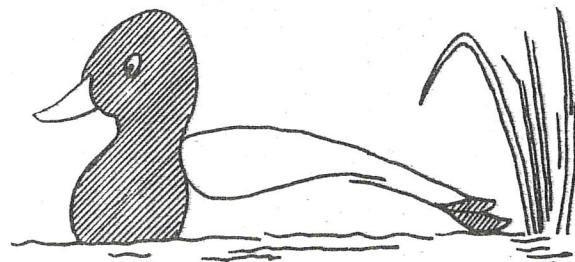


the lesser

Squawk



Published at Charleston, S. C. by THE CHARLESTON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY, INC.,
Your National Audubon Society Chapter, April 1976, Volume XXVII, No. 4

ARTICLES TO BE PUBLISHED IN THE MAY ISSUE OF THE LESSER SQUAWK MUST BE SUBMITTED
IN WRITING BY APRIL 20, 1976.

MONTHLY MEETING

Tuesday April 13, 1976 at 8PM
Charleston Museum Lecture Hall

PROGRAM

Mr. Dennis Lawson, newly appointed Administrator of Drayton Hall, will be the guest speaker at the April meeting of the Charleston Natural History Society. His primary topic will be "A History of the Rice Culture in the South Carolina Low Country." His presentation will include a series of slides that depict various aspects of the history of rice planting in the Low Country, and how much of the present natural history of the Low Country has been influenced by past rice planting. Mr. Lawson will also give a short lecture on his work with Drayton Hall.

Richard D. Porcher
Program Chairman

FIELD TRIP, Sunday April 25, 1976

The South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Department will host the Charleston Natural History Society at the Santee Coastal Refuge on Sunday, April 25. Site of Blake's Reserve, the refuge is one of South Carolina's newest and has an extensive array of wildlife. There are 15 osprey nests, one bald eagle nest and two colonies of red cockaded woodpeckers, in addition to the more common birds. Blake's Reserve itself is the oldest known heron rookery in America.

Participants will leave from the Charleston Museum at 7:30 a.m. and meet at the main house on the refuge at 9 a.m. Everyone should bring a lunch and insect repellent although I hope the latter will not be needed. If you have any questions, call me at 886-6911.

David Huff
Field Trips Chairman



Mr. & Mrs T A Beckett III
Magnolia Gardens Rt 4
Charleston S C 29407

SPRING BIRD COUNT - 1976

The annual spring bird count will be held this year on Sunday, May 2, 1976. All members of the Society and their guests are invited to participate. The assembly point will be Gregorie's Service Station at the intersection of U.S. Hwy. 17 and S.C. Hwy. 41 north of Mt. Pleasant at 6:30 A.M. Participants should bring lunch, rain gear, and plan to spend about eight hours in the field. The spring bird count is sponsored by the Carolina Bird Club, and unlike the Audubon Christmas bird count, no special fee is required of either members or guests. The same count circle is censused as at Christmas time, and participants will be grouped into 7-9 field parties, each headed by at least two experienced birders. In order that field parties may be assigned ahead of time, members and their guests who wish to participate are asked to notify Julian Harrison (795-1694).

From the Executive Committee

At the March meeting of the Society the membership voted to invite individuals from the community who opposed the nomination of the Cooper River Historic District to present their views on the nomination. Since the Preservation Society of Charleston has resended their nomination, the invited speakers felt the meeting was unnecessary, and the meeting has been canceled. The Executive Committee will, however, keep the membership informed of future developments concerning the Amoco plant and railroad through this historic area.

Richard D. Porcher, Jr.

The Phlox Clan

Seon a plant, originally from Texas, will come into flower along sandy roadsides, as well as in a few gardens, and particularly is it fond of sea island sites that presumably resemble its native heath. *Phlox drummondii* produces petals pigmented with reds, pinks, purples or white, which owing to the usual abundant growth of plants, produces a splendid palette of color. Shortly after *P. drummondii* has begun to bloom, you may expect to see *Phlox carolina* along moist, semi-shaded roadsides where its tall stems hold lavender-pink flowers above other damp earth dwellers. Inland, upper Berkeley County for instance, you may encounter in deciduous forests, the slender stemmed *P. pilosa* with its beautiful lavender flowers, and *P. amoena*, with predominantly pink blossoms, has been reported from sandy woodlands of the inner coastal plain.

Of the 60 species of phlox, all are native of North America except one found in eastern Siberia. Most familiar to us as garden subjects are *P. subulata*, moss pink or erroneously, "thrift", and *P. paniculata* which is the parent of most cultivated, tall garden phlox. The wild type of *P. paniculata* grows in the Appalachian Mountains. Less frequently, another mountain species, *P. divaricata*, is seen in local gardens. Some of the western species have interestingly restricted habitats; such as *P. diffusa* which grows on the sides of extinct volcanoes.

Phlox belongs to the family Polemoniaceae. The word phlox comes from the Greek word for flame, alluding, of course, to the colorful blooms.

Edmund R. Cuthbert

OFFICERS

President: Richard D. Porcher, Jr., Biology Department, The Citadel, Charleston S. C., 29409
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THE LESSER SQUAWK is published by the Charleston Natural History Society
Editor: Perry E. Nugent, 2260 Dallerton Circle, Charleston, S. C., 29407
Phone: 556-3841

conservationists it would truly reform wasteful timbering practices. Provisions it includes must be adopted by Congress if the nation is to have true preservation of forest values and essential forest ecological benefits.

Called the National Forest Timber Management Reform Act, The Randolph/Brown bill (S.2926 and HR 11894) would establish National Forest management standards, seek multiple-use plans for each of the National Forests, set stiff controls on clear-cutting (cuts would be limited to 25 acres), work to protect total forest resources--including the watersheds which healthy forests protect--and give emphasis to wildlife and wildlife habitat conservation.

New Limits On Monoculture Their bill includes a provision to set limits on the damaging practice of monoculture in Eastern forests. Long opposed by the National Audubon Society (we rate it as one of our national priorities), monoculture is the practice of planting only a single species, usually pine, for fast growth and short-run profit. The provision would be aimed at "generally preserving existing mixed hardwood forests" and to conservation of wildlife. Other provisions of the Randolph bill call for preservation of National Forest ecosystems; protection of forest soil resources, and more authority for local professional foresters who now must clear decisions concerning local forest management with top officials in the Forest Service.

C.H.Callison To Testify Other bills which have also been introduced would wipe out the prohibition on clearcutting in the now-famous 1897 law, under which clearcutting has been stopped in four southern states and in the Tongass National Forest in Alaska as the result of court cases. Audubon's Executive Vice President Charles H. Callison has been invited to testify for the Society at the hearings.

AMENDED STRIP MINE BILL STILL FACES SOME MAJOR HURDLES As reported last issue, an amended but still strong strip mine control bill has been reported out of the House Interior Committee. The bill is essentially the same as the one vetoed; the basically non-substantive changes are devised to meet the main objections of last year by extending certain compliance standards; by clarifying language barring mining on alluvial valley floors and exempting strip mines already in operation there, and by modifying the new reclamation funding provision. The House proponents of the bill still must surmount parliamentary hurdles to get the bill passed, and if it doesn't pass by at least a 2/3rds majority, it will face possibility of another veto.

The Society's Rocky Mountain Regional Representative Bob Turner says: "Many people within the mining industry are beginning to feel they would be better off with specific ground rules such as are laid out in this bill than they would with present indecision as manifested by continuous new regulations being promulgated from the Department of the Interior. We believe much of this indecision would be alleviated if the will of the people was expressed through Congress in passage of this bill, which has had lengthy field hearings and reviews and has been widely discussed throughout the U.S."

Two Thoughts on Energy According to a study by the International Energy Agency, the United States last year wasted as much energy as two thirds of the world consumed....The senior researcher of the Worldwatch Institute has this answer to those who would equate conservation with curtailment: "Curtailment means giving up automobiles, conservation means trading in a seven-miles-per-gallon status symbol for a commuter vehicle that gets 40. Curtailment means a cold house, conservation means good insulation and an efficient heating system."

THE SKY-WATCHERS' GUIDE

April of this year offers at least two events of special interest to Sky-watchers. One of these is the occultation, or eclipsing of a star by a planet; and the other is the opportunity for telescope owners to get a good view of Uranus, the planet next beyond Saturn in space.

Let us begin our Sky-watching soon after sunset in order not to miss Mercury, which is once more an "Evening Star". By April 10, it will be visible for about an hour after sunset, a little north of west, and during the next two weeks it will remain in view a few minutes longer each day until the 27th, when it reaches its greatest eastern elongation. After that, it will move rapidly into the glare of the sunset.

As soon as it is dark, Taurus may be seen headed nose-downward toward the horizon, pursued by Orion. Following Taurus along the ecliptic are Gemini, the Twins. Castor and Pollux, the brightest stars in this constellation, represent the heads of the Twins, just north of the ecliptic. Extending westward, two faint stars, between which the ecliptic runs, are their knees; and two more, south of the ecliptic, are their feet. One of these, not far from the end of Orion's club, is the brightest star in the group. On April 7, at 7:57 p.m., Mars will be very close to this star. The observer can then watch as the red planet begins to move eastward across the face of this star. Three minutes later, the star will disappear completely, only to reappear moments afterward.

Saturn may be seen, still located between Gemini and Leo. At mid-month, it sets about 1:30 a.m.

Next eastward from Leo is Virgo, the Virgin. Though rather difficult to discern, it is necessary to recognize this constellation if one wishes to locate Uranus. There is only one bright star in the group, - Spica, found just south of the ecliptic. The rest are very faint, covering about 25 or 30 degrees of the Sky. The shape suggests a large, lopsided, open book, with Spica at the bottom of the center binding. About 20 degrees northeast of Spica is a very faint star. By focusing a telescope just east of this star, the successful viewer may be startled to see a small bright object, green in color. That will be Uranus! The planet is so very far away, it is impossible to see any surface markings except through the largest telescopes. However, Uranus has five moons. If the observer is away from bright lights, and if the night is quite clear, he may be able to see the two largest of these in his telescope. They will appear as tiny dots near Uranus. At the first part of April, one will have to wait until 9:00 p.m. to begin the search for Uranus, because it will not be high enough above the horizon before that time. However, every clear night until the end of August will present a new opportunity for telescopic observation of this distant world. Virgo, now, is located a little south of east in the early evenings, but each night, it will rise a little earlier, moving gradually across the sky. By the end of August, it will be setting in the west as soon as it is dark.

High in the east during the early evening hours of April, about 30 degrees north of Spica, Arcturus shines with fiery brilliance. This star is an enormous sun, some 40 light-years from our Solar System. (A light-year is the distance light travels at the rate of 186,000 miles per second).

Venus is the only "Morning Star" to be seen this month. It will rise less than an hour before the sun during the first week, but by month's end, its brilliance will be overpowered by that of the sun.

A reminder to Sky-watchers: even though Daylight Saving Time will return the end of April, hours mentioned in these Guides always refer to Standard Time.

Elizabeth D. Simons

Observations

Date	Species	Location	Observer
March 6	1 Peregrine Falcon	Magnolia Gardens	Edmund Farrar, Jr.
	11 Glossy Ibis	Magnolia Gardens	Edmund Farrar, Jr.
	1 Parula Warbler	Magnolia Gardens	Edmund Farrar, Jr.
March 14	1 Black and White Warbler	Magnolia Gardens	Edmund Farrar, Jr.
	20 Orange-crowned Warbler	Magnolia Gardens	Edmund Farrar, Jr.
	1 ♀ Baltimore Oriole	Magnolia Gardens	Edmund Farrar, Jr.
	300 ♀ Glossy Ibis	Ashley River Bridge	Perry & Cris Nugent
19	1 Red-breasted Nuthatch	2260 Dallerton Circle	Cris Nugent
20	2 Louisiana Waterthrushes	Fairlawn Plantation	Pete Laurie & Perry Nugent
	1 Osprey	Fairlawn Plantation	Pete Laurie & Perry Nugent
	1 Sharp-shinned Hawk	Fairlawn Plantation	Pete Laurie & Perry Nugent
	2 Mississippi Kites	Fairlawn Plantation	Perry Nugent
22	1 Orange-crowned Warbler	2260 Dallerton Circle	Perry Nugent
24	25 Water Pipits	U.S. Vege. Lab.	Perry Nugent
	1 Cattle Egret	U.S. Vege. Lab.	Perry Nugent

I wish to thank Dr. Farrar for his interesting reports and to encourage others to report their observations. Spring migration is starting and is the time when you are apt to see uncommon to rare species as well as those that arrive earlier or stay later than usual. The Arrival and Departure list in each Lesser Squawk is a guide to help you know what birds are unusual enough to report. I welcome any suggestions that might help you decide if your observation is worth reporting.

Perry Nugent

Bird Movements in April

Arrivals

Date	Species	Date	Species
1	Solitary Sandpiper	8	Sandwich Tern
	Swainson's Warbler	10	Purple Gallinule
	Yellow Warbler		Bobolink
3	Blackpoll Warbler	12	Black-throated
4	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	13	Blue Warbler
4	Cliff Swallow	14	Gray-cheeked Thrush
6	Indigo Bunting	15	Cape May Warbler
6	Blue Grosbeak	17	American Redstart
7	Worm-eating Warbler	18	Magnolia Warbler
	Kentucky Warbler		Blue-winged Warbler
		19	Gray Kingbird
		21	Swainson's Thrush
		22	Red Phalarope
		23	Black-billed Cuckoo
		24	Chestnut-sided Warbler
		27	Kirtland's Warbler
		28	Bank Swallow
		Early	Scarlet Tanager
		Mid	Gull-billed Tern

Departures

Date	Species	Date	Species
2	Whistling Swan	16	Common Merganser
3	Old Squaw	16	Robin
5	Virginia Rail	17	Raven
6	Glaucous Gull	18	Canvasback
7	Rough-legged Hawk	20	Common Goldeneye
8	Ipwich Sparrow	21	Pine Siskin
9	Golden-crowned Kinglet		Brown-headed Cowbird
11	Baltimore Oriole	22	Water Pipit
13	Henslow's Sparrow	24	Bufflehead
14	Brown Creeper	26	Winter Wren
	Phoebe		Blue Goose
			Parasitic Jaeger
		26	Blue-winged Warbler
		27	Louisiana Waterthrush
		28	Broad-winged Hawk
			Solitary Vireo
		29	Purple Finch
		30	Whip-poor-will
			Red-breasted Nuthatch
			Palm Warbler
			Rusty Blackbird
			Pintail

was halted, at least temporarily, by two law suits filed by the Defenders of Wildlife, the Natural Resources Defense Council and others. One suit applies only to the Unit 13 "research" program which entails exterminating the wolves in a part of the unit -- the program from which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has withdrawn its funding (Leader, 1/30/76); a court restraining order halted shooting in that unit at least until a hearing March 2. A second suit, filed more recently on different legal grounds, won a restraining order on killing wolves in Unit 20-A; that order was subject to a hearing scheduled, as we went to press, for Feb. 25.

Meanwhile the National Audubon Society found itself in an impossible position in respect to the study of wolf ecology it had hoped to undertake for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game; some persons jumped to the conclusion that the Audubon Society research was in some way connected with the Alaskan "research"/extermination program, which of course is totally false. In a letter to the Alaskan authorities, Executive Vice President Callison pointed out that the proposed study would be "handicapped by the present atmosphere of emotionally charged controversy," and said the Society was regrettably withdrawing, at least for the present, from the study which it had hoped would have supplied sound data for wiser wildlife policies in Alaska.

Eagle Refuge. A 1000-acre tract 100 miles north of Seattle that is a wintering site for between 100 and 300 bald eagles has been dedicated as a refuge by The Nature Conservancy and the State of Washington, working with two timber companies, Scott Paper and Simpson, and Fred Martin, a Washington rancher; Tahoma Audubon Society and other chapters in the state contributed \$2000.

And From Colorado, there's more good news about eagles. Record numbers are reported wintering in the San Luis Valley in the southern part of the state; about 280 golden and between 200 and 250 bald eagles were estimated there after an aerial survey by a team of biologists including National Audubon's C. Eugene Knoder. They attribute the increase to "a combination of factors, including the ban on predator poisons on federal lands, a decline in illegal shooting, and possibly the prohibition of DDT."

AUDUBON LEADER - March 12, 1976

A CRUCIAL DEBATE WILL BEGIN MARCH 15 WHEN THE SENATE AGRICULTURE SUBCOMMITTEE TAKES UP FORESTRY REFORM LEGISLATION; SEN. HUMPHREY INTRODUCES INADEQUATE BILL

It is hoped that true reform of excessive clearcutting and other forest abuses will result from the Senate hearings March 15, 16, and 22, when industry and environmentalists meet to testify on legislation to guide the future of the nation's 187-million acres of National Forests (there are 155 National Forests in 43 states and most are in the West).

Despite a number of major reforms--dating back as far as the early 1900's and Gifford Pinchot, the conservationist first Chief Forester --U.S. forests have too often been abused or completely denuded by bad timber management in national binges to build quick and cheap with little thought to other forest resources.

An Inadequate Forestry Bill Senator Hubert H. Humphrey (Minn.) and 12 co-sponsors have introduced legislation (S.3091) which would not sufficiently reform these abuses. Worse, S.3091 will be the vehicle the Agriculture Committee will consider at the hearings. His bill has mostly "goal-oriented" policy objectives and does not include sufficient management specifics. It would set no concrete standards to guide future management and lumber sales and would not correct the present law which allows the Forest Service to continue to make massive clearcuts.

A Strong Reform Bill On the other hand, Senator Jennings Randolph (W. Va.) and Rep. George E. Brown, Jr., (Cal.) have also introduced legislation and in the view of

the tougher regulations results from its analysis that the plants' owners may choose to close the plants rather than make major investments for pollution control.

20,000 Jobs at Stake

Imposing the national standards on the eight plants, the EPA said, could risk 20,000 to 25,000 jobs, or 14% of the total employment of the Mahoning Valley. "This provision of relief on the basis of regional economic impact is a unique situation, due to the combination of the large number of jobs involved and the large portion of the labor force affected," the EPA said.

Because the eight plants are older, dating back in some cases to the turn of the century, the Youngstown-area mills employ open-hearth steelmaking furnaces that are less efficient and more pollution-prone. They make a significant contribution to the Mahoning River's pollution, where water temperatures sometimes run higher than 90 degrees Fahrenheit due to oil and grease and other waste accumulation.

The EPA decision would require the exempt plants to meet water-pollution controls by 1983 unless they apply for another exemption, and EPA officials say they expect the steel companies to make such a request.

The agency hinted in 1974 that it would grant the older Mahoning River steel plants a reprieve from tough pollution standards if they could prove the rules would cause severe economic and employment problems.

AUDUBON LEADER - February 27, 1976

Strong Alpine Lakes Bill Reported The House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee has reported out to the Rules Committee a reasonably strong Alpine Lakes preservation bill which would establish a 383,600-acre Alpine Lakes Wilderness within a 900,000-acre Ice Peaks Enchantment Area Management Unit as a buffer zone. Rejected were the Administration plan for a 293,000-acre wilderness and proposals by Representative James P. Johnson (Colo.). The Forest Service would be asked to present an overall multiple-use management plan and meet certain environmental requirements. The new bill has the backing of six out of seven of the members of the Washington delegation in the House; the bill is expected to come up for a vote next month.

WILDLIFE REFUGES BEING OVERGRAZED, AUDUBON CHARGES The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service "either fails to comprehend the damage being done to National Wildlife Refuges by overgrazing, or else it is trying to gloss over mismanagement that we suspect may not be entirely its fault," National Audubon has charged; "We suspect political pressures have forced the Refuge managers to accept more and more cattle on the Wildlife lands." This and other criticisms are included in our comments on the draft environmental impact statement which the Service drew up in response to our request that it assess the impact of the permit program under which private ranchers can graze their cattle on National Wildlife Refuges. The Society has repeatedly urged more adequate funding and staffing for the Refuge system, which is comprised of 368 areas covering 32,000,000 acres.

The Audubon statement criticized the increasing tendency to use the refuges for non-wildlife purposes, including haying and cattle-grazing, and notes specific cases of damage to wildlife -- including the reported case of two whooping crane chicks, born at the Gray's Lake (Idaho) Refuge last spring in an experimental attempt to start a new flock; the chicks were trampled to death by cattle. The Society doesn't oppose all grazing of livestock on Refuge lands, but believes that in the long run overgrazing decreases the food-producing capacity of the soil as well as depleting wildlife.

LAW SUIT HALTS WOLF SHOOTING; OUR STUDY OFF Aerial shooting of wolves in Alaska

Bird Movements in April

Departures

Date Species

Early Greater Scaup
Late Short-eared Owl

The following have been observed one or more times during April in our area

Golden-winged Warbler	Black-necked Stilt	Dickeissel
Bay-breasted Warbler	Lapland Longspur	Lark Bunting
White-tailed Kite	Yellow-headed Blackbird	

This column is primarily a guide for C.N.H.S. members although the dates should apply to all migratory birds of the coastal plain and many over the whole state. It has been a feature of the Lesser Squawk for many years and a number of the dates are from observations of our members. There seems to be much confusion about the meaning of the dates and the fact that common and very rare species are included in the list. These dates are the earliest arrivals or the latest departure as recorded in "South Carolina Bird Life" by Sprunt and Chamberlain unless there is an earlier or later date in the more recent issues of the Lesser Squawk. Any species that we have sufficient data on should be included in this list. A rare but regular visitor is just as important as the most common bird. Several species on the list are common on the coast during one season and inland during another season, therefore, they may be permanent residents but their relative abundance varies throughout the year. The Goldfinch is a good example of this, abundant during the winter and rare during the summer on the coast. Easily recognizable subspecies are found on the list. The Red-eyed and White-eyed Towhees are forms of the Rufous-sided Towhee, the former being a winter visitor and the latter a permanent resident of the coastal plain. One challenge for C.N.H.S. birders is to find and report species before or after the date they have previously been observed. This is one reason for publishing the list. Another is to inform our readers when to start looking for each species. You should expect to find very few specimens of a species at the beginning or end and considerable more during the middle of their visit to the Lowcountry.

Perry Nugent

Birds And Care
THE WASHINGTON POST - 2/15/1976
by Irston R. Barnes

Birds devote much time and attention to the care of their feathers, especially the flight feathers, but also the body feathers. Preening is the most essential aspect of feather care, which also includes true bathing with water, dusting, oiling, anting sunning and head scratching.

Last week in writing of bathing and dusting, I noted that dusting is quite different from bathing, although similar movements are involved. I also explained that bathing is not washing or cleaning the body or feathers; instead it accomplishes a controlled dampening of the feathers to condition them for more effective preening.

Bathing is also different from any incidental wetting that birds experience during a rain. Yesterday it rained hard and most of the birds wore their "rain coats," that is, they compressed their feathers closely against the body, thereby shedding water and keeping dry and warm. Then in the midst of the rain a white-throated sparrow went to a little puddle that gathered on a flagstone and performed its full

bathing routine!

Bathing is followed by drying, which I described, and then immediately by oiling.

A bird's oil gland, or glands, is situated on the upper side of the rump at the base of the tail. The oily secretion is pressed from the gland with a closed bill and applied promptly to those feathers which the bird can reach with its bill.

For parts of the body that cannot be reached directly with the bill, the bird may use its foot. For example, oil is transferred from the bill to the foot and then the head is scratched with the foot.

A variation may be observed with ducks and other long-necked birds. A preening duck will reach back with the back of its head to press against the oil gland and then quickly rub the wings and back with its head.

Preening is the most important aspect of feather care. Birds use a variety of motions in treating their feathers. They probe and agitate with their bills, stroke and smooth feathers, and pass parts of the feathers between the mandibles, restoring the interlocking of barbs and barbules. The primaries receive special attention, the bill probing at the base of the feathers and stroking them with quick passes. Other areas are given brush-like motions. Body feathers are ruffled as the bird works over the body with vibrating motions.

Anting is a form of preening carried on with an ant held in the bill as the preening medium. Acid-ejecting ants are used and stinging ants are avoided. Anting is still a mystery, although over 200 species of birds have been observed at the practice. The formic acid secreted by ants may help to control parasites.

In anting, the under surfaces of the wings appear to receive particular attention, and in the process both the wings and the head, from rubbing against the wing, get the benefit of the treatment.

Some birds let the ants do the anting. Crows and the European jay squat down on an ant hill and encourage the ants to swarm over the body.

Anting is sometimes carried on with substitutes, which are usually items with pungent odors. Among the recorded substitutes are other insects, citrus peel, cigarette butts, moth balls and many others. Anting is commonly followed by bathing, oiling and preening.

Sunning is also related to feather care. The first observation of a sunning bird may lead the observer to assume that the bird is sick or injured. On some occasions the sunning involves little more than the bird resting in the sun with its feathers ruffled to expose all feathers more fully to the sun. At other times, the bird may lie on its side with feathers ruffled and with one or both wings extended and with the tail spread. Or it may assume other strange postures. Each species has typical sunning postures.

Again, the function of sunning is not fully understood. It is thought that it may help in the conditioning of the feathers and that it facilitates the production of vitamin D from the preen oil on the feathers.

By all of these procedures-bathing, dusting, oiling, preening, anting and sunning-birds maintain the integrity and efficiency of their feathers, on which their survival depends.

POLLUTION RULES ARE SUSPENDED FOR EIGHT PLANTS

EPA Says the Steel Units Would Suffer Hardships If Standards Are Enacted

Wall Street Journal - March 16, 1976

WASHINGTON-The Environmental Protection Agency, in an unusual departure from its clean-water policies, exempted eight steel plants in Ohio's Mahoning Valley from new pollution regulations for the iron and steel industry.

The agency said "severe economic and employment disruptions" would result if these older steel plants on a 24-mile stretch of the Mahoning River near Youngstown, Ohio, are forced to meet the same standards as other steel plants.

The eight plants are operated by U.S. Steel Corp.; Youngstown Sheet & Tube Co., which is a unit of Lykes-Youngstown Corp., and Republic Steel Corp.

Official confirmation of the EPA's decision came here yesterday. It followed reports that circulated last week in the Mahoning Valley that the EPA had decided to depart from its previous practice of permitting almost no exceptions to the rules.

Republic Steel declined any comment other than to say it was "studying" the decision and any possible impact on steel mill operations.

U.S. Steel Corp. and Youngstown Sheet & Tube officials couldn't be reached for comment on the EOA decision.

Savings of \$30 Million

The exemption means the eight plants won't have to install new equipment to reduce discharges of oil and grease and other pollutants to interim standards by the 1977 deadline set by Congress. The exemption could save the plants \$30 million to \$60 million, the EPA estimated.

The new guidelines require the iron and steel industry to reduce uncontrolled discharges of oil and grease by 99.8% and suspended solids by 99.5%, before 1983. Meeting national guidelines, of which these rules are a part, will mean the nation's waters are clean enough in 1983 to allow fishing and water recreation, the agency said.

The EPA estimated that the iron and steel industry will have to spend \$2.2 billion to comply with the rules.

Pockets of Pollution

The EPA's decision to ease regulations for the Mahoning plants immediately drew criticism from environmental groups, charging the agency is creating a pocket of pollution, something Congress didn't envision in the 1972 clean water amendments. "The EPA has opened up a loophole, and who knows how many other steel plants or even other industries may try to take advantage of it," said Kris Hall, a lawyer for the Natural Resources Defense Council in Washington.

The iron and steel industry is one of the biggest sources of water pollution, the EPA said. The agency estimated the industry dumps two billion pounds of polluting materials into waterways each year. In June 1974, the agency issued regulations covering coke-making, iron-making and carbon steel-making. The new regulations cover the finishing process in the production of carbon steel.

The agency said the decision to exempt the eight Mahoning River steel plants from