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Summary of Country Reports

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It is clear that a body of people such as this Working Group will have little impact on population and deforestation problems. We might as well accept the fact that populations are growing in most countries and that as they do the habitat will change. So I think that we ought to try to focus on those things on which we can have an impact and perhaps mitigate some of the problems.

It is very hard to generalise, because there are general problems that are common to all countries, and there are also specific problems. As we have heard from the various reports. But let me make a few observations that I think worthy of discussion and perhaps some thought.

I think it would be very worth while to chronicle and catalogue those species that are being helped by habitat conversion. To me this was a very encouraging sign; there are many raptor species that are being helped by the turning of woodlands into savannahs and these we need to know about, to assess what impact they may be having on the land. The report from Chile illustrated this very well.

Along with habitat change we find that what we thought of as forest species with a unique habitat - and we regard Leucopternis (at least the majority of the genus) as being very specific to forest habitat - may in point of fact have a greater geological amplitude than we give them credit for. I believe we need to investigate this.

What I'm suggesting is that, rather than wringing our hands over population problems which we have no solution for or power to influence, we should be finding out more about the life history of those species that might remain with us, if any do die out, and try to figure out how we can best benefit them. We know that as we change habitat we reduce species diversity. But one thing we don't know about Latin America is what the impacts are if we convert native habitat to exotic habitat. A good example is in South Africa, where eucalypt and pine forests have been planted throughout much of that country and, surprisingly, one of the outcomes has been the increase of Accipiter ovampo, the Ovampo Sparrow Hawk, which we thought was very rare. It has apparently increased its breeding population considerably and is now probably one of the commonest accipiters in plantation forest, along with the Black Sparrow Hawk.

So all is not necessarily lost when we convert a native forest into an exotic forest, although I hate to see it go: but we need to be there to understand what impact, both positive and negative, this has on the raptors.

We learn that some hawks are protected in some countries and some are not. I suspect, however, that to most of the local residents a hawk is just a hawk, so those that are protected are being shot along with those that are not. Dr. Ramos has ably summarised the steps that need to be taken to educate people. But I think that something ICBP and local people can do is to stimulate the production of fliers and information leaflets that can be given to the campesinos, the farmers who come into contact with these birds.

We need better distribution maps; the most current, in Blake's "Neotropical Ornithology"; are totally inadequate. I spent the month of June in Ecuador, where for example he shows the Gampsonyx range as being along the coast, whilst we found the bird back in the Oriente. Since habitats are changing so quickly, so too are bird distributions. One thing we need to do is to generate new distribution maps, so that we know where the birds now occur: if you look at the available maps and go to the region indicated to find them, they are no longer there in many cases because of these changes. We also need to know more specifically about movements within countries, which I suspect occur quite widely. We need also to know those situations in which we are dealing with few individuals versus whole populations. While the pet trade is not desirable, one cannot think that the trade in, say, the Chimango Caracara has much impact on the total population. So we need to separate out those species which are critically affected by this problem and perhaps focus our attention on these. We also need to know which species receive multiple impacts: are those that might be involved in pet trade the same species that are also receiveing impact from shooting, or habitat destruction, or are they totally different independent variables that are acting on different species? I believe that this is quite important to know. The species inhabiting these tropical forests are certainly difficult to study. It may well be that if we used more techniques such as playback calls we would find them. In June in Ecuador when we played calls for Micrastur we were answered by both semitorquatus and ruficollis, although we could never find them; the minute you walk in the forest they freeze. Had we not played back calls we would never have known they were there, so that my impressions of ruficollis would have been quite different as regards the true status of that species. I would suggest that there are other forest species that fall into that same category.

The final thing that I would like to say is that I think more in-depth field studies on the species that we know nothing about need to be accomplished. My understanding from the literature is that Buteo ventralis is quite a rare bird, but it might turn out to be not uncommon at all. Only intensive field studies will reveal the true situation.

My heart lies in the neo-tropics with their conservation problems, and I hope that we can here solidify a few concepts which may lead to goals that can be realistically accomplished.

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