

CONFERENCES & MEETINGS

XVI WORLD CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR BIRD PRESERVATION, HELD IN CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA, 19–25 AUGUST 1974

This event was outstanding for the varied and lively discussions and the formation of closer links, as well as the exchange of information, with conservationists in Australasia, as it was the first time that ICBP had met in that region of the world. The meeting was attended by representatives of 17 ICBP National Sections, 4 international organizations, and observers from 4 other countries.

The Conference was given the full support of the newly-formed Australian Department of the Environment and Conservation, and the organization was undertaken by Mr J. Forshaw, a member of the staff of the Department. The Minister, the Hon. Dr Moss Cass, despite his heavy commitments, took a personal part in the proceedings by officially opening the Conference and entertaining the delegates.

On the opening day of the Conference an announcement was made that a Convention for the protection of Migratory Birds in Danger of Extinction, and their Environment, had been signed by the Australian and Japanese Governments. This Convention followed on similar agreements between Japan and the United States of America, and Japan and the USSR, all of which had been instigated by Dr Y. Yamashina, Chairman of the Japanese National Section of ICBP.

The problems of the preservation of birds on oceanic islands, particularly in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and policies for their management, were given considerable attention.

In all, 33 resolutions were adopted concerning the use of toxic chemicals, oil pollution of the sea, slaughter of small birds on migration, commercial exploitation of nesting sea-birds around southern continents, conservation of habitat, and the need for effective land-use planning, while a number of areas in Australasia, Asia, and Europe, were mentioned specifically.

The Conference was preceded by a special symposium on the international trade in wild birds, at which papers were presented dealing with different aspects of the subject — ranging from the effects of the trade in depleting indigenous stocks of birds in their countries of origin, to the shocking conditions at certain bird markets and of captured birds in transit. The members of the symposium drew up a resolution calling on all nations to sign, ratify, and implement, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, and to cooperate with other governments by not permitting trade in species which are (i) protected in most of their range, or (ii) taken in contravention of the law in their country of origin. Other guidelines for control of the bird trade by exporting, transit, and importing, nations were also proposed. This resolution was unanimously adopted by the full Conference.

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UNITED NATIONS WORLD POPULATION CONFERENCE AND POPULATION TRIBUNE, HELD IN BUCHAREST, ROMANIA, 19–30 AUGUST 1974

The U.N. World Population Conference (the 'focal point of World Population Year'), and the accompanying

Population Tribune, must have appeared to many as expressions of total chaos: more political rhetoric, more blindness to social and environmental realities, and more irrelevant information. I attended with an interest in ecology and the environmental impact of population, hoping to learn of new ideas and support for existing, workable plans. Instead of 'concrete' proposals, I gained some insight into human ecology, acquired a much broader outlook on the world's 'people situation', and came to feel that the Conference was productive for those of us who met others and established friendships.

The Conference's Committee on Population, Resources, and the Environment, commanded attention when one was not at the Population Tribune or learning how to navigate through Bucharest. Its background paper was a detailed log of the environmental-political state of affairs. However, decisions proved to be mere 'political rhetoric', and there was little concrete action apart from an endorsement of the background paper.

The World Population Plan of Action (E/CONF.60/WG/L.55 and Addis 1-3), the main document to be endorsed by the Conference, should be examined very closely by anyone concerned with the outcome of this Conference. Much controversy was centred on the question of population *versus* development: the more developed countries, and also many Asian countries, strongly supported population control as a means of encouraging development. However, the other developing countries shifted the emphasis of the printed document towards development as the effective means to ensure harmony and population control. In many developing countries, the people have seen the emphasis to be much more strongly on family planning than on development. There has been aid for development, but the growing population and the great exodus to cities have nullified its effect. Family planning is needed, but development, in terms of more and better food, education, and amenities, is absolutely necessary.

The developed world was called over-developed by many at the Conference, emphasizing over-consumption. Consumption of energy and other resources continues to rise rapidly, and a great need was felt for self-control as well as government-control to ensure a more equitable distribution of the world's resources.

Much of Asia is already over-populated, but the growth-rate remains high. No solution through population control or development, or through any other non-violent means, was seen for these starving peoples. But such political and human realities were not brought home during the formal sessions, and the most valuable aspect of the gathering was personal communication in small and informal groups, meeting people from other cultures, and sharing experiences and perceptions.

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FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF ECOLOGY, HELD IN THE NETHERLANDS CONGRESS CENTRE, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS, 8–14 SEPTEMBER 1974

The Hague, capital of the Netherlands, was the site of the First International Congress of Ecology during 8–14 September 1974. Professional ecologists and others with an interest in the subject came from all parts of the

world, to hear and discuss papers on a wide range of topics. The level of the Congress was scientific and technical, and the topics discussed, although relevant to public issues, were primarily of interest to specialists. Nevertheless, the Congress provided an excellent review of current ecological theories, and there was heated discussion among those who held conflicting viewpoints on such subjects as whether energy flows through ecosystems or is to some degree cycled within them, and on the significance of diversity to ecosystem stability.

For those who seek answers to critical environmental problems, the Congress would have been something of a disappointment. In fact, a person who was less than diligent in attending all sessions might have left with the feeling that there were no critical problems. Rather, one could easily obtain the impression that there was infinite time for unending research on increasingly abstruse subjects. However, in some sessions, social, economic, and political, reality crept in, as for example in sessions concerned with tropical rain-forests or the ecological effects of the Vietnam war.

No such Congress can please everyone, and the tone of this one was deliberately chosen. For ecologists it provided a fair review of recent developments and thought in many fields of interest.

The International Association for Ecology (INTECOL) and the Organizing Committee of the Netherlands are to be congratulated on a well-organized and smoothly-run conference. The Netherlands' authorities proved to be congenial and gracious hosts to all who came from other lands.

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INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON THE URBAN ECOSYSTEM,
HELD IN BRUSSELS, BELGIUM,
14-15 SEPTEMBER 1974

This symposium was organized by the Agglomeration de Bruxelles and was held at Rue de la Loi 15 to discuss various aspects of urban ecosystem studies—particularly as they apply to the agglomeration of Brussels. The main themes were urban environment, biocoenosis, living conditions of Man, urban metabolism, nuisances due to pollution, and ecological indicators of environment. Also discussed were urban scenery, the creation of a mathematical model, systems analysis, and the consequences of introduction of ecological data in town planning. Subsequently, Professor Paul Duvigneaud and some other participants discussed the limitations of the programme of the urban ecosystem studies, and advocated a cooperative study of large cities of the world in connection with MAB Project No. 11.

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'THE MEDITERRANEAN: COOPERATION FOR SURVIVAL':
A CONFERENCE HELD IN YVOIRE, FRANCE,
15-23 SEPTEMBER 1974

This conference, convened as the 44th International Quaker Conference, was attended by nearly 50 participants from 18 countries—about half of them from Ministries of

Foreign Affairs of Mediterranean states, U.S.S.R., and U.S.A., and the rest an assortment of scientists, economists, social scientists, lawyers, etc. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was represented by Peter Thatcher and two other staff members. The occasion was unusually interesting. One result was agreement by about half the participants to take personal responsibility for educational activities and for a variety of other activities to encourage and assist 'official' actions towards pollution control and environmental management in the area. To this end they formed the nucleus of a corresponding network called 'Friends of the Mediterranean', and started a *Newsletter* which is being distributed in 10 languages. I am serving, for the time being, as Secretary of FoMS; interested persons who write to me will receive copies of the *Newsletter* in their preferred language (within reason!). The meeting recommended the creation (preferably in Malta at the International Ocean Institute) of a 'resource centre' for educational materials pertaining to the Mediterranean environment. UNEP and UNESCO appear to be ready to help finance this.

I distributed the report of the FAO/GFCM (General Fisheries Council of the Mediterranean) consultation, and participants were informed that UNEP is convening the next meeting, in Barcelona in February 1975*. I understand it is agreed that the FAO secretariat will now prepare draft articles, and I therefore report below the consensus of views expressed at Yvoire. In interpreting them, it should be borne in mind that although there were participants from 'developed' Italy and France (*not* Spain or Greece), none of these were from Ministries of Foreign Affairs. The following points were noteworthy:

(1) Participants were much impressed with the Baltic Convention as the best example yet of a 'strong' pollution control instrument, covering in principle all sources of pollutants and all their effects. They wished to see established, in the Mediterranean, a standing commission (as for the Baltic) of representatives of member states—not merely a periodic conference.

(2) The 'guidelines' provide for entry of non-coastal states, by majority vote of eligible members. As the guidelines cover land-based sources, it was considered that non-coastal states through which flow rivers that discharge into the Mediterranean, should not only have a right to participate in the convention (perhaps in a special class of membership) but should be strongly encouraged to do so. Other states whose ships use the Mediterranean should, if they are permitted to participate, have an entirely different status.

(3) There should be effective links between the pollution monitoring and control arrangements established under the new treaty, with management machinery for other activities in the Mediterranean—such as fishing (GFCM) and seabed mineral exploration and extraction. Several participants, especially those from ministries in developing countries, said there should be some form of 'Mediterranean council', having at least 'coordinating' powers, concerned with all the Mediterranean resources and environment.

(4) Although the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is seen to be relevant (especially in relation to 'baselines' and 'islands'), there was a strong will to push ahead with a pollution treaty, regardless of the speed of progress in UNCLOS.

(5) FAO should immediately work on the implication of baseline and Exclusive Economic Zone decisions for fisheries and try to promote multilateral agreements where

* This meeting has now taken place—see the report in press for our next issue.—Ed.