TRANSCRIPT
INTERVIEWEE: **Russel Clapper** (RC)
INTERVIEWERS: David Todd (DT) and Joan Walker (JW)
DATE: June 20, 1998
LOCATION: Anahuac, Texas
TRANSCRIBERS: Karen Brewer and Robin Johnson
SOURCE MEDIA: Hi-8 and DAT
REEL: 1018

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DT: This is David Todd and I've got the good fortune of being here in Anahuac, Texas with Joan Walker and the two of us are going to visit with Russ Clapper who has been involved in conservation throughout the southern United States from the western states all the way to Texas, where he's been involved in a number of projects for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service helping run some of the National Wildlife Refuges. And I wanted to start out by just thanking you for taking the time to visit with us.
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RC: Glad to have you—glad to have you.
DT: Well thank you. Today is June 20th 1998 and we're going to ask some questions about the past and some ideas of what the future may hold from here on out. I thought we'd start with some questions about where things started. I wanted to ask if you could tell me a little bit about your parents and early friends and if any of them might have encouraged your interest in conservation. In particular, I understand that you're the descendent of Oklahoma pioneers and wondering if maybe they told you something about their forbearers' experience in farming and coming into a new land.
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RC: Well I learned the most from grandfather Clapper because he participated in a run and—but he had money to buy land. So when he was marking off some land near Oklahoma City why he got around to what might have been the final corner and here was another guy measuring it around from another way. And he had a family and small kids. So grandfather Will Clapper said, well I don't have to have this and you need it worse than I do so he bought a farm northwest of Oklahoma City. And my other grandfather was McKinney and I—they both—as far as I know, they both came out of Missouri. And Mc—grandfather McKinney died when I was just a little kid, maybe three or four years old so I didn't really know him. I learned some of the things about grandfather McKinney, a little bit from grandmother, but just that he was a good hardworking man, a good provider. Well, Clapper told me about a firearm that he was proud of. He had a—a—a .38 on a—I think it was a .38 Colt on a .45 frame and I don't know what was special about that but it was bigger gun to handle I guess. And he said, I shot at an antelope with that once but of course that didn't hit him, that's one of his stories. Later on I asked grandmother about what happened to that gun and she said, I was afraid of that thing. And one time I just took it and I went outside in the backyard and I dug a hole and I buried it and he never did know what happened to that gun. So when—when one of my
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uncles (grandmother Clapper had three boys and the oldest was Merritt and then there was Horace and then there was my dad Chelsey) well, Merritt asked me if I know what had happened to that gun because grandmother was living with us when she passed away. And I said well I know and I told him the story and that was a surprise to everybody. My folks were both raised on a farm. The McKinney farm was a little further out from town, about eleven miles from Oklahoma City and the Clapper farm was maybe seven or eight miles out and they're all a part of Oklahoma City now, houses built on them. And one of
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my earlier recollections is visiting grandfather Clapper after they sold out in Oklahoma and moved back to Missouri for a while. He always had stomach trouble. He never knew what the problem was. He always thought if he changed the water he might get better and finally they did wind up in Colorado Springs. But he also had a daughter, Ethel, that had tuberculosis and so she needed a different climate. But anyhow when we made the visit, we traveled in a Model T Ford and I was supposed to be too young to remember 'cause I was only three but I remember that they had a—a cellar and it was flooded at the time and there were frogs in it. And I can remember seeing a redheaded woodpecker on top of one of the trees. And I can remember a little country store where the guy gave us cookies and a sample of honey to taste. And that's about all—that was
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one of my early memories about wildlife. So I guess at an early age, I was thinking about it. And then another thing, it's—it's kind of a sensitive thing to talk about but, I was—get fussy when I was a little kid after they moved into town and for a while—I was born in a farmhouse out on 23rd Street west of Oklahoma City and dad farmed for a while down on the Canadian bottom but he got flooded out three times—two times in a row and he didn't have enough money to keep going. So he got work with—in town finally with the Postal Service and became a mail carrier until he retired. But we—the first little place we lived, it had an old fashioned root cellar even though it was in town, that was a place you could go down and play and—but I'd get fussy and I'd tell mamma I want a grasshopper, hop—hop and she'd go out in the vacant field there and catch a grasshopper
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for me to play with. And when she got ser—seriously ill after gallbladder surgery and we were traveling in a hurry in the night trying to reach home, we were stationed at Roswell Refuge—Roswell at the Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge and dad said, we got a call from him one day, everything was fine, the next day he said you'd better come. So we were somewhere in Texas and stopped for some coffee or breakfast or something. And all of a sudden, I knew she was gone because I thought of the grasshopper and the message came to me and it was tough. So I guess I've been a wildlife lover since I was born I guess. And at home we—one time gran—Uncle Merritt brought me a baby screech owl and I raised it and released it. Another time two of my friends went out near my uncle's place out close to Calumet and—west of Oklahoma City and we brought
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home two young red tail hawks. I had the female which was larger and I presume it was female, and he had a smaller bird which we presumed was a male. And we were raising them and training them for falconry 'cause that's the only thing we could find, you know. And—but they—there have been people who raised red tails and they're pretty good at catching rabbits. But that was when there was no legal protection on hawks, federal or

state. And so I raised this bird and he was learning to do some things. And dad had an old '30 Plymouth and we'd—let—he let us use it, he had a '39 that they used for, you know, family car but when we wanted to go out in the country we could use the old Plymouth and those birds would perch on the—the—the seat behind the driver. And they'd always have their hind end aimed the right direction, some papers down. But one day he left the yard and went down to a neighbors' place and sitting on the crosswire overlooking the chicken yard and all of a sudden I heard bang. And the kid didn't know I had the bird and didn't know but what it was a wild bird and he shot him right through the middle with a 22. But…
DT: How did you catch the hawk and train it?
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We—we robbed the nest and raised the birds. They were fea—completely feathered but they couldn't fly. And the way we get up—we got up a tree, we bought about a fifty foot chunk of manila rope and we'd throw it over a limb and—and put a loop in it and the other guys would hau—help you get on up and you get to another point and you throw it over another limb and they finally—you finally get up to the top where the—the nest would be, kind of a rope elevator and then come down the same way. I think we had a little basket or something we'd put the birds in to let them down.
JW: How old were you?
RC: How old were we? We were in high school, that was the year we graduated from high school I think. Yeah, we were about seventeen or eighteen. I graduated in 1940 and—it's one of those things, everybody was trying to do something like that because I think it was the Crabtrees that had an article in Geographic about falconry and they—they started off I think with a Coopers hawk. And we had a Coopers hawk nest spotted but by the time we got back out there it was too late they—they had already, if they survived, they'd already left the nest.
DT: Were there writers like the Crabtrees that you enjoyed and that might have sort of led you down this rosy path?
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RC: I—I think that's the right name, I—I may have the wrong name but these are the same guys that studied wolves and stuff at Yellowstone. I think that's the wrong name—why can't I—I have trouble remembering names, that's for sure. Anyhow, if I think of it later, well we will but—yeah that—that's—you—I read everything I could get and finally in the library at high school I found Birds of America, Garden City Publishing Company Birds of America and had a lot of good paintings in it. And so I bought one for myself. And before that I'd had little dime store bird guides and things. It was not very good but—so I was learning the birds and folks encouraged it.
DT: Was there anybody in particular, a teacher or a relative or friend that was real supportive?
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RC: At high school, my biology teachers were supportive and, in fact, one of them, one of the ladies, teachers, asked me if I'd take her on a fieldtrip and show her some birds. Then there was—there was Stemens. This guy Stemens was one of the pioneers in collecting pollen for allergy testing and he finally quit teaching and did that as a full-time business. There was another man Myers—Stemens and Myers together, they were both biology teachers. Stemens was at Klassen where I attended school and Myers was at the Central high school. But together they published the Flora of Oklahoma, it was

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practically all the plants that they could find in Oklahoma at the time. And they would go on fieldtrips and he took us on a fieldtrip and he'd always single somebody out that he sort of favored and if he favored them why he would pull a trick on you. So he goes along and he picks up this—pulls this plant up and he takes a little bulb and he whittles it off and cleans it up and said, here try this but don't swallow it, just chew it up and spit it out, don't swallow it. And it was like a thousand needles pricking you. And I got some water somewhere quick and washed my mouth out and he—and it's a plant, I think they call it dragon root or something like that but.
JW: Sounds like a dragon.
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RC: He—he taught me a—a lesson in botany that way.
DT: So you were interested in not just birds but also flora?
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RC: Yeah—yeah. In fact, he set up a special class for myself and another person in botany while he had a—his regular class was biology but for that same period he had us in the back of the room letting us get into botany. We spent a lot of time looking through a microscope with little water samples and little creatures that are in wa—stagnant water and things and sketching that stuff and—and then the—he had us do a—a plant collection and so we earned—earned a few points in botany.
DT: What was it like collecting birds and plants in Oklahoma back then. Were there wood lots and open areas where you could go out and get these things?
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RC: We lived on—we lived on the very edge of town on Northwest 12th Street and when you walked out our back door and went through our garden, we had—that had about a half acre there and went out—went through our back gate, it was a vacant field that hadn't been built up yet. And 11th Street was a dirt—graded dirt road and on the other side of 11th Street was the beginning of a farm and next thing was 10th Street and the other side of 10th Street was a farm and this farm continued clear on down to an old river channel of the North Canadian that was—it was Oxbow Lakes that were cut off. And if you kept on going you went through some woods and you finally got to the North Canadian, so we were on the edge of the country. And there was a storm sewer on—about a block from the house and it emptied into a creek and this creek had willow trees and cottonwoods and wild grapes so we were right on the edge of—of the outdoors. Always were meadowlarks in those fields and there always were flickers down on the creek and there were always redheaded woodpeckers—well it was vacant lots in front
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of us for a long time. And there would be redheaded woodpeckers that would make their holes in the power line poles and things. And I knew where the nests were. And somebody walked home from school with me and had a little time, I'd say let's—let's go look at this flickers' nest and I'd climb up there and pull out a baby and show it to them and put it back in. I had one or two falls, it's a wonder I survived. But I couldn't help it, I just liked it.
DT: Well what about your friends? Did some of them who you showed a flicker to take interest?
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RC: Yeah they—just one of the school chums but there were—there was one friend

especially, Garrel—Garrel Spire that he liked birds too and he liked to be able to identify things. And he—he lived with an aunt and uncle and they were both medical doctors and his uncle, Dallas Bletchly had his office right in his home and then his aunt worked down at a bone and joint hospital. But Garrel was outdoor—he could hear and I began to have some little hearing problems even as a kid especially after going swimming one time and sending signals underwater knocking rocks together. I always felt like I water in this ear ever since and so that ear got bad in a hurry. And apparently probably all my life I couldn't hear high notes—extremely high notes, so Garrel and I would be out in the yard in—in the summertime like Fall or Spring when birds were migrating and he'd hear the little neotropicals going overhead twittering and said I wonder what those are? The
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only thing I could hear would be upland flubbers 'cause I could hear them, they were loud. And he—he'd get so aggravated at me, he'd say, can't you hear that—can't you hear that? No I can't hear a thing. So he had his uncle look in my ears and he didn't see anything wrong 'cause he didn't—you don't see nerve deafness, you know, that sort of a loss. And maybe firecrackers contributed to it. We experimented, we made firecracker guns that would shoot gravel and marbles out a pipe. I shot a hole—a round hole right through the redwood siding on the garage one time, just cut a neat, clean hole just like you cut it with an auger. I learned taxidermy work, finally got some help from an expert that showed me a few things. I made a little—little change in high school years stuffing
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birds for people or a road kill roadrunner was one of them. Somebody's parrot died was another and a—a guy that hunted and I did a duck or two for him. And my uncle brought me a Mississippi coyote, I did it for him. I did an osprey once that he shot back when—he'd find out you—you're doing things, but hell, they liable to kill something and bring it to you. Nothing had protection in—in the way of birds of prey then and…
JW: There just wasn't a lot of protection or laws or anything, it was pretty much self-directed wasn't it?
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RC: Well I—I went to—I made friends with a federal game agent, Milt Boone he's passed on now, but he was in Oklahoma City at the time. And he only lived a block and a half away from me. And he invited me to come over and see some home movies once and so when I—I got serious about sparrows and things and all the different kinds we had I went to him to see about a collecting permit. He said, when you get in college and you have a classes we'll talk about it but now I said, if you want to you can salvage what you find on the road and it'll be okay. So I would get things every now and then and I'd give them to the school. And that's—that's about what happened. So I learned that little skill. I know it was—it was part of my skills that I wrote down when I applied for work with the Fish and Wildlife Service.
DT: Can you describe stuffing an osprey or a duck, how you'd go about it to preserve the skin?
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RC: You just literally, you skin a bird. And if it's—if it's a—a duck—if it's a bird with a big head you may have to—like a duck, I usually slit the top of the head so that I can pass the head out through the slit and cut, you know, sever the neck. You can skin up so far and then—then you have to clean out the eyes and the brains and things and treat it. I used white arsenic and alum. That was the old way in those days and when you got it all—and

you replaced the—the eyes—well the flesh you took off, you replaced with just ordinary modeling clay, water-based not—not the oil-based modeling clay, but the kind that will harden. And set your eyes in the clay and you ever—do everything carefully. And then make the body and the neck out of—you have a wire for—for the neck that
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pokes into a body that you made out of excelsior, you shape it in your hands and you wraps the twine around it until—and squeeze it and squeeze it until you get the shape you want and have a place where it's going to accommodate a little inset for the wings and all and—and then you have some wires that go up and—and fasten into excelsior that come up through their legs. And some of those birds you have to cut and pull a tendon out of the legs to have room for the wire. And—so it's a technique and if—if you do a good job it'll look like something when you gets through but I did a lot of things that didn't look like anything. Sometimes I worked half the night trying to learn how.
DT: You taught yourself?
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RC: Mother couldn't get me to go to bed 'cause I wanted to finish it. So they were supportive. But I—I did a few birds after I came to work, things that we found dead at—at Aransas for display. I quit doing that after awhile. I got like—where I like photographs better than I did stuffed birds. I could do it still but I won't. The osprey, I did a full wing mount with claws out and I later sold it to somebody or I took it to a taxidermy friend and he sold it to somebody that was in the advertising business so it went into a window display somewhere I guess.
DT: I heard that you spent some summer vacations when you were in high school banding ducks.
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RC: Well it was not summer vacation, it was actually in the winter during the school time. It was evenings, evenings and weekends. I had a good friend who was a grain inspector and a duck hunter. And for a while he quit duck hunting and started banding. He banded on an island in—in Lake Overholser, which was the first big reservoir for Oklahoma City. Now they have another lake in addition and they have water they're bringing up from the southeast by lift pump. But that was their sole source of water for a while. And my family had some property—grandfather Clapper had some property on the river that they condemned and took for the—that part of what they called the settlement basin. They had a—a low dam that water could spill over that would—whenever the river would flood, it would catch the water and then the mud and stuff would settle out. So they kept building in the settlement basin so it became a good marsh really. And I got off track somewhere.
DT: Well you were telling me about this fellow who was a grain inspector who I guess was a hunter as well.
311
RC: Okay—okay so he—he found an island out there, I guess there's a little piece of land that they—high land that they didn't clear and it was just a bare sandy island. And it wasn't too far from Highway 66 that was travel along the edge of the lake so you could drive in there and they had a boat launch. So he had a motorboat and you go out there and he built traps according to the pattern that the McIlheny used on Avery Island. He
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was an official bander for what was then the Bureau of Biological Survey, now it's Fish and

Wildlife Service. And so he had a little write up in the paper. He happened to live on one of my dad's mail route, foot carrier route so dad knew him. So we got in touch with him said, we'd like to help you. So we'd be sitting on the curb after school and he'd come by in his car and we'd run out there and we'd get in the boat and we'd take some extra feed out. He—being a grain inspector, he had a lot—lots of sample grain left over. So that's—that's where he got the feed and mostly wheat, sometimes there'd be a little corn or milo. So we'd go out there and we would catch the trap—catch the birds in the trap and he'd put the bands on them and we'd turn them loose and then we'd re-bait and we'd go back. And—and we did that off and on as often as—usually it was every day for a while.
DT: Can you describe what a trap would look like and where you'd put it?
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RC: He used—he used a—you'd have to describe it as a "Y". If you—if you built—if you drew a block—block style "Y", you know where it was wide-based and this way, well then the "Y" was where there was a little opening that a duck could squeeze through and it was—it was netting, this lightweight fencing like chicken wire fencing about so. And it was—the—the framing was reinforced with reinforcing rods that you—so the outline—outside outline of the "Y" and the inside, that'd all be made out of this—with wire stretched on these posts. And then he had more rods that you threaded through the
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bottom to keep the bottom laying tight to the—to the ground and you had a roof. We helped him build one, he wanted to build another one and we helped build one. And we had—we also would—he'd take these things down in the fall and he'd go put them up again. So I don't remember how—we must have done it more than one season. It might have been before the last year of school 'cause I can remember, you know, helping him roll it up and haul it out there and put it up again. And it was mallards mostly but he'd get a few teal and some widgeon and pin—pintail but mostly mallards. They—they just go through this funnel and they have a hard time finding their way out.
DT: And then you'd band them with the date and location?
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RC: It's a standard aluminum band that, you know, with the numbers and—on it. We—we did a lot of goose banding on the refuge here. Some—some years we had a two thousand quota. We caught these with cannon nets. That's another story.
DT: Can you explain what the purpose of the banding was for people who might not know?
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RC: It was to find out how long birds lived and where they traveled. That's what you find from banding.
JW: Was this some of the first recording keeping?
384
RC: I think McIlheny may have been the early—earli—one of the earliest. Now I don't know who did it first and I'm not even sure if it started in the United States or if it started in Canada or where the first banding was done. I imagine historically there may have been people that marked things just for what they would learn, but that would be a little study in itself, the history of banding I guess. But it's a—it's been developed where it's a li—little easier to do 'cause now they—you can buy bands that are pre-opened and they're stored on a—on a wooden rod or dowel.
[End Tape 1]

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RC: …where it's a li—little easier to do 'cause now they—you can buy bands that are pre-opened and they're stored on a—on a wooden rod or dowel when—or cardboard tube when they ship them.
JW: And they're sized by the…
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RC: So—so you're—they're ready to close. Before they shipped them on a string and you had to open them and then close them and you didn't—sometimes it was hard to get a good closure. So by manufacturing them pre-opened then you—we—we—we learned to make a special pair of pliers so when they closed it we got a good match. So there was nothing for it to catch on, that's important. And—but they did it the old way. One of the smart-ass kids, excuse the expression, slipped one in his jacket and on the way home it starting scurrying around in his jacket and Bob heard it and he said, who's got a duck? So we had to stop and release him out the window. But he had some good stuff, I don't
013
know—of course, all of that information from all banding is in the banding office and how a person goes about to get something. If you have some special study going, I think they can supply information, they may just invite you to come up there and look through the files yourself. But one of my—a fellow that I work with, Ray Fleetwood, was one of the early ones to band chimney swifts. And they've—from his banding and a few other people that were doing it the same time, they banded thousands of chimney swifts and they found out that they were down in central and south America.
DT: And how would they band those?
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RC: They—they—when the birds would go in for night in a big chimney on a—on a big building down—like downtown where they just see a whole bunch of them go down the chimney, maybe in migration or—and they go in like a swarm, they'd cover it so they couldn't get out. The next morning—and even one of the regional directors helped Ray Fleetwood with his banding at Atlanta. And they would go up there and they'd let them come out in—into a net or something. And as they came out they would band them, (?) that's—that's how they did it.
JW: That was pretty intense numbers too wasn't it?
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RC: Yeah. I just read a thing about that, I think it's in the—the new Bird Watchers Digest. Somebody's participated in this and it gives the date and the town that he was working in and it talked about other people doing it other places and they finally found where these birds wintered. That's, you know, it's—you can learn things. Now we know where our—the snow geese that wintered here, we know where they nested because they've been banded in Canada. They've been banded down here and some of them have been leg marked. So they—a guy used to come down and see how they move back and forth up and down the coast from leg—colored bands on their legs and different—different style and different series. And—and they did some of that too in Louisiana and
036
some of those birds that we saw over here—about their lateral movement after they hit the coast. Snow and blue geese are considered one species now. And really an odd thing was when we were banding, a young man came out to help us once and we caught some Ross'

geese that were banded and he looked at the band and the series and he had volunteered that summer up on Hudson Bay, that's some of the birds we banded, he said.
DT: So you both banded birds and also collected them once they'd already been banded, sometimes catching them the second time around.
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RC: Yeah we—yeah if you get something that's already banded, you record it and turn it loose, yeah, you don't keep it, you know, just—just record it and turn it loose.
DT: You mentioned earlier about using these cannon nets for geese and banding them that way. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?
046
RC: There was some fellows in one of the refuges in the Dakotas, I'm trying to think, Herb Dill was one of them I know that—that started working with cannons. And the first cannons were made from the—the drive shaft from an old Model T or something, some—some old model Ford had a—a big piece of st—hollow steel that—that was extra strong. And that was what they chose for their tubing for their cannon. And the first cannon fired a projectile and they had to kind of put something over it to keep the moisture out. The first explosive they used they made themselves and they used oh, pot—I think it's potassium chlorate and sugar I believe, mixture, and then they had to have a squib or something to detonate it. They may have had ano—a secondary powder with the squib to detonate it but anyhow that was the first one. And then they developed to where they—they—they found a whole bunch of stored mortar ammunition at the
062
crab—I think it's Crabtree refuge in—in I think that's Illinois I believe. Anyhow, there was an ammunition place there that became part of—of a refuge. And somebody got a hold of that supply later and was selling it. And we used to order it, it used to come from there. And it was a better one. But they—they quit making—I've had a version of the ones that—that fire projectile that we used and we didn't like them very well but later somebody decided to make one that shot more like a rocket and he made that out of two inch oil field tubing and about so long and o—high pressure caps and—and on each end and one of them was perforated with about five holes and—and a place for—for the wires to come out. So it actually discharged and it—the—the whole thing went harnessed onto your net. So you maybe have maybe sometimes four cannons, four or five cannons to a big net. They improved the net. They started off with big mesh and when you caught
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birds they were just hopelessly tangled in the—they'd get their wings through and their necks through and their feet through and it was—we had some big nets like that catching cranes in New Mexico, sand hill cranes, terrible job getting them out and the birds were under stress so you lost birds from shock sometime. Well somebody finally got wise and they got a smaller mesh and a lighter weight net but strong so they didn't tangle and worked up this new cannon. So that's what we were finally use. One time somebody forgot to secure the cannon, it just went flying out through the—the rocket part of it, it went flying out and disappeared into the marsh. The state—the state guys were working on Parker Ranch over there trying to catch a cannon of geese one time and somebody did the same thing there and they lost their—you can't ever find them, when they go that far, they go traveling two or three hundred yards out there and disappear, bury in the mud when they hit.

DT: It sounds like we're edging around your later career in National Wildlife Refuge system. So maybe we ought to talk a little bit about that.
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RC: Oh, you want to know where I—where I started?
DT: I understood that your first job in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was at Aransas, is that right?
094
RC: I was a clerk typist labor patrolman.
DT: How did you get started there?
096
RC: Well I—after I married, Jeannie and I came from a—a farm that her grandfather and a business part—partner had up at Sherman, New York. And my sisters came up visit. This was while the war was still on. And I'd already been turned down in—in the draft, they didn't think I'd make a good soldier or something. But—so I was free and so we came—moved to Oklahoma City and I worked for a while as a carpenter's helper and then I worked for awhile as a—as a temporary mail carrier and found a place to stay.
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Bob Jordan had a—a garage apartment that he'd built behind his house and the guy was in the service and he moved away. And it was vacant and so we've—we'd been living in just a room a couple blocks away some ladies rented to us. And so we got that little place to stay and Bob said, why don't you go to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service? And he wrote a letter to regional director and I wrote a letter and they said, we'd—we're interested, we'd like to se—have your application.
DT: And this fellow who recommended, who was that?
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RC: Bob Jordan. He—what he did in addition to being a bander, everybody knew him for that, he would help a new federal agent get settled in when they were assigned to Oklahoma 'cause he'd take them around and show them the hunting spots where they needed patrol and he'd do a lot of favors for them. So the supervisor in Albuquerque of law enforcement was Larry Morovca and he knew Bob very well. And so that gave me a reference. And so personnel wrote back—well I—at—they had—happened to have a vacancy at Aransas Refuge, the cle—clerk had quit and moved away and they were hurting for a clerk. And I—I had—after high school I went to Hills Business University [in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma] and—and took a secretarial training course or whatever they called it. And I'd had—I'd had worked for a while in Washington D.C. during the war as the office—Chief of Engineers fiscal branch. And I started there as a GS-2 and then I was a GS-3 and then
131
they gave me a—a special assignment that I handled all the secret and confidential mail that came in. And then I would take it around, hand deliver it to the different offices in the fiscal branch and make them sign for it. And then when they got the correspondence prepared for it, I'd go pick it up and I'd put it in an envelope marked secret and confidential and put it in a plain envelope and I'd mail it to where it was going. That was my last job with them before her—her grandfather—I didn't know Jeannie then but he and a business partner started this farm up in New York and it sure sounded interesting so we were up there. And she came up to her great grandfather's funeral over in (?) and she came by the

ranch house—farm house there after the funeral, it wasn't far from—this is in Chautauqua County which is a southwest county of New York. So she came in and
145
she asked where her Uncle Ray was and he—and her aunt said, well they're out there in the field, they're learning how to ski and Russell's out there with them and she didn't know who Russell was. So the snow was about this deep and she weighed a hundred and forty-five pounds and was a lit—little thing but short—you know she's a short person. She was plowing over that snow and by the time she got to us she was pretty tired. So I got her on the back of my skis and she grabbed a hold of my tummy and—and we go back to the house that way. Well after that, she's got interested. Wanted me to write and I never would 'cause there were—things weren't going quite right at the farm and I didn't want anything to do with her family and I was trying to figure out some graceful way to leave without upsetting a lot of people.
JW: What were you doing on the farm?
157
RC: It was a dairy farm and it was a lot of hard work and a lot of hay work. I didn't mind that, I loved that, but I didn't like the dominating ways of—of her grandfather and things so. After—she came up I guess the following summer and stayed and went to school there, finished her school there. Her mother and her father broke up when she was about twelve so she stayed up there and finished school and when she got through with school she kept—everything I did, she followed me around. If I went for the cows, she'd follow me on the horse—another horse and if I was doing something in the garden, she was back there talking to me. First thing you know, we kind of liked each other. So when she got old enough, we got married. I remember that first summer, I said, how old are you and she touch—she talks Pennsylvanian Dutch, she said well, she said—she said—she said, I'm seventeen and my birthday is in October, what would you think?
DT: Seventeen going on eighteen.
174
RC: Yeah, she was sixteen and she was going to be seventeen in October.
DT: She was in a hurry.
178
RC: So February 17, 1945 we got married. And her mother came up from Philadelphia. So in order to have enough beds to go around why she slept with her mother that first night. And so then we went to Jamestown and had a party and—and we stayed at a hotel there until time to come home. I can remember one thing that I did on the wedding day, we had enough snow on that old barn it—it cracked one of the beams up there, the snow load was, and I had to go up and put a prop in, support the roof, and I had to shovel some snow off the roof.
JW: On your wedding day.
186
RC: We got wedding—we got married that evening. They had lots of snow up there at times. So we made it and then my sisters came up for a visit back when they could start letting people travel by bus in the summer. And so then I decided it was a good time to go home. So we packed up everything and went to Oklahoma City and then I got that assignment. I went to work the 31st day of October 1945 as a clerk typist labor patrolman. And later they decided to call them clerk typist maintenance men. And they—there was

two houses at headquarters and then another one over five miles away. So I had one of the houses. It was—they called it quarters number two. It's still in use there and around this refuge and the office is all right there. We finally got a used car—old used car that'll get around in. That's how we got started and I'd been there awhile and the supervisor took an interest in me and the regional director took an interest in me
205
and the chief of refuges was Jay Clark Thayer. and he was still a bird collector 'cause he said, you don't know politically, I might be out one day, I may have to go back to teaching so I'm keeping my bird collection up. So whenever I'd find something around the refuge if he was interested in, I'd fix it up and—and mail it to him or—or if he came down again he'd get it. So—and cause I was interested—and I tried to get a permit to collect some of the sparrows around there, to build up an authentic identification on all the sparrows that occurred there in that county but it didn't—didn't go through. I thought it was my—my manager at that time thought it was a sort of a conflict of interest with the refuges. There were a lot of refuge guys that—that wouldn't kill anything for any reason and—but the—the director at that time was Ira Gableson and Ira had a—you know who Gableson was?
JW: No tell me.
222
RC: He—he was pretty well known. And he came down and he had a collecting permit and he'd collect on refuges. And at that time the manager was Bud Keefer and he said I—he said I like Gab—old—Gabe was what you called him if you liked him, you call him—I like Gabe but, he said, I wished he'd leave his damn shotgun at home. But that's just life on a refuge. But they finally had an opening at Bosque and…
DT: Before you go into Bosque, I'm really curious about what Aransas was like and first of all, what did it look like?
(Talking at same time)
234
RC: I doubt—I doubt if it's changed much. Now they have—they have cut back some of the brush and done some mowing near the tour roads and things but brush is ever growing there. The headquarters is where the big change is. We had—we had shale roads that were pretty well worn out. We had had a hurricane just before I was assigned there. They'd had a hurricane that fall and the first assignment I got was picking up shingles and stuff that were scattered all over headquarters and patching a hole in the roof—there was a house that I was going to live in. And Earl Craven was the refuge manager then and he lived in the house—the bigger house and he had a wife and—and a child, at least one child, and—'cause we'd sit with the child sometimes while they go do
248
something. So you could get down to where the whooping cranes were on a—on a trail—it was a shale road. At one time, I think the refuge—I think the purchase was in like '37 or something like that, they had had a CCC count and the WPA worked there. They built the headquarters and they had a storage building down below where the old CC—CCC headquarters were and one or two smaller buildings I think. And the smaller building there that was livable, the state had a deer trapper—the State of Texas was trapping excess deer off Aransas 'cause they had too—too many white tail and they were stock—stocking all over the state. It probably was a Pitman Robinson federal aid project so Guy Callbass was—head—headed that up and he had a crew. So they lived down there and then Earl Bennon, a

patrolman, had been there in the CCC days, became a patrolman for the refuge, patrolman maintenance man. And he lived five miles to the west I guess it was, at another ranch house that's over there. And then there was a—a
272
place they called Spanish village where the rancher lived that ran cattle on the refuge because in the arrangement of buying the property of San Antonio Land and Trust Company still could—they operated their ranch under a grazing permit. And they paid an agreed upon fee—they agreed to pay in the time of the deal. One of the good deals about the purchase of the land was that we had a participation in the mineral income. So when they developed an oil field there, our percentage of the royalty finally paid back the purchase price of the property which is—wasn't much, it might have been probably less than a hundred dollars an acre. But it finally paid it back and—with inflated money. I don't know if they have any grazing now, that—it was really the way the grazing worked.
290
It was really a—a benefit to the refuge because every windmill where cattle would gather to drink, you know, frequently, they would graze it more severely there and so you had a nice Bermuda—Bermuda grass area around that the deer loved and the turkeys liked to work in it. And the Canada geese in wintertime would graze around these areas. So cattle worked really well for us. They never over stocked and those guys did another thing too. They—they had a cake wagon with—and a team of mules and they hauled cotton seed cake and spotted it around on the refuge for the cattle and the deer and the turkey loved that and so did the abolena. In fact, they loved it so well that that's what the
305
trappers used for their deer traps. The deer traps look like a giant rabbit trap that they used and they were—they were closed in so when a deer got in there, he was in the dark and he was quiet. And these guys that have—have to handle them and—and haul them in a dark truck to haul them wherever they were going to go. That was an operation and the quota was something like—at first I think they got five hundred and a thousand and then I think it boosted it on up to two thousand a year or something like that, fifteen hundred or two thousand. Some of them went to the Virgin Islands, but they went all over Texas mostly.
DT: What was a typical day like for you?
317
RC: Oh a typical day, well I was office—the office man, you know. So I had a typewriter, the old—the old kind, it did work and they had a file to keep up. And later on, I was assigned the bookkeeping. So whenever we'd spend money and we had a way to account for it all and—and helped type reports. And later on I even started writing—helping write narrative reports for the special assignment. We changed managers twice after I was there. Craven left almost immediately after I got there. And then Keefer left in 1949 I believe and went to Crescent Lake, Nebraska and then they brought Julian Har down from—he had been an assistant manager at Wichita refuge. So one of the things you did was patrol the whooping crane wintering ground and keep track of the birds. You mended fences and—and field activities and took part in prescribed burning and road repair, whatever they needed an extra hand you did it, washing equipment, painting equipment, greasing equipment as well as doing your office work.
DT: Could you tell me a little bit about the prescribed burns and how you did those.

347
RC: In—in those days if—we did—if—if we found an area was grown up enough that would burn, we would—we would try to burn it and it was very difficult to get some of that stuff to burn.
DT: Was it woody?
352
RC: It was cord grass mostly there it was mostly spartana—spartana, which we call gulfcord. There was another guy that would—a biologist assigned there by research and he was doing research on turkeys. And he had fenced off I think maybe four tho—four thousand acres or something like that, separate from the rest and he got a marden rust cutter which was big rolling drums with blades on it and he pulled behind, I think, he had a (?) tractor, this biologist who did it, if he could—had enough money he'd hire somebody to run it. Sometimes he'd run it himself, and he would chop brush. The big problem was oak—running oak brush not—it was—it was live oak and if there was a little one by itself it might finally make a tree but when it sends roots out and keeps running, it just makes brush. And there was so much brush and he needed more openings he thought for better feeding for turkey and less predators. And so there were these motts of—which are islands of trees out in this prairie, really it was prairie down there. And he
379
was doing some studies to see if he could improve the use by turkey and doing that for several years. Well he finally—his work came to an end and he—he was dismissed from the Fish and Wildlife Service and he went to work for the Corps of Engineers as a biologist. So that was going on and he had me go with him once to identify all the little birds that were out in these grassy areas, the different sparrows and things 'cause I could do that and he couldn't. There was no fishing on—from the refuge shoreline at that time. If you were in the—if you came in by bay you could fish and that was always bothered us that you had a rule, once you're in—were in the water, you were off the refuge but they—you—they didn't allow access from the refuge to go fishing. We just had to fudge a little bit 'cause we just go down there and—at night and go floundering and things.
DT: Did you flounder the old way with the gig?
403
RC: Yeah with just a lantern and the gig, Jeannie did too. I'd carry little Rob in my arms sometime when he was a baby so Jeannie could flounder. And then—and—and we'd take turns and she'd keep him awhile and I'd flounder.
DT: Explain how floundering was in those days, how you did it?
410
RC: Well, in those days, it was so windy you hoped for a still night and if it was still at headquarters, you would presume that when you got to the water you might have to drive four or five miles in your car to get to a place that you could get to the water. And if it was quiet then the water would be clear. The flounder might be in and they may not so you would check it. There would be just thousands of little sheepshead minnow, cyprinodon variegatus, that would be one of the foods the flounder would eat and they'd be just be running along the edge of the water, just thousands of them sometimes and…
[End Tape 2]
001
RC: …and you'd keep walking around and finally you'd see, well there's the—the fish

himself. And we had a single—we used a single point barbless gig and you just stabbed down through him and then you reached down underneath and got your handle—hand on the thing and you lifted it up and you put him on a stringer or put him in a sack. We ate lots of seafood. We didn't have enough money to buy much. We had—good thing it wasn't too expensive having kids 'cause we had two while we were there, the only two we have. I think our whole bill for the first baby, doctor visits, the hospital and all was something like a hundred and thirty-five dollars plus all the driving back and forth to Victoria, Texas.
DT: I guess what Aransas is really famous for are the whooping cranes and I was curious what your role was and if you had any involvement with the cranes.
013
RC: At the time when we first were there, the Audubon people decided they would do a research study and finance it. There was no congr—congressional support to do anything for the whooping crane at the time. In fact, they—congress was approached to fund a study. And some congressman got up on the floor and they quoted him as saying, if you can't shoot it and you can't eat it, what good is it? We won't give one dime for whooping cranes. And that was a much-quoted attitude that came down from congress at the time. Well Audubon hired—they planned to send their—their research associate Robert Porter Allan, and he was still tied up in the Navy with duty on a mine sweeper, so they got Olan Suel Pettengill—I don't know, I think he's out of Minnesota but he's one of the well-known ornithologists, don't know whether he's living or dead Bob Allan's gone, but he did some background work, he—he located all the skins he could in
027
different museums of cranes. And he came down there and did some of the—I don't know whether he ever flew or not, but he learned about what he could that first year. He even sat down with me and gave me a birds skin lesson so I could improve a little bit, I got him to do that for me one evening. And so when the next year, Bob Allan was on the job.
JW: What did you all do that first year.
033
RC: What did we do?
JW: With the whooping cranes.
034
RC: That's about what he did. He traveled around some and found different specimens in museums and found out what we had and looked at our—the old records there and—and went down and observed some birds and—and some of their feeding habits and things. That's about what Bob Allan did. The only thing is, every summer Bob Allan would fly with the Fish and Wildlife Service pilot, Bob Smith, trying to find a nesting ground, they coming through—and he was never successful. I'd—he would bring his—all his notes back and give it to me. And, in my spare time, I'd take my typewriter from the office home and I would write up his notes. He'd pay me a little bit for it, his field notes of his report and the different places they landed the plane and what they did and
044
everything. And then he finally got his family down and up the road there at a place called Humpers Landing, outside the refuge where they—they took people fishing and the shrimp people brought their shrimp in and all. And he found a place to live up there so he had his whole family down, his wife and a daughter and a son. So he became a resident there and he literally lived with those whooping cranes. He was down there all the time watching

them with his binoculars and—and see how—what they ate. They ate a lot of crabs for one thing. And then he wanted to be able to photograph some a little
052
closer. The Audubon was tight enough in those days that they wouldn't even supply him with a movie camera to take with him up north or to use down there. I had a friend, Bob Jordan, that had a Bell & Howell (?) a little—one of them was telephoto, there were about three different lenses on this (?), sixteen milli Bell & Howell and he wanted some pictures so he shipped it down to me. And on May the 30th I had a holiday and one of the deer trapping guys Emmett Smith and I took a boat and went down to the—the nesting islands and got some pictures of roseate spoonbills and—and brown pelicans and things for Jordan. And then I loaned Bob's that—cameras when he was working, watching the birds. Life Magazine got interested so we came up with the idea, we'll build him a cow that he could get in for a blind. And we'll paint it red like one of the big red (?) bulls. So
064
we got—(?) and I got in the shop and we made a wire frame and we put canvas all over it and—and painted it and had little holes cut in it so you could see out the front. So Bob was using that some. Well when this little Life photographer came down, he's kind of a nervous guy, probably out of the big city in New York or something and Bob teased him a little bit and said, now you'll want to watch out for those bulls, they may think this is a bull and they want to fight with him, he said, you keep an eye out and make sure you don't get caught in there. When he got through with that he had windows cut in that blind all the way around. Bob was a real hearty guy and he—I guess you'd say he was an Irishman—a jolly Irishman. And he was a real happy person but he was a hard worker. One of the things he did, he'd pick up road kill rabbits to bait his crab traps with, to catch crabs to see if—try to get an index of how many crabs were out there available for the crane. And in doing that, he caught (?) and they didn't have good medicines for it then but there was a—there was assistant manager there (?) L. Beatty, we—we called him Les Beatty, he's got a son now that's just retired that followed in his footsteps. He was just a little kid when they lived in town and when he came out of the service he came down and joined the refuge crew again 'cause he had been there before as assistant manager. So, I got to relate this now what Beatty had to do with this.
JW: You were baiting the crab traps.
085
RC: Oh, well Beatty had—had had a red tailed hawk or something he was feeding. And he had picked up rabbits years before when he worked at the refuge and he got (?) so the doctor up in town had already had some experience with it and what it does to you it—it makes your spleen swell and it's very painful you know if it's—if you don't have good antibiotics. Well he had the best thing they had available at the time, I guess was probably Penicillin. But anyhow it—it—Beatty got over it and Allan finally got over it but I think it kind of broke his health because after he left and got through with the job and went back to Florida, he didn't last many years. And I don't know whether it was his heart or what finally got him but I always figured that had a lot to do with it. Now when Rob, my—my older son, got it just surveying and wading through swamps and being bitten by ticks and mosquitoes and things and they have a good drug for it now, I forgot which one it was, but they got him well in a hurry. And when he was going to A&M well they tested him frequently to see if there was any recurrence. And he's—he just cleared up, you'd never know he ever had it.

But that's one of the hazards that Allan went through on the job.
DT: Did he do a lot of work in counting the whooping cranes?
102
RC: He just loo—looked. But they were trying—they tried to find the nesting area and then he—he was always corresponding and talking with people and many observations, he was interested in any observations going and coming and he would gather information on that. And (?) had too, to some extent inquired about like my uncle Merritt, he lived out of Calumet and the sand hill cranes would come through there and he could remember every now and then there'd be a white crane with them. Well that's—that was another one and then now they're regular—regularly they stop at Salt Plains refuge. And I think they stop some place in Kansas now once in awhile and up on the river in Nebraska so they know a lot about it now. Well they got the idea of maybe some captive breeding to help the birds along. So they knew (?)—they didn't know about sexes, they just knew that there was a crane at New Orleans Zoo and it came out of a Louisiana flock
116
and there had been a Louisiana flock that people knew about and that—and that Audubon used to have a magazine they called Bird Lore, now it's called Audubon Magazine. Well a friend of mine who was a taxidermist and a—and a bird watching guy that was (?) Oklahoma City and came out of Nebraska and he grew up in the sand hill country and he actually killed a whooping crane when he was a kid and he knew he wasn't supposed to do it. And he stuffed it in a coyote bin and came out that his neighbor had seen him do it and he didn't make anything about it so he admitted that he'd done it. So that's what
125
happened to whooping cranes. They were big and they were white and they used to kill them for the market. Bob Allan dug up a photograph somewhere that showed cranes hanging in a market and the geese and ducks and, among them, the whooping crane. So this—this was, you know, things like that happened. But anyhow, they had this bird that they'd picked up crippled or somewhere and Johnny Lynch may have had something to do with it who lived—he was a Fish and Wildlife biologist that what we call a fly-away biologist that lived in Lafayette. But anyhow, I don't know how this bird got into Audubon Zoo in New Orleans but it was there and they—everybody knew about it. And
133
they also knew there was a captive bird at Gothenburg Gun Club in Nebraska. So they corresponded and they arranged that they were going to be able to get these two birds and get them together and they were planning that in 1948. And the reason I remember if it was '48 'cause we made a trip to see her mother in Philadelphia and to see her aunts and so forth up there in '48. And whenever I get near Washington I always go by the Washington office and it was a small office with just a few people and very informal. They always were glad to see somebody from the field. So I was just making friends like I always do. And so I went in to see the director, or I mean the chief, not the director but the chief of refuges, Clark Thayer and he said how's the enclosure coming? Well we were working on one. And so right at headquarters we made a—a horseshoe shaped pen on about two hundred acres or so, open on the bay, and we used a tall wire mesh, a little bit bigger and better than chicken wire, you can imagine something like big game fencing today. But anyway we took it, extended it out into the bay quite a ways on either end but
152

we just left the bay open. And we had a crippled bird on the refuge that we called old—old crip that we knew about down there. But originally they got this male bird from the gun club and the female from New Orleans if I'm getting this right (?) and put them together. Well the birds got together all right and they built a nest and we had a kind of a tower we put up there, it was more like a wooden stairway propped up on—with props but it put you up maybe twenty or thirty feet that you could get up—climb up there and you could observe what was going on. And people would take turns watching to see what was happening. Well they built that nest right close to the fence, maybe thirty yards or so from there to the fence and they took turns sitting on it. Well they didn't realize
166
that they were taking turns, that they could tell, there was some—something about the birds, they knew which one was cri—I mean which one was—was this—the Gothenburg—they called him the old devil I think. Well they named these birds, they called him the—the male they called Pete and the female they called Petunia. Charles Keefer—Keefer named them, Pete and Petunia. So they thought they had it all figured out. Well then one day somebody sees Pete sitting on the nest and they think they had it all wrong. I—finally I got (?) life histories of water birds and things and read up on it and found out that there's a lot of birds like that that take turns incubating. Well they hadn't figured that out yet. But anyhow they—they were getting a lot of newspaper publicity about this nest and everybody was watching, and the state guys they were taking turns watching and—to see what was happening. And one day the birds went in there and just starting whacking up the eggs and broke them all up or something and they were all infertile. And there was another outdoor writer from Austin, remember the author of "Crank(?) Away Country" and…
DT: Bedichek.
185
RC: Roy Bedichek was a naturalist and he used to come down there in his old Dodge and camp out and he used one pot for cooking and washing dishes and everything, he was really a—a down to earth camper. Well he—he liked our kids and he liked Jeannie and he'd always come by to visit and so we got to be close friends. So Roy and I were over there right after these birds broke up. And those birds did this thing where they put their heads up together and they call. This is kind of a—part of their mating ritual, I forgot what they call this when they do that, but they were doing that a little aircrane—plane flew over and they got real excited about that and they were calling and calling and calling. Then all of a sudden the male mounted the female right there in front of us. So we had no doubt which was which then. And they had—they had them figured right but—but during this—this observation period when somebody saw Pete sitting on the nest, they decided they had them named wrong so they switched their names around for the newspaper publicity. And that's—the sad thing was that that summer Jeannie heard some crying early in the morning. She said there's something wrong in the crane pen and that bird was calling and crying and crying and crying way before dawn. So as soon as
206
it's light enough to see said you've got to go down and see what's you know happened so I went down there and only one bird left. The—the male was dead in the water and the coons had dragged him all around and chewed him up pretty bad. And I don't—he—he had a bad reputation of fighting with ducks and things up there where they had him with other birds. They called him the old devil up there and he may have picked on this coon and the

coon may have fought back or he may have just died and the coon ate him, we didn't know. I did—I did a little autopsy on him to determine that he was a male for sure. And I think Bob Allan took the whole—I think he took the whole carcass so somebody could do a real autopsy and learn all they could about the structure of a crane and all. And all I did was make sure he was a male, you can do that and find the testes up against their—inside their backbone. Am I talking loud enough?
DT: Yeah, sure.
221
RC: That's—so we decided we would get another mate. About that time we traded managers and Julian Howard came on board. And the old crip was down there kind of in storage because he never migrated, that's—he was always there and been there for several years. And so we had already rounded him up once and brought him up there and put him in so we had a threesome. We thought well if we get two birds in there, it might encourage something. No, he didn't like it there, he promptly went around the fence or hopped over it, probably hopped over it 'cause he could flutter a little bit but he couldn't fly and he went right back to the—about ten miles down the road where he came from.
233
So we knew he was there. So when Julian Howard came, we decided we'd get another mate for this female. So there was a couple of—Gus Cameron and his brother, another Cameron and myself and Julian Howard and—and Beatty, we all went down and we kind of surrounded this bird and we got him—got him—got him coming out of the marsh where he could get up in the bushes before we had a chance to crowd him and finally had a little piece of net or something and they finally got him at bay. And they threw this little net over him and brought him back up there and he was happy. He had a friend up there and he stayed. And so he—he subsequently mated and they built a nest further out. And I moved, that was the year I moved, in '50 that—the spring of '50 that I—we moved
248
in April and—and so this nesting was—might have been started by then but I don't remember. I remember they actually said they hatched a little bird and they could see a little bird out there with a—with a telescope but it disappeared so I guess a coon got it. So that's when they decided, well New Orleans, they wanted their bird back. And so I guess we sent crip with it. But—and they—they raised some birds over there too in captivity. And they had a hurricane over there once and after the hurricane, some helicopter was flying over surveying damage and he frightened those birds and one of them killed itself, you know, trying to get away from the helicopter flying into the wire or something, one of the young birds I think. So that's is about it but seemed like something happened that maybe later we had—they managed to get—pair up with Fred Stark of San Antonio to—every now and then that cripple would come up from some source and he—he was good at doctoring birds. So I've—I've lost track of the history. All that stuff would be in the Aransas narratives but about the only way you'd ever get it out would be if you find some volunteer down there that's willing to go in and look at the records or you do it yourself.
DT: Could you go back a little bit before and maybe explain why people felt it was so important to get some captive breading? I mean, do you know what the numbers of cranes were, how low it had gotten?
276
RC: The numbers—the numbers had been as I think back in time on where they knew that

they were on Aransas refuge, they had a count as low as under twenty I think, maybe seventeen or something. But when the—the year that I left there were—there were thirty-four or thirty-six in 1950. And they were—there was a guy that always flew the flights, the same little pilot and different refuge employees would go up with him, I never did. But they would do this aerial count so we were sure, absolutely positive of thirty-four and we had had a mishap. We had to go down and—and round up another bird that was injured. It had a hole through it's neck like a 22 would make. And it wasn't—it wasn't healing up properly and the bird was hurting. And he wasn't—wasn't very hard to catch. And we went down on a Jeep and I was holding the bird on my lap, you know, as we were going back to headquarters and it died in my lap before we got back. He was that far gone. So after that we—Washington got concerned and everybody got concerned so they initiated daily patrols, somebody down there every day to see what's going on
299
with the birds. And I—I got put on a weekend schedule being the clerk and resident there that was a—so I could work it in with my other duties. And—and so I could take care of it then and somebody else could fill in during the week and sometimes I'd do it in the week, anyhow, we got it covered. And go down in the Jeep and locate all the birds you could. Some of the time they'd be over on—some of them would be on St. Joseph Island and we couldn't really see Matagorda and the only way they could get a count on that would be if somebody flew but we were…
DT: Do you think the counts were accurate?
310
RC: …we were watching what was going on. I know—because we would have some trespass from barges. One time a barge guy when Keefer was there, a barge guy, they tied up to their tug boat and went goose hunting on the refuge and somebody heard about it and brought word to us that it was happening. So Keefer and I went down and we waded across to cut him off, we waded across Mustang Slough, it was just a shallow body of water and just in our clothes you know, I don't think we had boots on, might have. But anyhow, we waded across and cut one of them off and I went to him and Keefer went to the other and I—when we were wading across I said, bud do you have your gun? I didn't carry a gun then. I had one that was available but I didn't carry it. Yeah, he said, I've got it. I didn't know how these guys would be. And so I went down to this one hunter and he had some geese he'd killed. And so we wrote them up tickets
329
and all and—and told them they weren't supposed to be there and you, said you had to walk right past a sign that says it's a refuge to get where you're hunting. Well they convinced the federal agents that they—they just didn't—thought they were in—in public land that wasn't refuge and all and they didn't even complete the case which I don't think was right. But that was one of the things that can happen. So when—when—because of that when people take and target shooting from boats and things, that's why they were nervous about the cranes and wanted us to patrol every day. That's one of the reasons.
JW: Was Aransas purchased because it was the whooping crane area or did it just get discovered later?
345
RC: They don't—officially you can't find that but that—unofficially it had a very—it was a very good reason why they did it. And today looking back, they'll say that's why we bought

it but we could never find that in—in any of the justification there. It was a water foul refuge. It was bought with water foul money. So that's the way it was, you know. I think officially it was considered a duck stamp purchase and just like Bob Smith, he accommodated us flying. So Bob's—Allan was up there helping Bob Smith count ducks and he did. They did the whole bits together but he also went up and looked—he flew some of the same country where they found the nesting. He flew right over what's Buffalo National Park up there where a Canadian pilot finally spotted the birds. That's where they go up to rob nests for their breeding program and all.
DT: Could you tell me a little bit about the counts? I know there are some people who are curious about how they were done and if you thought they were accurate since the numbers got so low and one or two differences.
372
RC: Oh yeah—yeah, they count, they—they just spotted each bird. And see, you've got some of these birds kind of mark off sort of territories. They kind of—they object to other birds interfering and—if the food supply is low. They found out when they did some baiting or supplemental feeding, they found out that the territorial thing broke down right away 'cause they were—they had these territories for this pair and that pair and their young and they had had it all marked off. So when Rob Allen was—Bob Allen was doing his study he—he had this—he'd have something he'd call Mustang Lake pair and something—some other pair according to the name of the water down there and things. And they would—and St. Joseph [Island] would have some birds on it. So these birds stayed
390
pretty well and didn't wander. Now once in awhile they would wander into the brush looking for acorns and grasshoppers and stuff but—so they would fly over with this little light plane and they'd just circle around and circle around and spot this one and spot that one and—and not disturb the birds and they'd get a count of what was there. And when it got up to be thirty-four, it's a little harder and that's when the—the one year we weren't sure if there were thirty-four or thirty-six. I know we were pretty sure there were thirty-six but because of the chance of two birds moving while they did—did the count, we might count them twice.
DT: What do you think about the bottleneck problems of the cranes going down to such a small population and then recovering?
406
RC: There—there's a real serious need I think for some habitat farming in a sense. One time they had a pump and the whole idea of the pump was, it was a big propeller type pump that you could pump water and fish through without killing them. And so they were operating that pump to put water into one of the sloughs, and sloughs so-called there were really these tidal ponds between the marsh—I mean between the upland and the–and Intracoastal. So they—they had a boat channel there that and they had this pump so that it picked—this water would come in and out of the…
[End Tape 3]
DT: …of the cranes going down to such a small population and then recovering?
001
RC: There—there's a real serious need I think for some habitat farming in a sense. One time they had a pump and the whole idea of the pump was, it was a big propeller type pump that you could pump water and fish through without killing them and so they were operating

that pump to put water into one of the sloughs, and sloughs so-called there were really these tidal ponds between the marsh—I mean between the upland and the—and Intracoastal. So they—they had a boat channel there and they had this pump so that it
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picked—this water would come in out of the bay to this pump and then it'd pump it over into one of these sloughs to build up the marine life, you know. If you pump at the right time, you put a lot of little baby crabs through. We—we did it here [Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge] on Shoveler Pond one year and we filled that thing with little baby crabs, came in with the tide water and they grew up to be big crabs cause we had a sample net out there to see how many gar we had, to see how many alligator gar in there and it filled up with blue crabs this big. Well that's—that's what they do. Well there's a need for some of that I think. I haven't even talked to the manager but I could—observing craw fish farming here and how it works and knowing that cranes eat crustaceans through there—'cause sometimes we'd find them up when we had—in the wetter years, they'd be up in feeding in—in little pools and things out of the marsh. They could do a little bit of that if they had a source of fresh
022
water, they could do some craw fish farming but that's expense that—there could be some things done and they—they were careful when they did supplemental feeding with grain that they didn't get any contami—contaminated grains. And—and they didn't want any pesticide residue building up.
DT: What do you think turned the tide that brought these cranes back?
027
RC: Protection. The publicity that they started with Audubon and all the publicity they got and people became aware of it and then wells that—well there's more than that. Probably one of the key things was nest robbing and there was a lot of opposition to ever, ever, ever take a ne—egg from a wild nest but they had a theory about it and it proved out. Birds more of—often come down with one young, sometimes they come down with two, I don't ever remember three, but anyhow, they sometimes come down with two. But they almost always have two eggs, or maybe they do. But they must have difficulty up there raising two birds because of predators and keeping, you know, keeping them safe and finding food for them. So they—they theorized that possibly if they take an
038
egg and leave one, they'll do a better job. And, sure enough, the first year they robbed nests they came down with a record number of young. And so they continued to rob the nests, I don't know if they're doing it anymore but they may be.
DT: Where would they take these robbed egg?
042
RC: Huh?
DT: Where would they take the robbed eggs to incubate them?
042
RC: Well they took—at first they took them to Patuxent Research Refuge outside of Washington D.C. That's where they did it at first and then—then they started this foster parent program at Gray's Lake. I think it was Gray's Lake Idaho and I'm not sure what they're doing now but they're still doing something I think.
DT: And a foster parent would be a sand hill crane?

047
RC: Sand hills and they never could get those young birds to mate. There—they seemed—they seemed to be imprinted with—that they were sand hill cranes or something. So, in fact, finally when they finally produced an offspring one year, it was a hybrid between a sand hill and a whooper and it was recorded on Bosque Refuge and the gal that took the pictures, I ask her this—if she could have it copied and I used it in a National Wildlife Refuge Association newsletter. And so that was something that happened. But now they've got some other idea and I've forgot what it is, it probably—it might be mentioned in this thing that I've got over there, Whooping Crane newsletter. Oh, it's the—yeah it's this thing of raising sand hill cranes and flying them south. They
057
going to do that with the—with the whooping cranes that are raised up there. And they'll actually be imprinted to follow this little lightweight aircraft like the sand hills did. They lost—they lost a sand hill to a golden eagle coming down and something else—I think there was one or two casualties but they did very well. Did you follow that when that happened?
DT: I've heard about it, yeah.
063
RC: Another thing they did, I've almost forgotten, there was a—a lone survivor, and they call it the last of the Louisiana whoopers. And I mentioned earlier about Bird Lore magazine back—back in the '30s, there was a photograph on the cover that somebody took of whooping cranes flying over the Intracoastal in Louisiana. And that was the first time that I knew that there were still any in existence and I think—I think my friend Ray Swanson gave me that magazine. Somebody in Life magazine had a bunch of Peterson's bird pictures in it and I grabbed one of those, that was my bird guide for awhile and National Geographic had hawks and things and that would be my bird guides, whatever I could get that had better pictures, you know. But anyhow they decided they—that that
073
whooper wasn't going to do anything by itself over in Louisiana. So they were going to bring it to Aransas. And that's what they did. But then they released it down in whooping crane territory and the first thing he did was get beaten up by somebody that—another crane that resented him being there. So Julian Howard and his wife put him in their living room and fed it baby food or whatever they could feed it and nursed it back to health. And when they got it strong enough, they took it clear over to the lake—the St. Charles Bay side of the [Aransas] refuge south of Burgantine Lake, there was a good country over there for a crane and he lasted there for a while but finally he just died. And that was the last of the Louisiana whoopers. We don't know how…
[misc]
DT: Well we're back at it now and we've discussed a lot about your many exploits with cranes and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, but I wanted to visit with you a little bit about your work in other parts of the country and particular at Anahuac where you spent many years. And as I understood it, during the time you were at Anahuac, you were involved with recovery of the red wolf and were the first leader of the recovery team in the mid '70s.
091
RC: That—that's true and I don't remember what date that was but I can say this that when we first—when I first moved here was March of '63. And while I was talking to a neighbor, Joe Lago, he said something about we've got some wolves in this country and he said I want

you to come over and see one that the trapper just caught and scalped. And I went over and took a photograph and it was a big animal, it wasn't a coyote. And he said they—we think they call them red wolves he said but they could be different colors. So I heard about it and then the rancher that—one of the rancher people, Jim Bob Jackson lived down the road from here and he mentioned that they—they had wolves on the refuge. And he said, they're not coyotes, and he said they're wolves and occasionally
104
you'd see an animal. Then they got interested in the fact that it might be endangered. Now the woo—the wolf was being controlled along with coyotes and the trappers, if they caught a bigger animal, they would report it as a—as a wolf and if it's definitely a coyote, they'd report it as a coyote. But if you were up in Grayson County, like where I was at Hagerman Refuge, everybody up there always used the term wolves, the wolves are bothering my calves, they never would talk of coyotes. And there was a guy that's from
113
[Austin] college there at Sherman Texas, is Howard—Howard McCarley, I believe is his name, and he did a study up there and everything that he could find and samples that he could get, they were all just coyotes but that was just a term that they used all through east Texas, a wolf was a wolf and it wasn't a coyote. And so the Predator and Road Control trappers if—if they were knowledgeable, they got an animal they recognized as different from the coyote, they'd report it as a wolf and otherwise they'd report it as a coyote. So all these records were accumulating in Washington. And so when Joe Lago was a county commissioner and he encouraged trapping 'cause they were also ranchers and maybe somebody had a loss but right across the street was another rancher that said, I've never—I've lived here all my life and I've never had any trouble from wolves, they're
124
here but they never bother us. And so you had these conflicting stories about it. Well commissioners promote things sometimes and they like to get funds to please their neighbors and so there's always some county money balanced with federal money and state money for predator control. And our predator control office was in San Antonio—the headquarters. And at that time the boss was Neal Caroline. Well finally somebody got some interest in these animals and this trapper came down, I think his name was Boyd, he caught about fifty some animals in this area and some of them were much bigger than others. In fact, he was so proud of some of the big ones he caught he violated the rules and they hung them on a gate on the highway down here next to the Bear ranch, this display of what of what he caught. And one of the soil conservation service people got a picture of that and I borrowed it once. So we started reporting in our narrative report that there were probably red wolves on the refuge.
DT: What year was that do you think?
140
RC: Well I—it started—we started talking about it some time after the '60s and I may have a red wolf leaflet somewhere that gives us dates but I can't remember when we first organized a team. I can remember when I got off the team because when we got busy with—with the YCC [Youth Conservation Corps] program, I got overloaded with—with extra things to do and I asked to be relieved and get off the team. I also had another motive but—so this was in the '70s sometime. They—first thing they did they hired a biologist, John Steele.

DT: But this is after the Endangered Species Act?
150
RC: At first, the Endangered Species Act as such did not protect anything in the United States. It protected endangered species in a sense that you couldn't import an animal endangered in another country. And finally they got around to giving endangered species protection for those things in the country. And that's when—whenever that thing came to pass and the red wolf got protection is when they got the attention of the animal control people, they better do something right about it. So they hired a—a guy—a biologist, John Steele, and they came up with some endangered species money and we
160
built some—we built a hill first. I said, if I'm going to have wolf pens on the refuge I want them safe from a hurricanes because Hurricane Carla put water over the area where you went by to register, that was under water. So that hill over there, the rise where you see a new shop building, at one time that hill was built for red wolf pens. And we borrowed dirt and dug a pond for a water supply and so we had a pump where we could wash the pens and they bought some real good dog pens and shipped them in and we put them up and they helped put them up and provided money. So anytime the trapper would catch an animal, he would bring it there and put it in a pen if he looked like it might be a wolf or part wolf. And he'd hold it for awhile and study it and that—that was John Steele at first. Well John Steele didn't quite get the job done that Washington thought they
173
should be getting done so they hired—they moved Curtis Carley who had been studying coyotes in the west to come in and get an office started in Beaumont, a red wolf office, and he hired a staff to help him as to trap and handle animals. And he had about—he had about two or three people—three people working with him for awhile. And that was just before we got into YCC period of resident camp down there on—where the little Justice of the Peace office is in the (?). So we would, as refuge employees, we'd care for the animals in our spare time and we had an abundance of nutrient. So these animals eventually were selected and they went into a captive breeding program. And it happened to be that this was in Tacoma Washington because the university up there got interested in it and the zoo at Port—Point Defiant Zoo at Tacoma got interested in it and they were taking animals for a while. And then there was a guy who had a mink farm and he said, I'll donate the land if you will—will build some facilities for—and they got
193
money for that. So they started a captive breeding program there. So then they—somewhere in that period of time, they organized the red wolf recovery team. They had a meeting of Louisiana representative and a Texas representative and—and myself since I was on the refuge and already involved in it at the meeting. And they said, well somebody has to be the leader of this team and everybody sat there on their hands and wouldn't say anything. Said well I'll volunteer, I'll—I'll take the job, that's how I got it. Well then since I was willing to take it, then it had to be officially assigned to me by a supervisor in Washington. And the director of the Fish and Wildlife Service was Ernest Greenwald—I mean Lynn Greenwald, Ernest was his daddy, Lynn Greenwald, and so he had to write a letter and say you're appointed so and so and you do so and so and you can
207
travel so and so and then all of this. And so I became the leader of the red wolf recovery

team. So then I had to organize meetings and make them meaningful and get the proper people there and, every now and then, I'd call a meeting and we'd have one here and we had one over at the Rockefeller Refuge in Louisiana and we had one in—in Beaumont, I think we had one—seemed like we had one over at the—at Murphy Wildlife Management area once. They have a few animals on their place.
DT: I'm curious what people's reaction was to trying to protect these wolves because I imagine some of the ranchers and the animal control officers might not have seen it the same way as the wildlife folks.
218
RC: They—we—we have handled that with kid gloves. And the fact that we were trapping animals and taking them out of the wild, that satisfied the ones that were concerned about predation. And so the whole thing became a salvage program and the coyotes in the meantime, were starting to show up in big numbers in Chambers County. So the coyotes were working in—working into this country. Now, at that time, I didn't know that coyotes had been here maybe twenty years before that until I—until I had a—a guy look at a stu—a specimen that a man had in town and it was killed right here in this county and—'cause the animals that we would hear didn't have a coyote call and this Howard McCarley from Austin College at Sherman, Texas came down and he started taking sound recordings and making sonograms from it. And he learned that the wolf
236
howl ended with a flat drawn howl without rising and you know, just moaned off. But a coyote always ended its song or howl with a rising inflection so his graph would look like this or the—when coyotes. And so he did a lot of recording here and at about the same time he was doing all of this and a little before that, there was a graduate student from Yale, a native of Tyler Texas, Jim Shaw and he's now up at Oklahoma State University at Stillwater, Oklahoma and married a gal up there too and she's a—they're both doctorates—doctors. And he got his doctorate studying the red wolves down here. And he worked with us when we had penned animals and he helped to hunt rabbits and nutria to feed these animals and so he had a chance to study them. And so we had a pretty good thing going.
DT: You mentioned something about coyotes. I've heard that red wolves and coyotes may have bred together, is that true?
254
RC: Yeah, if you go back—if you take a book, there's one book called I think it's "The Wolves of North America" by Stanley and Goldman and they did a study of museum specimens and things 'cause they were the museum type people that went out on collection trips and—and they studied skulls and everything. So they did a study to try to see what—what the—the wolf was, a southeastern wolves—there were a lot of black ones in the southeast and in Florida. There used to be a few black ones here because people reported to me that they had seen a black one or caught a black one or killed a black one. And now there are some black coyotes and John Steele got a hold of a black coyote from some trapper up country up towards—between here and Dallas somewhere they caught one and he brought it, he's so proud of it that he skinned it all out and saved
270
the skin but it was a coyote, small animal and a coyote. So when they—so they agreed on this captive breeding program to—to kind of keep this animal going, they would select out the most wolf-like animals and this is what Curtis Carley's office did. And they—somebody

donated an x-ray machine so they could actually x-ray a skull of a live animal and they could do the measurements on the skull and all and—and compare it with coyotes and they picked out the most wolf-like animals that they sent to the programs. Then the further test was, if they gave offspring that looked like wolves when they grew up, they'd keep them in the program as they gave offsprings that developed more like a coyote or coyote characteristics, they took them out of the program. So simply they were practicing a breeding program, trying to get a pure race.
JW: Do you think that any of the animals that were captured and used in the program were purebred red wolves?
289
RC: There's no way of knowing. Now there've—there've—some recent—been some recent study with DNA and I don't have that magazine. I forgot what magazine it was now but it was—it was one that Dr. Frank Fisher from—gave me from—he's a—with Rice and I sent this to a forensic lab, there's a young lady up there in Asheville, Oregon where the Fish and Wildlife Service has a forensic lab. She was interested in that story and I sent her this information 'cause it had a little about DNA and an argument between the DNA proponents and the skull proponent. But, let's see, it's Ron—I'll get his name after while but he's up in Kansas, I had him down to one of our meetings once. And I had the—the gray wolf man out of Minnesota down to one of our meetings, probably at the same time. See…
DT: So they didn't get a really definitive proof of whether they were genetically pure or not?
308
RC: Yeah they—they're doing the best—'cause—'cause this was like—well the argument really is and I'm sid—I'm beginning to side in different with—than some of them. The argument is, is this red wolf a separate species or it is a southern strain of a regular gray or timber wolf? And the more I saw of that animal and the more I read about it and the more I fooled with it, the more I decided that it's could very well be a timber wolf. And in the book I started to talk about was Goldman and Stanley, they—they found this typical southeastern wolf and some—quite a few black ones they considered to be the red wolf or whatever because some of them are reddish just like the timber wolf. Some of them are reddish and some of them are black. And I've seen quite
324
a few photographs on calendars and things up in there in the Canada of gray wolves and they look so much like some of these bigger animals that I remember. I've had—we had one that was seventy-six pounds. And it's—it's on—it's on one of the narrative reports there in the office with a front cover picture of that. That was back when Clark Bloom was my assistant manager and it was a wolf. And—and so at—they're still going to argue that. That's why I think the DNA guys were trying to prove something. Now Ro—well the Ron that I'm trying to think of is Ron No—Novak I believe it is, Nowak or Novak and he was connected with one of the universities in—in Kansas. And he's a—a mammalogist and he studied skulls. And he disputes the DNA and, he based on the skulls, says that there's quite a distinction between the red wolf and the timber wolf, certain things that he sees and he studied all the skulls that—that are up in Washington. And I've been up there with Ron—with Curtis Carley who they selected to run this red wolf office when I was a team leader. I made a trip with him up there and, at the same time, went in and saw different people but. Let's see, what—there was an—an important thing about that.

DT: I see we're running a low on time and I probably should cut to one last question that I had. With all your work in conservation and Aransas to Anahuac, I was wondering if you could just briefly tell me what you think the contribution to conservation that you most value has been.
362
[misc]
[End Tape 4]
[misc]
004
RC: That's a real easy question.
DT: What is it?
004
RC: Making friends.
DT: Making friends. Tell me a little more.
005
RC: Making friends for the Fish and Wildlife Service and the refuge system, just being nice to people and showing them if they're—if you can get them to go out and look or talk to them and get them to understand and appreciate what a refuge and what wildlife, what it means. That's—if there—if I've made any contributions, I've made some good friends for the Fish and Wildlife Service.
DT: Another question, looking into the future, what do you think the conservation challenges will be that still remain?
011
RC: Well I think this is going to be the same challenge the whole world's faced, population growth and hanging on to what we have. There—there's a lot of folks right now that would like to raid the refuges and take their land for this or that or prevent new refuges from being established because they have development plans. And lately we've been winning some important battles. We've snatched some stuff right out under the noses of developers and bought it with the blessing of the communities. So there's some—there's some people that see that there's more to life than money and concrete and the—and the real hope is in the children and—and their learning about it and their appreciation 'cause there's not so many kids growing up on farms as there are in cities now and the farm people alway—already have an appreciation. So the outdoors experience means a lot.
DT: Well speaking of outdoors and experiences there, is there a place in the outdoors that you especially like that you could tell us about, a place that's got a special magic for you?
026
RC: Well when I retired, I told them the—the biggest thrill was sunrise over Shoveler Pond on Anahuac Refuge 'cause we—we had a—what we did there, that was a—it was just a pasture—it was dry pasture, it had been a—it had been a part of a duck hunting club—duck hunting. They had—they had a fin and feather clubhouse where they mostly drink and play cards and they went down there to mostly hunt, fish and run the trot lines in there. So we decided we'd put a pump and we'd pump water into Shoveler Pond, we'd make it into something. So we made it into one of the most popular bird watching places on any of the refuges on the coast. I—I've had a lot of people come by and say this is better than what I could find at Laguna or Aransas or…
DT: What sort of birds?

036
RC: Water birds mostly and when—when you pump water, we pump food in there like I told you about the little crabs and things. One time we decided we had too many alligator gar. We used to draw it down in the spring and let the vegetation grow. And they wasn't growing up with cattails then. And so we decided we'd eliminate the alligator gar out of there 'cause there was so many of them big and they're eating up the little food fishes we wanted the water birds to have. So we did that and the next year when we pumped water in, we pumped in a lot of baby carp and the carp really multiplied but then the pelicans and—and the other birds got in and took them out again. So it's just watching—watching what happens when you develop the place.
DT: Well it must be an especially nice when not only is there a place you can appreciate but you helped make it. And I wanted to thank you for all your work making preserves all through the United States.
047
RC: I did very little of the work, I had a really good bunch of fellows to work with, really good assistance and good laborers and three of my crew have—have already passed on.
DT: Well you're generous to us as well and I wanted to thank you for taking the time today to talk about it.
051
RC: It was my pleasure.
DT: Thank you.
End reel 1018
End of interview with Russ Clapper