

ICBP and its Work Around the World

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Beginnings

The International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) exists to fight the extinction of birds and the destruction of their habitats. By extinction, we mean more than the eternal, global loss of species, although this is our primary concern; but we also seek to address local extinctions, and the conservation of bird populations at the regional and national levels.

The remit for this was established in 1922, when ICBP began life at a small meeting that included Jean Delacour at the London home of Britain's then Chancellor of the Exchequer. The meeting was instigated by T. Gilbert Pearson, president of the National Audubon Society, who was visiting Europe to promote cooperation and coordination among the continent's national bird protection societies. In 1914, soon after the outbreak of the World War I, the United States had lost the last Passenger Pigeon, the Carolina Parakeet was also last recorded that same year, the Whooping Crane and the Trumpeter Swan were each down to double figures, and the Eskimo Curlew stood then (as now) at the very edge of extinction. The Americans had good cause to argue for greater international responsibility for wildlife, and particularly for migratory birds, which recognize no political boundaries and are the common trust of many nations.

At root, then, ICBP is a federation of interest groups. The groups are aligned in sections by nationality, and each section (there are nearly 70) has a vote in the regulation of ICBP's affairs at its statutory quadrennial World Conferences (which for years have been synchronized and located with the International Ornithological Congress, to minimize travel expenses). The underlying principles behind ICBP are akin to those of the French Revolution: *Liberty*, because ultimately that is what (in some way or another) birds confer upon those that care for them; *Equality*, because

the system created seeks to allow everyone a voice and a vote; and *Fraternity*, because the intention is that the rich help the poor, the strong the weak.

For 58 years, the entire organization was maintained between World Conferences by one or two part-time or voluntary staff, most notably Miss Phyllis Barclay-Smith, who served the organization for more than 40 years. During that period, IUCN (the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) and WWF (World Wildlife Fund) were established, and ICBP was enlisted to serve them as their joint bird conservation advisor. It was one of the ironies of history that WWF was founded by a group of British ornithologists yet, because ICBP already existed with its own structure, it was seen as "in charge" of birds. So while IUCN and WWF, concentrating on non-avian issues, generated their own well-funded dynamism, ICBP limped along from World Conference to World Conference, passing resolutions that, from lack of full-time staff, it simply had no power to act upon. By the 1978 World Conference, it was obvious that birds were getting a raw deal, and ICBP needed rescuing from irrelevance. The decision was taken to create a secretariat to manage ICBP's interests more fully: WWF, RSPB (Britain's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) and National Audubon all contributed with core funding to get the new venture under way.

The International Secretariat

At first, the "new venture" consisted simply of a director, Dr. Christoph Imboden, a Swiss recruited from the New Zealand Wildlife Service. Because IUCN was then (1980) establishing its Conservation Monitoring Center in Cambridge, U.K., it was felt wise for ICBP to set up base there too and share premises. IUCN is responsible for the international Red Data Books (RDBs), the authoritative

analyses of the world's threatened species, and their new center was to house the authors of the various volumes; and because ICBP had always assumed that responsibility for the bird RDB on IUCN's behalf, there was good cause to keep the offices together.

For eight years, ICBP operated out of one, then two "portakabins" (wheelless trailers) down a leafy lane in a reclaimed gravel pit on the outskirts of the old city. During that time, the secretariat grew steadily to a staff of 20, and the pressure to find its own secure home became irresistible. In July 1988, the organization eventually moved to its present headquarters in the village of Girton, still on the outskirts of Cambridge. The subsequent two years have seen the recruitment of 10 new members of staff, and already the new accommodation is being extended to cope with this institutional population bomb.

Secretariat work divides into three main areas. First, there is desk-top research, which involves accumulating and analyzing data on threatened species and critical areas. Then there is the program, which consists now of over 60 projects. Finally, there is development and publicity, whose ultimate aim is the raising of funds to keep the rest of the operation viable.

The importance of thoroughgoing research to the shaping of a responsible conservation program is discussed in the following article, "Red Data Books: how and why," but it should be stressed that ICBP's interest in identifying priorities extends beyond threatened species analysis. Since late 1988, a Biodiversity Project has been mapping centers of avian endemism by the computerization of the ranges of all bird species restricted to 50,000 km² of terrain. By means of such dispassionate analysis, the richest areas of endemism can be identified, for the common good of conservation in general (allowing that areas with high endemism in birds are high in other endemics — which




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experience bears out).

For further aid with the identification of priorities, in the past 10 years ICBP has pursued a vigorous policy of analysis of key issues and themes, drawing heavily on ornithological expertise from around the world to help synthesize the best modern data and opinion on bird conservation matters. This has resulted in the Technical Publication series, with volumes on parrots, seabirds, island birds, tropical forest birds, raptors, the value of birds, grassland birds, the world's threatened birds, avian diseases, and important areas in Europe. Volumes are expected soon on captive breeding and reintroduction, migratory birds, and cracids.

Meanwhile, a series of smaller monographs dealing with more local issues has sprung into being, with volumes on Cameroon Montane Forests, the endemic birds of Madagascar, biodiversity in the Caribbean, forest birds in Thailand, forest birds in Nepal, key forests for birds in Africa, and a French territories Red Data Book. Field projects and minor desktop studies commonly get written up as Study Reports (40 published to date) and often contain recommendations for future action.

An Expanding Program

However, just as ICBP's research work is for both internal and external consumption (shaping the program, but also providing stimulus and direction to other organizations with broader or narrower conservation remits), the ICBP program itself is the product not only of secretariat research but also of network demands and proposals (from sections, specialist groups and so on), outside requests for action and help, and indeed cooperative agreements struck with other bodies.

The Migratory Birds Program (MBP) largely derives from such agreements, with many individual projects being sponsored by societies particularly interested in the fate of "their" summer birds at other seasons. This program has focused on the countries of the Mediterranean basin and west Africa, targeting specific campaigns against illegal hunting (involving direct lobbying and long-term investment through education) and for the conservation of critical areas in (for example) Malta, Cyprus, Italy, Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan, Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea, Ghana and Nigeria. In many cases, the migra-

tory bird issue is not, on a global scale, as high a priority as certain others, but it often provides the best point of entry to a country for conservation interests, and ICBP now enjoys good relations with many government departments in Africa as a result of initial contacts through the MBP.

The majority of ICBP project work is naturally concentrated in developing tropical countries, commonly addressing the specific conservation needs of key forests, wetlands or islands. Islands are of great concern to ICBP because the power of flight has allowed birds to colonize thousands of points of land throughout the oceans; their very isolation has led them to develop in ways that are not compatible with high-intensity continental competitiveness, so that, after hundreds of thousands of years during which tameness and flightlessness have evolved as positive advantages, the arrival of man and his followers — cats, rats, pigs, goats — has been purely apocalyptic. ICBP analysis (*Ibis* 132:167-180) suggests that 90% of all avian extinctions since 1600 occurred on islands, and that despite the current pace of habitat loss on all continents within the tropics, almost 40% of all threatened bird species are restricted to islands.

In 1968, ICBP purchased Cousin, a tiny (27 hectare) island in the Seychelles and the last home of the Seychelles Warbler, of which some 30 remained. Under careful management, the warbler population rose by a factor of 10, and with equally careful preparation a number of individuals were transferred to another island, Aride, where they again proliferated. ICBP continues to manage Cousin, and has been involved with conservation initiatives for other threatened Seychelles endemics such as the Magpie Robin (23 left) and Black Paradise Flycatcher (under 80). On Mauritius, it was an ICBP project that for 15 years monitored the status of the critically threatened kestrel, parakeet and Pink Pigeon. On the other side of Africa, ICBP has been working closely with the government of São Tomé and Príncipe — two oceanic islands rich in species yet probably more neglected by conservation than any others — to assess the status of the forest birds there and to advise on management that will benefit both the birds and the island economy. Across the Atlantic on Dominica, a similar but longer-term project is in

place, with ICBP project staff investigating the ways local agriculture can be integrated with forest preservation, so that both people and, especially, parrots can survive. Dominica is the only home of the Imperial Amazon (60 left) and Red-necked Amazon (230 left), and in 1989 ICBP acted in concert with the U.S.-based RARE to buy a crucial area of forest for both species that was about to be clear-felled by the owner. Elsewhere on the islands of the world, ICBP has projects in Jamaica, St. Helena, Indonesia, the Solomons and New Caledonia.

Projects with People in Mind

On the continents, forests form islands of habitat, and some of the most threatened species of bird are those restricted to just one or two diminishing forest patches. A major ICBP survey of Cameroon montane forests in 1983 and 1984 identified one particular site, Mount Kilum in the Bamenda Highlands, as in urgent need of attention. It contained two species, Bannerman's Touraco and the Banded Wattle-eye, the rest of whose habitat had been totally destroyed. The forest on Kilum itself was in rapid retreat; within a few years the touraco and the wattle-eye would be gone forever.

A member of the ICBP survey team, Heather Mcleod, returned in 1985 to see what could be done, and quickly discovered that the local people who were steadily destroying the forest for fuel wood, building material and land, were also well aware that they were destroying an irreplaceable resource. By bringing these people together and talking with their leaders, Heather obtained a public consensus for the conservation of the forest that had previously remained hidden and unarticulated. Armed with the support of the local communities, she and her husband John Parrott established a forest protection scheme that includes replanting economically important trees around existing boundaries and on eroding soils.

The results have been remarkable. When Mike Rands, ICBP's Director of Program, visited the project in late 1989, he was astonished that a constant stream of farmers was arriving from all over the mountain — sometimes, exhaustingly, in the dead of night — to seek advice on the planting of trees. There could be no more convincing evidence of the value of

harnessing conservation to the interests of local people than this.

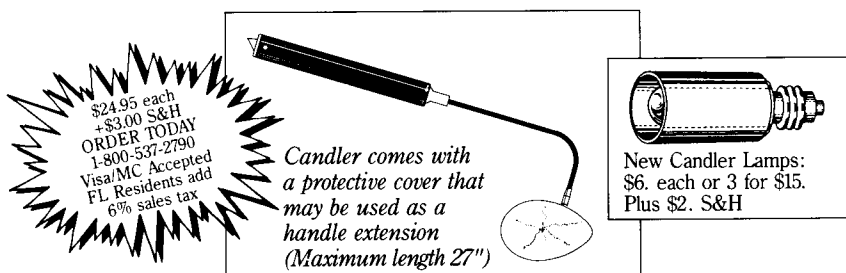
The Kilum project has proved an inspiration and a model to ICBP. Finding ways of establishing the local usefulness of the resource to be conserved is a vital component of the work, and has been crucial to progress in Thailand where, in the far south at a single small site only some 20 km² in extent, the last ten or so pairs of the exquisite Gurney's Pitta survive. A major new project involving British government aid began this year with the aim of protecting the remaining forest and, once more, regrowing entire areas with economically valuable trees that are also good for birds. Similar work is in progress at Sokoke Forest in Kenya, where six threatened species occur (two unique to the forest), on the Paria Peninsula in Venezuela, where four threatened species occur (again, two unique), and in the Palas Valley of northern Pakistan, best hope for the long-term survival of the Western Tragopan.

Of course, there are hundreds more forests (and indeed wetlands) in need of the treatment, and not all have local peoples who want the trees or

the water to remain. Nevertheless, ICBP continues to promote the conservation of such sites, where known, through its publications, through lobbying governments, and through helping to direct the efforts of other organizations. Indeed, the question of lobbying is increasingly important. If governments become ever more sensitive to the anxieties and wishes of the people they serve concerning the environment, then they may more readily accept that wildlife conservation is a responsibility that they must bear for the quality of life of their citizens. Their motivation is even higher when they know that a similar burden is accepted by neighboring states: hence the value of international treaties — Ramsar, Washington, Bonn — that allow for shared responsibilities in conservation, and hence the importance ICBP currently attaches to promoting those treaties to the maximum. A future addition to staff will be simply to handle such matters.

Sometimes, of course, it simply comes down to straightforward confrontation, whether of governments, people or pests. On the island of

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Currently, ICBP is preparing for its next World Conference (November, in New Zealand) and drawing up a new four-year plan. New initiatives to expand the program in the Pacific, the Philippines and the Americas are being developed, along with new projects to consolidate efforts in Africa and Asia. Writing in the first issue of *World Birdwatch* this year, Christoph Imboden reflected only briefly on the past ten years that saw the ICBP secretariat grow from one to 30 staff, and then looked critically at the next ten years: "It is tempting to talk about 'the challenge of the 1990s,' but the word *challenge* is too bland, too over-used, for this context. The truth is that the 1990s are the twentieth century's last chance to put ecological principles into practice and set this planet's firm course through the next millenium. This is not a challenge, this is a *necessity*." ●

But, of course, ICBP does not run on goodwill. Funds for the operation are provided from a variety of sources. The fledgling World Bird Club has still to reach 2,000 members, although 10,000 is the target for the end of 1993. A second scheme, the Rare Bird Club (which has Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands as its chairman and numbers the Duke of Edinburgh and the King of Sweden among its 175 members), is for those

ICBP continues to generate much support from member organizations like RSPB in the U.K. and Vogelbescherming in the Netherlands. WWF contributes a grant to the core budget, and WWF-U.S. has backed a number of major projects. The World Bank and national development agencies repeatedly assist with projects, and U.S. foundations play a substantial role in maintaining the research work. ICBP now has an Achievement Board that meets under the chairmanship of Prince Bernhard twice a year