

Sandhill Cranes - A Conservation Problem



Photo by F. W. Lahrman

RESOLUTION FOR PROTECTION PASSED BY S.N.H.S.

The regular concentration of large numbers of Sandhill Cranes at the north end of Last Mountain Lake was the *raison d'être* for the main field trip planned for the A.O.U. in late August. More than a year before, this unique trip had been plotted and birders were promised the spectacular sight of 10,000 Sandhills in the fields. Although the count of cranes seen by the visitors on August 29 was probably 5000-6000 rather than 10,000, experienced ornithologists from across the continent who had come to the meeting were amazed by the great flocks which they watched feeding in the fields and circling in the air above.

Only a few weeks after the A.O.U. visitors had been thrilled by this unforgettable experience, we learned that crop depredation by cranes in the poor-crop area north of the lake had made it necessary to open the season on Sandhill Cranes, permitting shooting (with no bag limit) in a restricted area. Although aware of the serious financial losses suffered by farmers in the area, the Saskatchewan Natural History Society deplored that such a measure was deemed necessary. This feeling was especially strong among members of the society because so many of them had just been introduced to the great

flocks of cranes in the recent memorable A.O.U. field trip, and because they had come to learn that the population that rests at the north end of Last Mountain Lake represents a significant portion of the whole North American population. Accordingly, a resolution was passed at the annual meeting, October 17, to this effect:

RESOLVED THAT the Wildlife Branch of the Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources be urged to ensure the protection of all Sandhill Cranes by the following measures —(1) by increasing the areas of full protection in the province, especially at the head of Last Mountain Lake; (2) by planting grain crops to encourage cranes to keep within these limits; (3) and in addition to, or in advance of, these developments to provide further funds to recompense local grain-growers and to forestall all shooting.

The Wildlife Branch to which this resolution is being submitted is even more conscious than the members of our society of the complexity of the problem involved. We are pleased to have from Mr. T. A. Harper, biologist and Assistant Director of the Wildlife Branch, a full and convincing statement of the problem. With us, the Wildlife Branch is asking: "How can this conservation problem be solved?"