

SNHS — A CONSERVATION-CONSCIOUS SOCIETY

The recent continent-wide concern about the use of DDT prompted the programme committee of the SNHS Annual Meeting in October to ask me to speak briefly on the subject. Since I had written an editorial on DDT for the September *Blue Jay*, and since I have a BAN DDT sticker prominently displayed on the back window of my car, it was obvious to the committee and to the meeting that I have been following developments re: DDT with interest.

DDT means "drop dead twice." This definition was given just the evening before the meeting, on the TV programme *Laugh In*. During the programme they also gave an award to DDT, "the only spray that kills both sprayed and sprayer." There is, now, real evidence that DDT does kill birds and fish as well as insects, it does endanger the health and well-being of man, and perhaps most important of all, that it can upset the world ecological balance and threaten the survival of us all. We are, therefore, in a box. We need pesticides to help us grow enough food and fibre for an ever-increasing population and to control malaria and other diseases, but we must at all costs also prevent deterioration of our essential environment. DDT may be considered to have some short-term "good" effects, but we can now be sure that the long-term effects are bad.

Naturalists expressed warnings against DDT as early as 1945, and gradually the case against it became stronger. The first really effective case against DDT was made by Rachel Carson in her book *Silent Spring*, published in 1962. You may remember that we published a seven-page review of that book in the December, 1962, issue of the *Blue Jay*. Now (October 28, 1969), the U.S. Department of the Interior has announced that a National Wildlife Refuge, stretching for 40 miles along the Maine seacoast, has been named in honour of Rachel Carson, as a "tribute to one of the greatest conservationists of our time."

Rachel Carson's book had a strong emotional appeal, for it described in dramatic fashion the dangers of DDT and other pesticides. Now more facts are available and it is recognized that any case against DDT must be supported by facts. This year the Saskatoon Natural History Society used this approach and was successful in getting the City Council to stop any further purchase of DDT for mosquito control in their city. Similarly, Pollution Probe, organized by the Department of Zoology of the University of Toronto, prepared such a well-documented case against DDT that the Government of Ontario put an almost complete ban on the use of DDT in that province, and the Government of Canada is introducing restrictions which should reduce the use of DDT in Canada by 90%.

This legislation deserves our congratulations and our support. But environmental pollution problems are not going to be solved by the simple banning of persistent pesticides. When one substance is banned, how are we to prevent a flood of other and perhaps even more dangerous pesticides appearing?

An intensive educational programme is essential. Governments should take this responsibility, but conservation societies such as the SNHS can help. First, we can help to make the public aware of the magnitude of the pollution problem, so that the public will be ready to insist that pollution be regulated, and prepared to pay for the research and control measures involved. Second, as individuals, we can all do something to reduce pollution, including the boycotting of products of companies that do not try to control pollution. Third, as a society, we can work actively on committees (such as the one set up in the resolution passed at the Annual Meeting) to document the facts of soil, air and water pollution, and to make these better known.

Ecologists tell us that the deterioration of our environment is increasing at an alarming rate. This trend must be reversed before we pass the point of no return. As members of the SNHS let's prove that ours is a conservation-conscious society.