

## THE PRESIDENT'S PAGE

The Decatur members of A. O. S. and the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Personnel provided the Society with an unforgettable week-end on November 15-17. For many members the meeting will long be remembered as a first: first time for seeing the Canada Goose, maybe, but definitely a first time for seeing at one time, on the wing, thousands of geese.

For me there were two highlights of the meeting: one in the field and the other at the Paper Session. The Second Research Paper Session for the Society conveyed to me the rapid degree of growth of interest and study of ornithology among the membership. It was indeed a sign of growth in the eleven-year-organization to have such a group of stimulating papers presented. I urge each of you to take your observations more seriously and compile the information for publication.

Upon our arrival at the refuge early Friday afternoon, we were challenged to identify a duck in questionable plumage. After we had seen the strange duck and each had consulted his best possible reference book, all agreed it was a female duck, but only a few would agree that it was a European Widgeon. By this time the director, Mr. Thomas Z. Atkeson, had our interest sufficiently sharpened to permit us another morsal of bird interest. He asked that we drive to Garth Slough to see the birds which have become the symbol of the Refuge. The drive was lovely. Either side was flanked by the colorful hues of the autumn foliage.

Suddenly the road opened from the forest onto the slough and we could see exposed mud flats. There was the symbol of Wheeler Refuge, the Canada Goose. Arthur Cleveland Bent writes in his LIFE HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN WILD FOWL that the Canada Goose (Branta canadensis) is the most common goose in North America, "and when once seen its grandeur creates an impression on the mind which even the casual observer never forgets." If suddenly seeing thousands of Canada Geese at once makes them a common bird then surely the grand goose was then a common bird for the duration of our meeting. There on the mud flats were thousands and thousands and thousands of geese. Some were floating on the water, or just resting on the flats, while others were preening their beautiful brownish white feathers. As the car slowly approached, all activities ceased and with the group clucking call, all eyes concentrated on the possible danger:

Mr. Atkeson explained that we were at a position from which we were able to see about one-half the distance up or down the Tennessee River as it flowed through the refuge. The very low water level at this time of the year permitted us to continue to drive along a dry mud flat with the water on either side of the car while ducks and geese lined the avenue. After about a mile the car was stopped and we quickly got out and with clapping hands and much noise caused the birds to take to the air. Only those of you who have experienced the thrill of seeing a snow storm when there were huge flakes can envision the spectacular sight of the loose feathers which floated to earth as the magnificent birds with powerful sweeping wings hurriedly took to the air, emitting the distress call, amidst the sound of hurried wing beats, honking and calling while circling higher and higher assembling into the family groups. The sky was now heavily peppered with the thousands and thousands of honking

geese; one could not distinguish from whence came the cry of the birds because there were so many darkening the sky on this late afternoon in November. In October the estimated number of geese had been 35,000 but this was November and the birds had continued to come southward and now the rough estimate was 40,000 geese. If we had just seen approximately one-half of the geese on the refuge while standing at Garth Slough, then we had seen close to 20,000 geese in the sky at one time. Truly this was a most stimulating sight to behold; the white feathers floating earthward; the sky pink with the dust laden air, darkened with geese as they formed into many V-patterns. As their clarion notes mingled together in the distance the voices reminded one of the joyous barking of dogs. Surely we had just witnessed one of nature's most spectacular ballets.

The dates have been set for two coming meetings. The mid-winter meeting will be held on Saturday evening, 22 February at Heart of Auburn Motel, 333 So. College St., Auburn. This meeting is open to all members who are interested in the business of the organization. The Spring meeting will be held on Dauphin Island, April 24-26 at the Holiday House Apartments. Do make a note of these dates and plan to be with the group.

Happy Birding in 1964  
Rosemary T. Dusi