

# \*The insidious nature of world pollution

Continued from Page 1

It is impossible to estimate their numbers. Far more birds may be involved than have been found so far. Some reports speak of 10,000 birds perishing. Certainly, many thousands were involved in the tragedy.

At this writing, no expert can more than guess what happened. Many birds are so emaciated they appear to have starved. But did they starve for lack of food or were they ill or poisoned and hence unable to eat?

Did strong winds and other bad weather conditions of recent weeks also play a role? Some of the species are molting and hence couldn't fly away from bad weather or a food-short region.

Dr. Norman W. Moore, head of the Toxic Chemicals and Wildlife Division of Britain's Nature Conservancy, says a confluence of various factors may be involved. Indeed, experts may never know exactly what happened.

## More questions unanswered

But the incidental finding of the PCBs has raised the question of whether more attention should be paid to such pollution, quite apart from the bird death mystery.

Levels 10 to 12 times the amount of PCBs found in bird specimens used in routine monitoring tests were found in eight of nine of the seabirds examined by Nature Conservancy experts. This suggests that rather heavy PCB pollution may be occurring somewhere along British coasts.

The chemicals were found partly because tests for them are similar to tests for DDT and its relatives. But, in testing for poisons, experts only find what they look for. Often they haven't looked for PCBs. And if other kinds of poisons are getting into the environment, they, too, may go undetected because no one thinks to look for them.

This is how massive mercury poisoning caught Sweden off guard. The deadly metal seems to have come from seed dressings used to protect seeds against fungi and from various industrial processes. Mercury pollution attracted attention when pheasants and other birds began dying in unusual numbers about 1963. Subsequent studies found the poison spread widely, especially into fish in both fresh and salt water.

Sweden has taken energetic measures to combat this pollution. It has, for example, banned mercury seed dressings. It has set standards of contamination for fish that,

at times, have practically shut off some kinds of fishing.

## Swedes learn lesson

Not all the pollution comes from Sweden. Other Baltic countries contribute to it. But Sweden has learned a lesson in how stealthily an environmental poison can build up to be a serious problem.

Commenting on this, Dr. Bengt Lundholm, secretary of Sweden's Ecological Research Committee, has explained: "... we have found that the mercury levels started to rise in the Nordic environment at the end of the last century [when the wood pulp business, which uses mercury, began].

"It took roughly 70 years before the effects appeared and society was taken by surprise. This could have been avoided if we had continuously followed the levels of heavy metals [which are poisonous] in the environment."

You could say the same thing for lead today. Coming from automobile engines and some industrial processes, the level of this metal in air is rising. From time to time, reports of this break into the news. But, as yet, no one knows to what extent the contamination is spreading or how seriously to take it.

To help find out, a team from Scripps Institution of Oceanography has been sampling "pure" air far at sea to measure the natural background of lead in the atmosphere. Even here, they recently reported, they find enough lead to indicate pollution. The "pure" air isn't so "pure" after all.

The contamination is 100 to 1,000 times less than in San Diego. Still they judge it to be above what they would believe to be a historical natural level.

This merely suggests that lead is spreading through the lower atmosphere. A lot more research will be needed to pin down the lead-pollution hazard. But, like mercury, even a slow buildup of environmental load must be taken very seriously.

All of this illustrates the complex nature of man's chemical assault on his environment.

Recent moves to ban or restrict DDT and related poisons in some countries may give a false impression that this assault is being contained. Important as such steps are, they scarcely begin to avert the chemical poison hazard. Indeed, scientists have scarcely begun to understand the nature and scope of the hazard, let alone figure out what to do about it.

MONS 031625

## U.S., Soviets redraft A-treaty

By the Associated Press

Geneva

The United States and the Soviet Union

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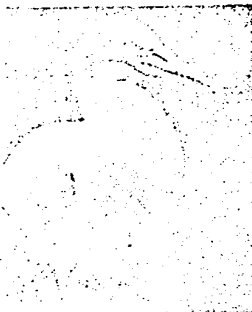
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members of the Supreme Court  
to termed the ruling a "criminal  
by the federal government" and  
constitution by the court."

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ALA. ARK. FLA. GA. LA. MISS. N.C. S.C. TENN. TEXAS VA.

By a staff writer

## insidious nature of chemical pollution?



By Robert C. Cowen  
Natural science editor of *The Christian Science Monitor*

London

Britain's massive, and puzzling, die-off of seabirds has dramatized the insidious nature of chemical pollution.

While people point accusing fingers at DDT and related bug sprays, other poisonous chemicals spread into our environment unpublicized and virtually undetected.

Thus researchers got something of a surprise to find that some of the dead birds had heavy body burdens of a class of toxic industrial chemicals known as PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls). They're widely used in making paints and plastics and in many other manufacturing processes.

As with lead from automobile exhaust, asbestos from brake linings, or mercury from seed dressing and industry, pollution experts have been aware that the

PCBs were a potential problem. But little track has been kept of them, so little was known about their environmental spread.

Finding hundreds of parts per million of PCBs in seabirds suggests that Britain, and by implication other countries, may be pouring far more of this class of chemical into the environment than suspected.

Even the fact the PCBs may be menacing birds would not have come to light if wildlife experts here were not pushing a crash investigation into the spectacular seabird disaster.

Somewhere at sea, a tragedy has been taking place. It was unknown until mid-December when dead and dying birds began washing ashore, landing on ships, and dropping out of the sky. They include a number of species—cormorants, gannets, guillemots, puffins, razorbills, and shags.

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: menaced by pollution