

Individual Responsibility

All through the sixties naturalists have been voicing alarm because certain wildlife species are obviously in trouble. Gradually we have come to realize that it is the health of the whole environment that is in danger. Certain lakes and rivers are virtually dead, our air and our soil are becoming increasingly contaminated, and if pollution continues to accumulate there is real likelihood that the ecosystem will collapse causing an unprecedented die off on this earth. Some experts think that man will be able to avert the disaster, will be able to recognize the problems and make corrections in each specific case before it is too late (as he did, for example, in his efforts to save the Whooping Crane from extinction). Others believe that each correction will add new problems which will interfere with the complex balance between living things and thereby hasten the collapse of the natural world.

In the midst of such a complicated situation natural history laymen may be tempted to feel that, as individuals, they can do little to prevent disaster. But there are projects in which these people can play an active role. I am thinking particularly of support for the preservation of natural areas. Two articles in this issue, one on "*The Red Tide in Regina*" (p. 50) and the other on "*Wildlife-pesticide research*" (p. 2), indicate the difficulty involved in the whole matter of attempted preservation of nature. Certainly, much research will have to be done and it may even be that we are already too late to reverse the detrimental trends which are taking place. A negative attitude, however, will accomplish nothing. We must try to decide what the fundamental problems are and then attack these problems with vigor. We are all in a position to make our voices heard by writing letters and contributing money.

For what *specific* purpose, you well may ask.

Each natural history society can acquire some natural habitats. True, these will be subject to various pollutants carried everywhere by air and water; this fact is inescapable. But it is possible to preserve at least some fairly natural habitats. The Regina Natural History Society, for instance, has a half section along the Qu'Appelle valley which is still fairly natural but which is threatened more and more seriously each year as people look for places to dump their garbage, ride their snowmobiles and develop ski and other recreation areas. We must take definite action to meet these threats. The Saskatchewan Natural History Society has two areas under lease for protection of certain plants and animals but these areas can be protected and extended only if they are actually owned by the society. At the moment, some individual landowners are privately preserving small natural areas but since one's life span is limited and unpredictable, such individuals should clearly spell out their intentions in their wills. Possibly some group like a natural history society could agree to accept the responsibility of seeing that their wishes are implemented and their favorite areas preserved in perpetuity.

Recently the Nature Conservancy of Canada has expressed interest in helping to buy natural areas in Saskatchewan. We should, of course, buy and preserve these areas ourselves, but if Nature Conservancy will help with some of the initial cash, we can proceed to collect money to repay them, thereby enabling them to buy other areas. A national agency which is interested in saving unique and representative samples of our environment all across Canada is an organization with a positive approach. Let us support it wholeheartedly. If we cannot (for the time being) do anything else in the present pollution crisis, we can at least give what money we can spare to the sanctuary fund of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society or to Nature Conservancy for the purchase of natural areas in Saskatchewan or in any part of Canada which we care to specify.