

## AMÉRIQUE DU SUD

### BIRD LIFE IN SEMI-ARID REGIONS OF CHILE

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*(c/o Katz Johnson, Santiago, Chile)*

My experience of bird life in semi-arid regions is confined to the north and north-central zones of Chile, where, due to geography and sparsity of population, very special conditions prevail.

As you are doubtless aware, the arid and semi-arid regions of Chile consist of a narrow strip of land imprisoned between high and precipitous mountains on the east and the Pacific Ocean on the west. Except for the oasis as Arica and the narrow canyon-like valley of the river Loa, from the Peruvian border southwards for nearly 1,000 kilometers there is no vegetation at all until the 4,000-metre level is reached in the Andes. To all intents and purposes the bird population is confined to the sea coast, to a few watered valleys of the foothills, and to a narrow strip of elevated plateau lying between this 4,000-metres level and the 5,000-6,000-metres peaks of the Andean backbone forming the boundary between Chile and Bolivia, and, further south, between Chile and Argentina.

Most of the coastline is uninhabited, and, where centres of population do exist, nobody worries about the birds. The plateau country and the few east-west valleys carrying water destined to disappear beneath the desert sands are almost completely isolated from civilization and support only the sparsest of populations; these are of indigenous Aymara origin and eke out a precarious existence from primitive cultivation and the all-providing llama.

In suitable locations in this region, depending principally on the presence of water, the bird population is surprisingly dense. However, except for periodic raiding parties on the flamingo colonies to obtain eggs for food, it is not interfered with at all.

From this brief outline I think you will readily understand why I feel that there is little or nothing to be said about the preservation of bird life in the semi-arid regions of Chile. The problem as applied to conditions prevailing in the rest of the country is of course a different matter altogether, but evidently outside the field envisioned for the Caracas conference.