

Opening Remarks – Twenty-Fifth Vertebrate Pest Conference

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On behalf of the Vertebrate Pest Council, I would like to welcome you to the 25th Vertebrate Pest Conference. I regret that Bob Timm could not be here today. He underwent surgery recently. He is doing very well, is home, but was not able to attend the Conference. I agreed to fill in for him and present the Opening Remarks. Bob had a draft of his opening remarks already prepared, so I am relying heavily on his comments. The Vertebrate Pest Council is thrilled that the Conference is being held once again in this scenic and historically rich city of Monterey, California. This is the fourth time this Conference has been held in this location; the most recent prior Conference convened here in March 1988, some 24 years ago.

We were elated to find that due to the recent economic downturn in convention business, we could contract for hotel rooms and meeting space at costs lower than we had seen during the past two decades. That is the good news. The bad news is that little did we know, when we signed the hotel contract more than 3 years ago, the city of Monterey would be designated a “resort” destination, making it difficult for many employees of federal, state, or local governments to obtain permission to actually attend a Conference here! And the budget cuts at all governmental levels have caused travel cuts that have also prevented many of our colleagues from attending. So we are doubly appreciative that those of you who have come for this educational event have found a way to be here... and we also thank the management of the Portola Hotel for their flexibility in working with us to match our facility needs and costs to the revised expectations that have accompanied holding such a Conference in this era of “doing more with less”.

This Conference celebrates the 50th Anniversary of the Vertebrate Pest Conference. It was in early February 1962 in Sacramento, California that a diverse group of individuals, all of whom were involved in some manner in the management of “vertebrate pests”, came together for the first “Vertebrate Pest Control Conference”, as it was originally named. For those of you who have done the arithmetic in your head and are questioning our accuracy, please note that there were 3-year gaps between the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Conferences, while our otherwise “normal” interval between Conferences has been 2 years, thus resulting in the coincidence of our 25th Conference with our 50-year anniversary. (For others of you still puzzling on this relationship, rest assured that you’re in a room of kindred biologists and not a room of mathematicians.) Here’s another fact about that first 2-day Conference: the registration fee was \$1.00. (So, you can see we started off as a non-profit entity, and although it may not be obvious, we remain so 50 years later.)

The organizing committee for that 1st Conference, under the leadership of Dr. Walter E. “Howdy” Howard of the University of California at Davis, invited a select

group of 25 knowledgeable speakers to present “how-to” type papers on the biology and control of a wide group of vertebrate pests— including commensal rodents, coyotes, opossums, pocket gophers, moles, snakes, pigeons, starlings, wolves, and many others.

At the time of the 1st Conference, there were few general “how-to” references or other publications on the subject of vertebrate pest management. For example, the California Dept. of Agriculture’s *Vertebrate Pest Control Handbook* (Dana 1968) did not appear until half a decade later. Therefore, the organizers envisioned from the outset that the *Proceedings* of the 1st VP Conference would be a very useful document for managers. Through Dr. Howard’s outreach and the subsequent efforts of Dr. Philip J. Spear, Technical Director, the National Pest Control Association (NPCA), (now the “National Pest Management Association”), assumed the expense of publishing the 1st *Proceedings* and made this volume available throughout the United States at \$3.00 each post-paid. NPCA also provided free copies to their entire national membership, representing well over 1,000 pest control companies, many of which even in 1962 conducted for-hire nuisance wildlife control in urban and suburban situations. Indeed, this 391-page *Proceedings* substantially filled the need for a comprehensive reference on vertebrate pest control, and for many years served as the leading general how-to handbook nationwide on the subject, as well as a text for college courses.

That 1st Conference in Sacramento in 1962 drew an attendance of approximately 300 persons from 16 states, plus the District of Columbia, Canada, and South Korea (Marsh 2008). Part of our continuing success has been providing this opportunity to meet in person with colleagues from both near and far to discuss, both formally and informally, topics of mutual interest and to share ideas and challenges. And those of you gathered here today can testify that even in an age of videoconferences, Skype video calls, Twitter, iPhones, digital libraries, and other instantaneous means of communication, there is no substitute for the smile, the handshake, the compliment, and the discussion that will occur this week, as well as the new friendships that will be made. At this 25th Conference we have a total of 248 attendees. Of those attendees, 24 are from 10 countries outside the U.S. These guests are identified by their name badges; please make an effort to welcome them as you encounter each other this week. But right now, will those of you who have traveled here from beyond the U.S. please stand and be recognized as I name your country: Australia (5); Canada (1); France (1); Japan (1); Mexico (3); New Zealand (5); The Philippines (1); The Russian Federation (1); South Africa (2), and The United Kingdom (2).

We also have a number of students attending the Conference. Would the students please stand and be recog-

nized. One of the goals of the Vertebrate Pest Council is to encourage students to enter the wildlife damage management field, so we seek to encourage student participation through things such as travel grants.

At the end of the 1st Conference in 1962, Dr. Spear in his concluding remarks of appreciation said “The record of this meeting will stand as a permanent tribute to Dr. Walter Howard and his associates.” Now, here we are, 50 years later, and we can now attribute a grand total of 25 Vertebrate Pest Conferences, comprised of some 1,430 oral presentations given to participants numbering some 8,100 individuals. The *Proceedings* of these Conferences contain individual papers that span some 8,215 pages of text, representing the largest single collection of factual knowledge about the management of vertebrate pests that exists anywhere in the world.

And we are fortunate, here today, once again to be able to say “Thank You” to the founder of the Vertebrate Pest Conference, Dr. Walter E. “Howdy” Howard. Dr. Howard, will you please stand and be recognized this morning by your many friends and colleagues? And, we also wish to recognize Howdy’s wonderful wife, Betty Howard. Thank you for your dedicated support of Howdy’s career over these 5 decades. You raised three children while also accompanying Howdy on many of his more than 50 international consulting and advising assignments on rodent control and other wildlife management issues, throughout his remarkable career. Dr. and Mrs. Howard today are accompanied by their daughter, Kathy Crow and her husband Bob. Welcome, and we are so glad you could be with us today. And one footnote: Howdy, it’s still some 6 weeks away, but let us wish you in advance a Happy 95th Birthday!

A lot has changed during the 50 years that the VPC has been occurring. The first Vertebrate Pest Conference was a more local event that this one, with most attendees being from California. As you can see, the VPC is now an international event, with attendees from across the U. S. and the world. The Conference format has certainly changed. There are no more charts and slides—PowerPoints now rule. The sophistication of the science is greater, with more use of modeling to determine effects of our management actions. Regulatory processes are now in place to protect non-target wildlife, humans and the environment from unintended effects of our management actions. And one change I see very clearly. At the first VPC I attended in 1980, I was one of only a few women in the room. There were advantages to that—

there was never a line for the women’s restroom in those days! However, it is wonderful to see so many other women now in the field of wildlife biology and particularly, in vertebrate pest management.

A lot has *not* changed over the 50 years— we are still dealing with problems of those same commensal rodents, coyotes, pocket gophers, moles, snakes, pigeons, starlings, wolves, and many others. The techniques may be slightly different, but we have not yet solved the problems of how to co-exist with wildlife. So I imagine the VPC will continue on for many more years.

I would like to thank all of the past and present Vertebrate Pest Council members at this time— they have given a tremendous amount of time and energy over the years to make this Conference happen, and to put on alternate-year educational training workshops for the public. Please stand so we can recognize your contributions!

Finally, I have some announcements before we start with our keynote address. A speaker ready room is next to the hotel registration desk, down the stairs in the Portola room. Lunch each day is on your own and there are numerous restaurants down on the wharf or out the main hotel door and across the street. Tonight we have a banquet celebrating the 50th anniversary of the VPC. Unfortunately, it is sold out, but for those who have tickets, it will be at 7 PM at the Montrieo Bistro, 1½ blocks from the hotel. Tomorrow morning from 7-8 AM in the Cottonwood Room there will be a complimentary breakfast for speakers. On Wednesday at 6 PM, there will be a vendor’s forum and poster viewing in the DeAnza Foyer. Exhibits and posters will be up in the foyer starting this afternoon through Thursday lunch.

Finally, I would like to thank our 2 event sponsors, Liphatech and Bird Shield. I would also like to recognize our 9 vendors, BirdGard/Deer Shield, Bird Shield, The Gopher Snake, Liphatech, Inc., Messina Wildlife, Motomco Ltd., Pestcon Systems Inc., RCO International Inc., and Tomahawk Trap Co.

Please enjoy yourselves. The weather is wonderful and there a lot of things to do and see in Monterey, including the aquarium and whale watching.

LITERATURE CITED

- DANA, R. H. 1968. Vertebrate Pest Control Handbook, 1st Ed. California Department of Agriculture, Sacramento, CA.
- MARSH, R. E. 2008. A history of the Vertebrate Pest Conference. Proc. Vertebr. Pest Conf. 23:310-326.