Loss of Coho Fry Laid to Pesticide

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By Wheeler Johnson

THINGS ARE NORMAL at Berwyn Rod and Gun Club. The big annual blowout at the Bladensburg Fire Hall found Bob McCaffery again taking up the gavel as president, Johan Finsterwalder sweeping all the top awards for rifle and pistol shooting, and congratulations all around at the closing of another successful year under retiring president Dave Zollenhofer.



Berwyn, one of the pioneers among the Washington area gun clubs, is located near Bowie. Actually, its property almost touches the far turn at the Bowie race track. It was strongly target rifle oriented, producing some top shooters, including champion Finsterwalder and others before him.

In recent years, however, there was a murmuring among the trap-shooting element in the club, who felt the scatter gunners ought to get some recognition, too. They put the bee on McCaffery during an earlier term as president and he decided to investigate.

His constituents introduced him to the sport at no less a trap shooting hotbed than the Oriole Club in Baltimore. According to Mac, his first action on a trap field resulted in a score of something like 17x50. He came back to Berwyn determined that something had to be done about his own trapshooting as well as the club's. Now it's advised not to take on either the club team, or Mac himself, unless you can rate as a Class A shooter.

NOT ALL WAS FOOD, music, dancing and prizes at Berwyn's annual get together. After the dinner, Dr. Joseph P. Linduska, associate director of the Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife, warned the gathering that the need for an immediate halt to the way we are altering our environment is "almost a life and death matter."

"Biologists go back about 20 years in sniffing the wind and another 10 years in crying wolf. The individual's patron saint in these warnings, Rachel Carson, also a biologist, waved the red flag on what was happening to the environment," Linduska said.

"I was on the ground floor of the controversy over the effects of the use of DDT in 1942, and at that time I was convinced that Rachel Carson had overstepped her bounds. Now I am equally convinced that she was conservative."

LINDUSKA reminded his hearers of the recent development in Michigan where 25,000 pounds of coho salmon were condemned because these valued food and game fish contained 19 parts per million of DDT, while the allowable amount in food for public consumption is set at seven per million by the government.

Not as well known is the fact that one million coho fry, which never had been exposed directly to DDT were lost because the eggs, laid by fish which carried 19 parts per million of the pesticide were very high in fat content and either fail to hatch or the fry died.

Other species in the Great Lakes also are under similar heavy burden as well as lake trout in New York from the chloronated hydrocarbon pesticides, which Linduska described as having insidious qualities affecting the environment and which are virtually indestructable.

THE INSIDIOUS properties of DDT were illustrated in a gnat control project at Clear Lake, Calif. The gnats used to emerge in tremendous quantities, Linduska related. They were treated with DDT, using a spray of less than one part per million. That took care of the gnats.

After the third year, however, the fish in Clear Lake began to die. After that the fish-eating birds began to die, perfect example of how these pesticides begin with the food chain, the one-cell animals, and the DDT is ingested by each animal in the chain until poison stored in their bodies is greater than the animals' tolerance to it.

LINDUSKA WARNED of another menace, which he said "over the long pull may be the greatest problem compound we have."

This is a chemical used in production of paints, insulating materials, and in plastics. Its formal name is polychlorated biphenyls, but understandably it is most often designated as PCB.

Linduska says this poisonous chemical now is showing up in the tissues of birds examined, along with DDT, dieldren and other better known trouble makers. Indications are that it leaches out of the paint and insulating materials and gets into the soil and water. Discarded plastics add to the store of this poison that eventually makes its way into the tissue of animals and birds, providing "the greatest problem of the chemical age," Linduska said.

IN ADDITION to McCaffery, officers inducted were: A. B. Hitt, vice president; Fred Pearce, treasurer; William Gray, corresponding secretary; Richard Holmes, recording secretary; Johan Finsterwalder, executive secretary, and Joe Bordas, training officer. The executive committee is composed of Ted Richards, Joe Roper, and Fred Wilson.

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