

Introduction

On 18 February 1980, His Imperial Highness Prince Hitachi, accompanied by Princess Hitachi, was the special guest at the opening of the IWRB Sapporo Meeting, comprising Executive Board Meeting, Swan Symposium and Crane Symposium. The Second International Swan Symposium was declared open on 21 February 1980 by Dr Shigeru Matsui, President of the Swan Society of Japan. Prof W J L Sladen, Co-ordinator of IWRB's Swan Research Group, then introduced Sir Peter Scott, Honorary Chairman of the Symposium. Sir Peter handed to Dr Matsui a small gift for His Imperial Highness, Prince Hitachi. This consisted of the adoption papers for two Slimbridge Bewick's Swans — one for His Imperial Highness and one for Her Imperial Highness. These were called Lotus and Leaf and each one had a drawing of its face pattern so that they can be recognized in the future.

Sir Peter then went on to say, "You will be hearing more about the Swan Supporter Scheme later in the symposium. The first symposium at Slimbridge received representatives from many countries, including two from Japan, Mr Honda and Mr Yoshikawa from Hyoko.

"For one reason or another, each one of us is an enthusiast about swans and I think it is very appropriate that there should be a double symposium — one about swans and one about cranes — because both of them are part of human mythology, leading to a very happy relationship between man and animal in many, but not alas in all, parts of the world. Swans are more fortunate than cranes in that, although they are edible, they seem to be less hunted. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why no species are seriously endangered although there are problems in some populations. In the case of the crane, however, the great majority are endangered, most directly by man. In both cases, the wetland habitat may be threatened. There is some possibility of over-population of swans in some localities and there has been a demand in some parts of the North American continent for hunting to take place. One of the most important features is the adaptation of all these birds to man-made habitats, but the swans seem in most cases to have to have a relatively undisturbed breeding habitat.

"I would like to mention the question of methodology and standardization. The measurements taken in Japan are in some cases different from those taken in England and some measurements that we think are important are not taken at all as, for example, the length of the skull. I think it is important at this meeting to standardize techniques and also to compare notes on the best methods used in the course of capture and handling. I believe it to be very important that we keep any damage and unnecessary stress to the birds to a minimum. These birds are very fragile creatures. There are three reasons why we should handle them in a very gentle manner. The first is the principle. We really have no right to be rough with birds. The second reason is also very compelling. It is that if we are rough with

experimental birds, they will not behave like normal birds and therefore we shall not get the best data from the ringing. The third reason is that there are people who do not believe that birds should be caught at all because it may damage them; we don't want this to be substantiated. It is always right to hold the birds for the shortest possible time in captivity and to handle them very carefully during that time. Swans should not be caught just before having to make a long migratory flight. We know that flight for them is not altogether easy and, indeed, aerodynamics suggest that, theoretically, Whooper Swans cannot fly — they simply don't have large enough wings to overcome the heavy load of their body. The evidence of our eyes indicates that that theory is not correct, but I make the point because I think that the margin between being able to fly easily and not being able to fly at all is narrow and therefore the effect of handling them may be deleterious."

Sir Peter then passed the meeting to the Chairman of the opening session, Prof G V T Matthews, Director of the IWRB. Other sessions were chaired by —

- Dr M Williams (New Zealand)
- Mr P Andersen-Harild (Denmark)
- Prof W J L Sladen (USA)
- Dr J Bartonek (USA)
- Mr N Perret (Canada)
- Dr S Matsui (Japan)