

EVERY CHRISTMAS SEASON for 30 years, members of the Audubon Society in Casper, Wyo., have taken a bird census within a 15-mile radius of the city. The most prolific habitat is Soda Lake — the wastewater treatment pond for Amoco Oil Company's Casper refinery.

Created to treat biologically nearly two million gallons of refinery effluent a day, the 640-acre lake and surrounding 2,500 acres of grassland also evolved into a wildlife sanctuary. In recognition of the company's development of the site, the Audubon Society this year presented a "Citation to Industry" to the refinery.

"In Soda Lake, industry waste contributed to an increase in wildlife," says Dr. Oliver Scott, originator of Casper's annual bird census, and a frequent skulker in the rushes around the lake. (Only Audubon Society members and company personnel have access to the securely fenced site.) "To see waterfowl in Wyoming, Soda Lake is the place to go; it raises more ducks and geese than anywhere else in the state."

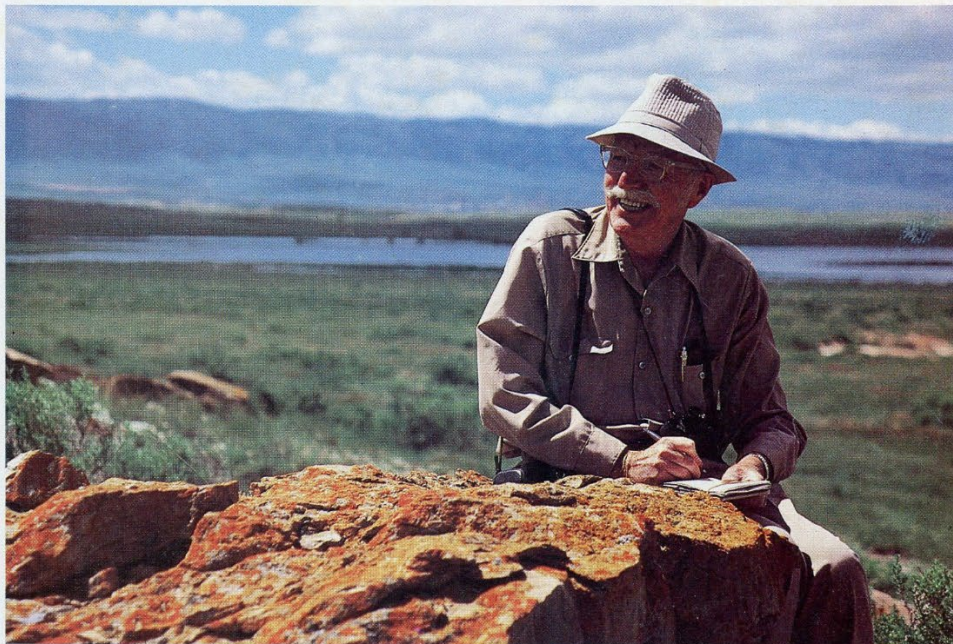
That may seem surprising, considering that a crust of alkali rims the shoreline. But it's a natural condition. In fact, since Amoco developed the site, the alkali level has been cut from about 20,000 parts per million (ppm) to some 7,000 ppm. "That's drinkable," says Lorin Lefevre, superintendent of environmental control at our refinery. "But with that much alkali, it sure would taste bad."

The lake is actually two bodies of water connected by a carefully designed drainage system. The smallest is a basin where about 90 per cent of the biological action occurs. Waterfowl nest around the second lake, and some feed on the tiny freshwater shrimp that thrive in it.

"Fishing birds, such as cormorants, are out of luck," says Lefevre. "They nest at Soda Lake but fly two miles south to the North Platte River for dinner."

Antelope fare better. With domestic livestock kept out of the site, natural prairie grass flourishes and provides grazing for an antelope herd of nearly 100. And Scott? He expects to spend part of this Christmas holiday checking to see that all wildlife is doing well at Soda Lake.

*Dr. Joseph Hickey, internationally known ornithologist, author, university professor, and a director of the National Audubon Society, takes note of the birdlife on the preserve.*



*Lorin Lefevre, superintendent of refinery security and environmental control, keeps a low silhouette while observing some of nearly 100 antelope at the lake site.*

