ways in which the Trust seeks to promote wildfowl conservation. It is a major function of the Research Unit to obtain and present the factual evidence on which sound policy decisions must be based. In particular, Mr. G. L. Atkinson-Willes has prepared a long series of regional reviews of status and distribution which are now being revised and re-cast for publication in 1962, or as soon as possible, to provide a yardstick against which future changes in the wildfowl scene can be measured. Several hundred collaborators in the National Wildfowl Count scheme have made an indispensable contribution to this review, as have the members of most of the wildfowling clubs affiliated to W.A.G.B.I. Many other parts of the Trust research programme are also intended to increase knowledge of how wildfowl populations behave and so bear directly on conservation practice. In too many cases it is still necessary to act on opinions rather than a sufficiency of facts. In such cases the Trust is at least able to draw on a breadth of experience unlikely to be attained by more than a very few private individuals.

The Trust does not itself seek to establish and maintain refuges, though actively interested in the management and research plans of the Conservancy for those National Nature Reserves of importance to wildfowl. The Trust is eager to help and support local schemes for refuges, providing that these appear to be in conformity with the national needs. It is particularly anxious to encourage plans which are the concern of a variety of interests such as, for example, those produced by a wildfowling club and a naturalists' trust acting together. Individual members of the Trust can do valuable work for wildfowl conservation in this field, by keeping watch on activities threatening existing wildfowl haunts and by actively encouraging "combined operations" to stave off or minimise such threats.

