

THE CASE FOR NONGAME

A Challenge For the Boone and Crockett Club

IT IS A STRANGE THING THAT THE NONGAME FORMS OF WILDLIFE HAVE RECEIVED SO LITTLE CONGRESSIONAL AND FEDERAL RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF RARE AND ENDANGERED SPECIES, IT HAS BEEN SLIM PICKINGS DESPITE THE EFFORTS OF THE STATES AND CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS OVER A LONG PERIOD OF TIME.

It is strange because of the long relationship of people with all forms of wildlife, especially birds. Our national symbol is the bald eagle which has been a symbol of honor in many cultures down through the ages. Most states have a state bird. Bird feeding and watching and the supportive activities have become big business. Non-consumptive use of wildlife far outstrip consumptive uses. Coffee table books and countless television programs attest to the public's interest and fascination with wildlife, a vicarious experience, often the urban dweller's only enjoyment of wildlife.

The Nongame Act, first passed in 1980, has never been provided any source of funding. Its principal value has been Congressional recognition of the importance of nongame wildlife.

Why is this important? Because many nongame forms are in trouble; and because these forms are of keen interest to the public.

They are in trouble in the United States principally because of the loss or modification of habitat, urbanization and industrial expansion. And, what many citizens do not fully recognize is that these forms are migratory and we are seeing declines in many songbirds and backyard birds because of habitat losses in Central and South America.

For about 20 years the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies has had a Nongame Committee proposing action. It now has a wildlife diversity initiative in cooperation with other organizations and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to explore Congress-

sional and private sources of funding. Almost two-thirds of the states have some form of a voluntary income tax check-off to benefit nongame. There is great interest but still no reliable source of Federal funding or corporate involvement.

So, why should Boone and Crockett care? Why is this a challenge to Boone and Crockett?

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The inspiring history of the Boone and Crockett Club and its role in establishing the conservation movement in North America was so well described by Jim Trefethen's two books, especially his first, Crusade for Wildlife, in 1961.

While the Club was founded by those who had a strong interest

in hunting and exploration, it has, since its inception, concerned itself with the broad issues of conservation and resource management. From the founding dinner, hosted by Theodore Roosevelt in December 1887, the Club and its early members assumed leadership roles in establishing the concepts and laws, the parks, forests, refuges and the building block statutes, the foundations of today's conservation movement.

It was this broad based approach plus the forcefulness, intellect and political and economic clout that made the Club so successful, resulting in its recognition as a leader in supporting sound management.

So, why is the nongame issue a challenge to the Boone and Crockett Club? First, it is a basic resource concern. The decline of nongame forms is an indicator of the health of the environment. Secondly, the nongame forms have tremendous public support.

Solution of the nongame issue needs the support of the Club in passage of Federal funding legislation and in enlisting the support of corporate America in involvement and funding.

Support of nongame implies no diminishment in interest or support for big game, hunting and record trophies. To the contrary, they are complementary.

The support of the Club would not only help with a critical resource issue, it would be in keeping with the Club's continuing efforts to maintain a leadership role and garner public support. And, it would help change the public perception that Boone and Crockett is primarily interested in big game hunting and records keeping.

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ONE EXAMPLE OF THE PUBLIC'S SUPPORT FOR NONGAME FORMS IS THE POPULARITY OF BIRD FEEDING AND WATCHING WHICH IS GROWING GREATER AND GREATER EACH YEAR.

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