UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Radio Service

OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Saturday, April 3, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NEWS NOTES FROM WASHINGTON." Information from the Bureau of Biological Survey, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Today's letter from the Department of Agriculture brings very good news, especially interesting at this time of year. Our correspondent writes about the treaty between the United States and Mexico, just ratified -- a treaty for protecting many of the birds now on their way north.

Quoting this letter from our Washington reporter: "March 15, 1937, should be a red-letter day on the bird calendar, for on that day a group of prominent men gathered here in Washington to complete an international treaty that will mean life itself to many birds of the present and future. The prominent men at this gathering included the Ambassador from Mexico, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Agriculture, and Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson and Major E. A. Goldman of the U. S. Biological Survey. The treaty is between the United States and Mexico for the protection of migratory birds and game mammals. This treaty has been pending for some years but on this recent occasion the exchange of ratifications by both countries was made public by a proclamation from President Roosevelt.

"As you may know, we have had a similar treaty with Great Britain for many years. Now that the Mexican treaty has gone into effect, the United States has joined with both its North American neighbors to protect wildlife. The treaty with Great Britain protects birds that migrate between this country and Canada. But many birds that cross the Mexican border in their northern migration do not reach Canada, and including some of these and others, too, the new treaty puts 140 species and subspecies under Federal protection for the first time. Officials of the Biological Survey will have charge of administering the new laws and regulations.

"Under the new treaty, Federal funds may be appropriated for both protection and investigation of migratory birds -- funds to establish refuge zones along the line of flight, for example. One of the provisions of the treaty is that neither game animals nor migratory birds may be transported, dead or alive, over the Mexican border without a permit from the Government of each country. Also the maximum time for migratory-bird hunting in either country is now only 4 months out of the year. And in both countries, there will never be duck hunting from March 15 to September first.

"Perhaps you would like to hear which families of birds will be protected by the new treaty. The list of them is long, you will be glad to know, and as the Presidents of both countries agree, other birds may be added.

"The families of migratory game birds as they appear in the treaty are: swans, ducks, geese, rails, gallinules, coots, woodcock, snipe, sandpipers, phalaropes, cranes, plovers, turnstones, surfbirds, avocets, and stilts, pigeons and doves.

"The nongame birds include some of those that are most beneficial to us in destroying insects and weed seeds, and many that are also favorites for their color and song. They include the cuckoos, roadrunners, swifts, woodpeckers, larks, titmice, verdins, bushtits, wrens, mockingbirds and thrashers, wagtails, pipits, flycatchers, vireos, meadowlarks, blackbirds, grosbeaks, finches, sparrows, hummingbirds, tyrant flycatchers, swallows, creepers, thrushes, warblers, waxwings, shrikes, wood warblers, and tanagers.

"By the way, the long careful bird studies by men in the Biological Survey have brought out interesting facts about the flight of many birds on the treaty lists.

"For example, some of them migrate by night and some by day. The night-flyers include such small, timid, and feeble-winged birds as the rails, the wrens, and the woodland flycatchers; but they also include such powerful flyers as snipe, sandpipers, and plovers. By the way, some of these strong birds hold flying endurance records -- make flights of more than 2,000 miles across the ocean. Of course, on these long flights they travel both night and day. Even one of the tiniest birds of all, the ruby-throated hummingbird, has a record for endurance flying. It crosses the Gulf of Mexico in a single flight of more than 500 miles.

"As for speed records in migration, one of the fastest flyers is mentioned in the treaty. This is the swift, which flies by day and on occasions probably exceeds 100 miles an hour. An airplane observer has reported that swifts easily circled his ship when it was traveling 68 miles an hour. To do this, the birds certainly were flying as high as 100 miles. Ducks and geese are no slow pokes in traveling either. Their common flying speed is between 40 and 50 miles with an emergency speed beyond this. Larks and shrikes, which have been timed by the speedometer of an automobile, have made a speed of 22 to 28 miles an hour. In contrast to these are such slow fliers as the flycatchers which make only 10 to 17 miles an hour.

"Some birds on this list seem to be sociably inclined on their travels, joining other species in flight, while others always stay with their own kind. The Survey men find that as a group the wood warblers probably travel more in mixed companies than do any other single family of North American birds. The spring and fall flocks are likely to include several species, with both young and adult birds traveling together. Swallows, sparrows, blackbirds, and some of the shore birds also migrate in mixed groups. But other birds always keep strictly to themselves in flight. The swifts are some of these, possibly because they are too fast for company. Waxwings also fly by themselves.

"Another interesting fact about migration is that some birds travel in close formation, as if they had had military training, while others fly in groups but no particular order, and still others travel alone. The birds that travel in close flock formation include the shore birds, blackbirds, waxwings, and some of the sparrows. Those that travel together but hold to only a very loose formation include the swifts, blue jays, swallows, and warblers, while the solitary travelers are the winter wrens, shrikes, and belted kingfishers."

That concludes the spring bird notes from our Department of Agriculture correspondent in Washington, D. C.

****