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Some Bird Species Called DDT Victims

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Madison, Wis. — A California biochemist testified Monday that his studies have convinced him that DDT and not another commonly found contaminant is the cause of thin eggshells which he believes will wipe out certain predatory bird species.

Robert Risebrough, Berkeley, Calif., was called as an adverse witness by the attorney defending the pesticide at a natural resource department hearing on a petition calling for banning DDT in Wisconsin.

Testified Earlier

Risebrough had testified in December for the petitioners — Citizens' Natural Resource association and the Wisconsin chapter of the Izaak Walton league — about DDE, a form into which DDT changes in living bodies and his conviction that DDE causes a metabolic disturbance in birds which leads to thin eggshells.

The thin shell cracks easily, causing the death of the embryo inside the egg.

Risebrough was called by Willard S. Stafford, Madison attorney who is conducting the defense of DDT for the National Agricultural Chemicals association.

Stafford questioned Risebrough about work he has done with polychlorinated biphonyls (PCB), a goup of hydrocarbon compounds widely used in industry. PCB's show up in some test equipment in a way that makes separation of DDT in analysis much more difficult.

Only Few Found

Risebrough said that while PCB's are found in large amounts in many marine birds, he had found only a few in which there were more PCB's than DDT or its metabolities (forms into which it changes in passing through living tissue).

He said that tests with eggs containing up to one part per million (p.p.m.) of PCB's and up to six p.p.m. of DDT in all forms showed mathematically, by correlation with eggshell thickness that DDE and not PCB's, were to blame. The tests were made mathematically, he said, with a statistical accuracy of 99.9%.

He said that damage to eggshells from DDT can be traced not only to the DDE in the bird's body fat, but also to the amount present in the food it eats.

"DDT may be comparatively inactive in the body fat," he concluded, explaining that peregrine falcons from Arctic areas seem to be sustaining their numbers better than those from more temperate climates because the food they eat while rearing a second clutch of eggs is "clean."