
Editorial

Dr Donald McQ. Shaver, the distinguished Canadian poultry breeder, in his address of welcome at the XXI World's Poultry Congress in Montreal, expressed his great concern that the poultry industry was either unaware of, or indifferent to, the rapid depletion of its genetic reserves of poultry stocks.

The Congress, he said at the time, was an appropriate forum to air concerns about the lack of investment in preserving poultry genetic resources for future long-term use. Only a half-dozen countries had initiated national conservancy plans. Realistically, some public funding was necessary but few politicians would rally to this kind of cause, unless the general public could be persuaded that this is an urgent issue.

Organisations such as the WPSA should develop a workable plan to integrate the efforts of all countries and avoid wasteful duplication. There is a need to establish a worldwide inventory and convert historical information to an electronically accessible form, concluded Dr Shaver.

In this connection it is encouraging to read, in the paper by Steffen Weigend and his colleague M.N. Romanov, about the important action taken by the FAO during the past decade in gathering primary breed information for the World Watch List of Domestic Animal Diversity. Avian species feature prominently in this work with chicken breeds strongly represented. As well as estimating breed risk status, the project has generated a global database. The next steps, says Dr Weigend, should include the strengthening of data collection; the improvement of the quality of breed data and the eradication of observed pitfalls. He also calls for the co-ordination and direct support of local, regional and international efforts to ascertain and preserve biodiversity, under the aegis of FAO.

One of the major tasks that lie ahead is in the implementation of the recommendations of the project.

As far as the avian species included in the database are concerned, chickens, ducks, geese, and turkeys, members of the World's Poultry Science Association, all over the world, should be well placed to assist in this work. The president of the Association, Dr Peter Hunton, who has had a personal association and deep interest in poultry breeding throughout his career, believes that it is very important for members to see Dr Weigend's review and we therefore commend it to the attention of all our readers.

David Martin
Editor