Union of South Africa, has been appointed a reader in estate management at Cambridge

DISCUSSION AND CORRESPONDENCE

THE PRESERVATION OF WILD LIFE

THE Ecological Society of America's committee on the preservation of natural conditions, while unable to deal with problems concerning wild life not in reserves, continually encounters the fact that individual species are menaced with extinction by agricultural encroachments. Two of these menaces are:

1. Clean-culture (roadside mowing and burning) as distinguished from roadside and streamside shrubbery and bird and original life preservation.

Birds are decreasing for lack of nesting sites, on account of destruction of breeding conditions. Entomologists and some agriculturists maintain that this condition is necessary to agriculture. Bird men insist that birds are also essential. It is known that a few states encourage roadside shrubbery while several require roadside mowing. The practise in the various parts of the United States and Canada should be ascertained. The effect of different procedures should be determined. The areas in which specially destructive and drastic measures such as burning for insect pests are necessary should be clearly defined and limited and the public informed as to the dangers of such burning.

2. Upland marshes are important as sponges storing water and letting it out slowly during dry seasons, thus controlling floods. Such marshes are gradually being drained and the flood menace is increasing every year.

The only way to save these natural resources and at the same time, the swamp faunas, especially the birds, is to utilize the swamps for aquiculture. To this end several water-culture experiment stations should be established. For the present there should be one, perhaps at Cornell University, to deal with the upland marsh problems. There should be another in connection with Okefinokee swamp and one in connection with the coastal swamps of New Jersey. In addition to frogs, fish, and birds, a number of plants are good for food, etc.; *e. g.*, cattail flour and cattail paper have recently been tried with success. Swamp potatoes, the corns of arrowhead, and seeds, roots, and stalks of our native lotus served as food for the American aborigines and pioneers. Hedrick (SCIENCE, 40:611), Claussen (*Sci. Mo.*, 9:179), and Needham and Lloyd ("Life of Inland Waters") have discussed these questions and suggested or advocated the improvement and culture of aquatic plants.

It is the belief of the committee that all organizations in any way interested should combine efforts for the investigation of these questions.

For a list of the committee members, see SCIENCE, March 26, 1920; since that date the following have been added: Z. P. Metcalf, University of North Carolina; C. A. Shull, University of Kentucky; R. M. Harper, College Point, N. Y.; and Jens Jensen, Ravinia, Illinois.

V. E. SHELFORD,
Chairman

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

PREDILECTION AND SAMPLING OF HUMAN HEIGHTS

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: Extensive reliable data showing the distribution of human heights in "unselected" populations are surprisingly hard to obtain. The Association of Life Insurance Medical Directors and the Actuarial Society of America have, however, undertaken a very careful statistical study of men accepted for life insurance,[1] which provides, among other things, a distribution of the heights of 221,819 men. Here, at last, we might expect to settle the question of the form of distribution that would hold for a population, but we discover in the distribution curve a remarkable inversion that it is difficult to explain as anything other than an artefact.

This distribution curve is the solid line of the figure. The average height is 5 ft. 8.49 in. Since the curve is plotted in units of an inch,

[1] "Medico-Actuarial Mortality Investigation," Vol. I., 1912, esp. 11–22.