

# BLUE JAY CHATTER

We have become more and more conscious through our reading recently of the danger to wildlife involved in the use of insecticides. Articles like the one on "Insecticides and Wildlife" by M. H. A. Kennleyside in **Canadian Audubon** (Jan.-Feb., 1959) or the paper on "Insecticides and Birds" by George J. Wallace in **Audubon Magazine** (Jan.-Feb., 1959), or the study made by Ralph H. Allen Jr. for the **Passenger Pigeon** (Oct.-Dec., 1958) of wildlife losses in the Alabama fire ant program, show us that birds and other forms of wildlife have been suffering seriously in certain areas from DDT spraying. George Wallace goes so far as to maintain that "the current widespread and expanding pesticide program poses the greatest threat that animal life in North America has ever faced—worse than deforestation, worse than market hunting and illegal shooting, worse than drainage, drought, oil pollution, and possibly worse than all these decimating factors combined."

Wallace's disturbing statement receives scientific support from a study made on the Michigan State University campus at East Lansing of the population decline of robins over a five year period coincident with an intensive spraying program for Dutch Elm disease and for mosquito control. Robins were first noticed dying on the campus in the spring of 1955, the year following inauguration of the Dutch Elm disease control program, and this dying-off continued each spring until by the summer of 1958 robins were practically eliminated from the university campus and some parts of East Lansing. It was established that the robins were dying of insecticide poisoning from eating earthworms which had accumulated DDT in their bodies through feeding on leaf litter from sprayed trees. In the 185-acre North Campus which supported an estimated minimum of 185 pairs of robins in 1954, Dr. Wallace's June to August count of robins in 1958 produced only three adults and one fully winged bird of the year. The decline both in numbers of nesting pairs and in nesting success has been alarming.

Although robins were the object of this detailed study, it was noted that other ground feeding birds which eat earthworms were also affected, as were the tree-top feeders in an entirely different way through insect shortages or actual consumption of poisoned insects in lethal quantities or in sublethal quantities that may cause sterility in subsequent years.

Following the robin survey on the campus at East Lansing, it is interesting to note that the Wisconsin Society of Ornithology has chosen as its co-operative research project for 1959 a study of robin population in sprayed and unsprayed areas. Because the Dutch Elm disease is spreading in southern Wisconsin and increased DDT-spraying is being carried on, the society is urging its members to **COUNT YOUR ROBINS THIS YEAR.**

The possibility of a serious grasshopper outbreak in Saskatchewan in the spring of 1959 may similarly intensify insecticide programs in this province. We should like to urge all readers of the **Blue Jay** to be on the alert for any evidence of damage to birds and other animals resulting from the increased use of insecticides.

We have long been concerned about the effects on vegetation of 2, 4-D sprays, and many of us have deplored the disfiguration of country roadsides where weeds have been controlled by spraying instead of cutting. As each new spray has come on the market people hurry to take advantage of its obvious benefits without giving due consideration to possible harmful effects. It is imperative that a complete study be made by government departments and chemical firms of the effects of both weed and insect sprays before they are applied in a wholesale and perhaps dangerous fashion.