

THE MOURNING DOVE IN IOWA

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The Mourning Dove is a common nesting bird in Iowa, being found in towns and rural areas alike. It is multi-brooded and nests from April to September and has, on the average, about three successful broods from five or six nesting attempts. The life history was studied intensively from 1938 to 1940 in Cass County by H. E. McClure while a student at Iowa State College. He estimated the breeding population of this county to be 73,000 and computed the production at approximately 228,000. Last year the College began a project to determine the present status of doves in the same county. A considerable number of dove nestlings were banded by McClure and additional ones are being banded under the present study.

Aside from these efforts, relatively few doves have been banded in Iowa, only a total of 1,832 to the close of 1955. Forty of these have been recovered, about 2.2 per cent. Half of the recoveries were in Texas and seven were in Mexico. Others were: one in Louisiana, three in Oklahoma, three in Nebraska and six in Iowa, indicating a southward movement from Iowa. None crossed the Mississippi River. On the other hand, three birds have been taken in Iowa that were banded in other states; one each from Arkansas, Mississippi and Nebraska. No doves have been recovered in Iowa from any areas to the north.

In all of North America approximately 145,000 Mourning Doves have been banded since 1920, and 3.7 per cent have been recovered. Three per cent of the banded birds have been reported as taken by hunters. Since an unknown percentage of bands is never reported, the kill by hunters may be several times this recorded 3 per cent. Last season the dove was considered a game species in 29 states, but there is no open season in Iowa. Classed as a migratory game bird by international treaty, it is hunted under regulations promulgated by the Fish and Wildlife Service in cooperation with the State Game Departments.

The Mourning Dove nests in each of the 48 states, in southern Canada and in Mexico, Cuba and Haiti. In the fall the birds move southward and become concentrated in the southern states, Mexico, Central America and Cuba. A few may winter in the central states but only occasionally in the northern states. An annual index to the breeding population is obtained by a census at the peak plateau of the nesting season, between May 20 and June 10. Over 600 biologists, enforcement officers, and other persons count

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the calling (cooing) doves over 20-mile routes in all states and under standardized conditions. The results of more than 750 routes are summarized for comparison with similar counts of previous years. Reliable information on production can be secured by random roadside counts taken monthly, beginning in July. Country-wide the dove population has been increasing during each of the past four years. The recent trend to diversified agriculture in the south has benefited the species by providing more feeding areas. Weed seeds and waste grain furnish the bulk of the dove's food, so it is considered beneficial to the farmer.

In order to secure more information on the movements of Mourning Doves and to assist in perpetuating the species, the Fish and Wildlife Service is promoting a nation-wide program of nestling banding. The goal is to band 150,000 nestlings during the five year project. The quota for Iowa is 3,000. Biologists and wardens of the State Conservation Commission, together with students, bird banders and other persons are urged to participate in this important program. The Iowa Ornithologists' Union and local bird clubs might adopt the project, as has the Inland Bird Banding Association. All of your members can assist by locating dove nests and reporting them to designated banders. Youth groups such as Girl and Boy Scouts, 4-H Clubs, Future Farmers of America and science classes may be called upon for assistance in finding nests. They will gain valuable knowledge of wildlife and conservation while associating with the adults who will band the nestlings under Federal and State permits. Information and suggestions concerning the nestling banding program may be secured from field men of the State Conservation Commission or the Fish and Wildlife Service. We would like all of you to assist.

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This letter was sent to all Iowa Legislators - at the time of the second session. As of March 12, Bill seems to have been indefinitely postponed - Editor, The Register

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Spare the Doves and Move on

We heard a woman comment indignantly on the dove bill: "Why does the legislature waste time on this? The legislators should spend their time debating more important matters."

This woman's solution for the dove bill was simple: Just kill the bill and go on to other legislation.

We are among those who do not think the legislature should authorize an open hunting season on mourning doves. But we don't think it is fair to criticize legislators harshly for devoting a considerable amount of time to discussion of the measure.

Anyone who is against any proposal would like to have it quickly killed. But legislators have an obligation to give a full hearing to arguments for and against measures of this kind.

Backers of the bill are principally hunters. They want the opportunity to shoot more live targets. They don't want to exterminate mourning doves as a species of wild life and can produce some factual evidence—based on experience in other states—that open seasons set by the conservation commission would not wipe out the doves.

The opposition comes from non-hunters—bird watchers, nature lovers, outdoor enthusiasts who don't like to see beauty on the wing destroyed. They think it's heartless to destroy birds

which are beautiful, harmless and symbols (to them, at least) of innocence and peace. They know the doves wouldn't be shot for their dinner table value.

They think shooting doves, which perch trustingly on telephone lines along highways, offers no more "sport" to hunters than shooting hens in a barnyard. Some fear an open season would lead to extinction of doves but would be against shooting them even if convinced their fears were groundless.

The hunters are a large group in Iowa and have effective spokesmen. But the non-hunters are an even larger group. The fact that they are not banded into large special interest organizations hasn't prevented them from speaking out in defense of doves, as is evident from letters to the editor and pleas to legislators.

Most of the defense of doves seems to be coming from women. Why not? They don't do as much hunting as men, we expect them to be more humanitarian than brutal males and more appreciative of the finer things of life.

We suggest that the legislature may now have given an adequate hearing to the dove issue. Why shouldn't the 157 to one male-dominated legislature bow to the women on this question and get on with reapportionment, appropriation and tax revenue measures?

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In Iowa, as well as the remaining northern tier of states, the mourning dove has not been considered by the majority of the people as a game bird. We, therefore, vigorously oppose the opening of a season on mourning doves, even if the dove population statistics seem to warrant such an opening.

We urge you to vote "No" should S. F. 252 or H. F. 361 come to the floor for a vote.

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The Cedar Rapids Bird Club
The Des Moines Audubon Society

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