

WHY SHOULD I JOIN THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY -- HOW WOULD IT BENEFIT ME?

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Chairman Howard, Ladies and Gentlemen. My topic is not really the two-fold question it appears to be. The answer to question number two is also the answer to question number one. Thus my remarks will be more specifically addressed to the question why rather than how.

Most of the people here today are already members of the Wildlife Society. As such, they do not need this pep talk for themselves. But they do need to use it, or something similar, on many of their friends and colleagues. For, while the Wildlife Society today has a larger membership than ever before in its history, and is still growing at a rapid pace, the hard facts are that there still are more professional wildlifers than there are Wildlife Society members. These should all join the Society post-haste. It is my role today to try to provide you with reasons which you might use to persuade them to become joiners rather than non-participators, leaders rather than followers.

Perhaps you wonder why I am addressing you on this subject. The reason is simple. The Executive Committee suggested the topic and I volunteered to attempt to provide some answers. I did so, not because I am more especially qualified than others to do it. Rather, I accepted the challenge because no one else volunteered and because I do feel keenly on the subject. I have also had many opportunities over the years to use whatever persuasive powers I may have to induce my students to join the Society, admittedly often with less success than I would have liked. Therein lies our first point for discussion.

To paraphrase a rather famous quotation, no amount of valid reasons or persuasive argument can sway all of the people all of the time. But any good argument will win some of the people some of the time. This alone is reason enough for trying any time and all the time. If everyone did this, the percentage of positive increase would be encouraging indeed. That is to say, one of the most pertinent reasons for our relatively low membership rate is as much lethargy on the part of the members as of the non-members. So let us all determine to ourselves to become joiners in the crusade for members. Then and only then will the balance of my comments ring sincere in their application to non-members.

Why should I join The Wildlife Society? If your "adversary" asks you that question, give him a chance to tell you why he should not join. He will either suddenly become a most unpersuasive elocutionist, or, if glib of tongue, he will provide you with enough rope to hang himself. For I say to you in all sincerity that there neither is nor can be a valid argument for a professional person not being a member of at least one society or organization which alone can give professional recognition to his claim of professionalism.

We are not here attempting to decide whether or not the wildlife profession is in fact professional. I am merely accepting the dictionary definition of this term, which states in effect that a person working full time at a job for which he was specifically trained is a professional. The only alternate to professional is amateur. Now we have the choice of accepting this definition as a starting point or tacitly admitting that dictionaries are valueless as a true source for the meaning of words. Thus the argument of professionalism versus non-professionalism for a trained wildlife worker is somewhat moot unless he wishes to be dubbed an outright amateur at his calling. Assuming one would not choose to accept the latter alternative, the training then which will remove him from the ranks of the amateur must come in large measure from a body of fact and/or theory compiled and disseminated by some sort of organization whose function it is to publish same for the widest distribution consistent with cost.

Here two arguments for organizational support immediately come to the fore. The first is the need for a professional organization to disseminate the literature, and an equal need for the widest possible support for that organization by all who directly or indirectly benefit therefrom so that the second goal of the widest dissemination possible can be achieved.

These two arguments can also be used effectively to squelch the argument of a lack of a personal need for the journal such an organization publishes. In the first place, that the profession itself needs the organ has already been established. For anyone as an individual to disclaim the need for it is to openly admit that he does not intend to act or remain professional "now that he has a job sewed up". Surely nothing could more effectively work against both the individual or the profession than such an attitude, should it become even remotely universal. Not only would this deprive the Society of a learned clientele, it would eventually deprive the Society of its organ as well. For little, if any, publishable research data would emanate from such a milieu.

The next most closely allied argument which one hears is that "I don't need the journal because I can read the office copy". However true this may be, it is a selfish and equally short sighted attitude. For what society could continue either as a society, or continue its publication, if its only sales were to other organizations and/or libraries? For purely selfish reasons each such congener has neither the time nor the desire to support each other as active members. They merely purchase

each others' publications for rather purely selfish reasons. Thus, individual active members alone, usually, are the vertebrae which support the body and without which the body would collapse.

There is also a selfish, but equally compelling reason why an individual professional should support his professional society, whether he has time to read its organ or not, or even if a free copy is already available to him. This is the fact that the individual himself may someday have a good piece of research he may wish to have published. Since few can afford the price of self publication, most are dependent upon free publication of their work by societies and their journals. Again, without adequate member support, funds will be inadequate to do the job needed. As most of you know, there are usually more manuscripts awaiting publication than there are journals or funds available to do the job. Thus, it would strike me as a perfectly valid policy for a society to refuse to publish free, if at all, the written labors of anyone except active members. Valuable contributions of non-members could still be published with the author, or his benefactor, having to pay the costs of such publication. Such a policy, and some societies may already have it, would quickly impress upon its potential members the true worth of society membership. In fact a comparison of a scientific society to an insurance company seems apt in this single sense. The cost of publication is borne equally by members and subscribers whether they as individuals ever publish anything or not.

And the logical sequel to the last stated argument is of course that each subscriber gets equal or greater value received in the form of publications than the cost of his membership. In almost all professional societies, the Wildlife Society being no exception, the largest percentage of a member's dues is returned to him in the form of page value received, namely the society's publications. There is, further, the resale value of the journals.

There is also, at least I for one think so, another much more subtle but multi-purpose benefit to be derived from membership in one's own professional society. This is the concept of esprit de corps, of togetherness, of belonging, of a chance to lead as well as to follow, of a chance to be heard as well as to listen, and of a chance to demonstrate interest, whether the latter is in fact sincere or not. We are moving ever closer to the time when the oral examination takes on greater importance in the job application and promotion process at all levels. And the man near the top has seldom been free of that hurdle. Under such circumstances, all other qualities being equal, the joiner should certainly score higher than the non-joiner. Note that I said should, not may. I feel keenly on this point and have never made any attempt to hide the fact. Indeed, the longer the membership, the higher the score should be. You may rightly argue that if, as I have indicated, everything else is equal, then surely either candidate could do the job adequately. While I concur in this deduction, to a point, I hold to the belief that the non-joiner has demonstrated not only poor judgment, if nothing else, but selfishness and miserliness as well. And none of these traits would serve

him well consistently in a profession which is seeking to build an image of dedicated, educated, and authenticated service to the people. The introvert is seldom a volunteer for the extra step or the hardest mile. And often such a simple thing as joining and working for a Society involves both of these factors.

Lastly, after all other arguments against joining may have failed to dissuade the avid salesman, the now uncomfortable candidate issues forth with what he feels surely will be the coup de grace. "I simply cannot afford it." How often I have heard this, and worse yet, how often I have said it and meant it sincerely. I still do. But only for those societies peripheral to my profession. In fact, lest I be misunderstood, may I say that I probably have earned some sort of a booby prize for the number of times I have joined the Wildlife Society: that is, once a year between February and June since about 1940. I can remember all too clearly a group discussion on this very subject one year en route to just such a meeting as this. This day too I heard this same clincher, from a prospective candidate. But, within the hour we all stopped for that type of transfusion to which some give greater credence than others. In the true tradition of the gentleman, our nameless colleague bought the first round of plasma, than another and another. And each time the dull plastic change tray went back to the "bunny hutch" with a fresh plating of silver. Ere we left the Inn, the price of a Society Membership had been entrusted to a pleasurable but "non-professional" purpose. Now I do not wish to imply here that I disapprove of either the behavior or the value received in the above example. But I do question the comparative sense of values which were there demonstrated.

P. F. English, past president of the Wildlife Society, was much more blunt in his appraisal of this particular excuse. He stated in 1954, "Anyone so, what should I say - tight? - that he does not want to belong to the only Society of his chosen profession, I personally feel, is not a fit character to be called a Wildlifer." He then added emphasis by saying, "I mean this . . . anyone who wants to be called a wildlifer must, so far as I am concerned, send in his dues and become a member of The Wildlife Society." These were harsh words. But do they not still have as much validity as they did then?

Let us not forget the trite but still valid cliché which states that man does not live by bread alone. He lives as a spirit as well as a body. Sustenance of the latter at the expense of the former can well lead to a superfluous stomach and a shrunken lethargic brain. A reversal of this behavior pattern might well insure not only a longer life but a Wildlifer - in the P. F. English sense.

May I quickly summarize my arguments? The standard objections to explain non-membership in a professional society are these:

1. I do not have time to read the journal.
2. The journal is already available to me in my office or I can

use the library copy.

3. I cannot afford to join.

I have discussed 16 factors or arguments herein, some of which might be used to induce membership participation:

1. The member is as guilty as the non-member for "allowing the latter to so remain. We too must become joiners - in the crusade for members.
2. Give your "adversary a chance to explain his apathy. He will routinely "hang himself".
3. There neither is nor can be a valid argument for lack of participation.
4. The alternative to professionalism is amateurism.
5. Any truly scientific society cannot exist without active members.
6. Its potential for good is in direct ratio to the support of its members.
7. A non-member cannot be professional without concurrently acting like one.
8. Failure to support a professional society exemplifies an extremely short-sighted perspective.
9. Inter-organizational memberships will not alone support an organization. Conversely, member participation is essential to the functioning of any healthy scientific society.
10. Free publication of members' writings can and should be made a real stimulus to active membership.
11. Members usually receive more from their society than they pay for.
12. Society membership provides an esprit-de-corps among professional people which could not otherwise exist.
13. Society membership can and should be a plus factor in job application and promotion.
14. Members of societies - that is, joiners - can normally be counted upon more heavily than non-joiners for volunteer efforts when the need arises.
15. Lack of finances, in my opinion, is the least valid argument for failing to join one's own professional society, but may well be the true factor mitigating against joining peripheral societies.
16. Finally, in the words of P. F. English, no one can rightly call himself a Wildlifer who does not pay his fair share towards the betterment of his profession.