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Newport Natural History
Society

From J. M. R. Southwick

NEWPORT
NATURAL HISTORY
SOCIETY

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

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ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

COMMISSIONERS OF INLAND FISHERIES,

MADE TO THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

AT ITS

JANUARY SESSION, 1895.

PROVIDENCE :

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1895.

REPORT.

To the Honorable the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, at its January Session, 1895 :

The Commissioners of Inland Fisheries herewith present their annual report for the year 1894.

TROUT.

The Commissioners have purchased ten thousand (10,000) yearling trout, most of which have been distributed in the various waters of the State. A few hundred will be retained for distribution early in the spring.

The trout fishing, the past, as for several seasons, has generally been poor, though some good catches are reported. This, in part, is due to the very low state of the water in the streams, which in some cases have dried to their bottom and thereby destroying the fish, in part undoing what the Commissioners are trying to do, by restocking. We could do more and to better advantage if our appropriations were larger.

BLACK BASS.

The Commissioners have been enabled through the good offices of Fred Mather to obtain a limited number of adult, large mouth Black Bass, it being deemed desirable to introduce them into some of our rivers which are now practically without good food fishes.

The small mouthed Black Bass are very plentiful in the ponds and streams where they were placed by our predecessors and are valued more highly each year as a food fish.

SHAD.

Through the kindness of U. S. Commissioner M. McDonald there were placed in the head waters of Palmer River at Shad Factory about two millions (2,000,000) Shad Fry. As has been before stated by us, this is the only body of water unobstructed by dams in our State. We have also applied for an apportionment of eggs of the Land Locked Salmon.

BAY FISHING.

The fishing in the upper portions of the bay for Tautog and Scup has been very poor, but Squiteague have been taken very freely by hook and line. The season has been unfavorable to the net fishing during the spring; while some few did very well, most of them got but poor returns for their outlay and efforts. In the lower portions of the bay, as the season advanced, the Squiteague and Menhaden became very plenty and the season's catches of these fish were large. The Tautog or Black fish were quite plenty all the season.

Blue-fish were plenty at Block Island, but not many in the bay.

Bass showed an increase of numbers over former years.

We are pleased to give in full the following letter from Capt. N. B. Church. It gives a very clear idea of the menhaden fishery as well as his observation of other fish along the coast.

NEW YORK, December 22, 1894.

J. M. K. SOUTHWICK, Esq.

Dear Sir: Your letter of the 19th is at hand and I am very sorry to say that I am not prepared to give you a very full report of the general fisheries. I will not attempt to write about our local spring fishing as you are probably

more familiar with it than I am. The Menhaden fishery for the whole coast has been a fairly prosperous business.

Some of the Chesapeake fishermen started out in March with the idea of going South to find them in their Southern quarters, but they had not gone far south of Cape Hatteras when they found them very abundant; they fished on them and followed them into Chesapeake Bay, where they had very good fishing for a short time. They were next seen on the Jersey coast, and in and around Sandy Hook Bay where they had good fishing for a while, then the fish turned and went into Chesapeake Bay where they had very heavy fishing all summer. This body of fish was small in size and very poor in yield of oil. The body that locates on our coast struck in in May, great bodies of them located in Long Island Sound and in Narragansett and Buzzard's Bay, and also in Boston Bay, and the bays and rivers of Maine. No great catches were made in Maine or Boston Bay owing to the fish being on the rocks and in strong tides in the latter place and on account of their not showing but a short time each day in Maine.

Good catches were made in our bays and rivers until they went out of them early in August, as they usually do. The very blowy weather in October and November was fatal to the fall fishing, which would have been good under more favorable conditions of weather, as there were large bodies of fish seen all along the coast.

Some of the Southern boats followed the Menhaden south of Hatteras, and they told me that the bodies were so full of live sharks when they got there that it was impossible to catch them, they would bite the seine so badly.

Blue fish have been very abundant south of Montauk all of the season, so much so that half of the fishing smacks engaged in catching them, hauled up early in the season. Squiteague have also been abundant as have been about all of the local varieties of our coast, such as Summer Scup, Tautog and other varieties. Striped Bass have been caught in larger quantities this summer than for several years.

The Whiting catch is a wonder; they have been so abundant in Provincetown Bay as to spoil the fishing for other varieties, the pounds being full of them nearly all the time. I am sorry I cannot go into the matter of local fishing more thoroughly, but I have been home so little this summer that I have had a very poor idea of it.

Thanking you for your kind expressions,

I am, &c.,

N. B. Church.

Account of Fish shipped from Newport, R. I., by Old Colony Steamboat Co., in 1894.

Month.	Lobsters.	Fresh Fish.	Salt Fish.
January.....	43 barrels.	68 barrels.	barrels.
February.....	14 “	83 “	“
March.....	12 “	142 “	“
April.....	69 “	178 “	“
May.....	192 “	7,509 “	“
June.....	270 “	6,089 “	“
July.....	844 “	1,240 “	“
August.....	476 “	184 “	“
September.....	392 “	587 “	“
October.....	31 “	1,040 “	“
November.....	14 “	363 “	24 “
December.....	35 “	286 “	68 “
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Total.....	2,392	17,769	92

Total for 1893. Lobsters, 1,399 barrels. Fish, 24,452 barrels.

Estimate of salt water fishes caught in Rhode Island waters from shore, west of Point Judith.

Porgies.....	2,315 barrels.
Sea Bass.....	232 “
Flounders.....	516 “
Flat Fish.....	216 “
Blue Fish.....	259 “
Weak Fish.....	53 “
Eels.....	172 “
Smelts.....	187 “
Herring.....	1,500 “
Black.....	60 “
Mackerel.....	40 “

Striped Bass.....	12 barrels.
Shad.....	8 “
Squid	2,060 “
Menhaden.....	30,000 “
Lobsters.....	20,615 “

LOBSTERS.

The Chairman of the Commission would here report that in the past year he has devoted much time and study to the propagation of Lobsters.

As much of the work was necessarily experimental he has therefore given more attention to learning the best methods than to the production of large apparent results. He has made some important experiments that will be of value in the future. While the hatching of eggs in incubators has been attended with a fair degree of success he is of the opinion that any way differing from that of nature must be with greatly increased waste, both before and after hatching.

He would, therefore, approve of retaining the egg lobsters until hatched, and then either return them to the water, or exchange them for other egg lobsters. Without a large outlay this must be about all that can be accomplished.

But the subject is one of great interest and requires the most patient and thorough study before determining all the points to be considered. In the successful propagation of the lobster, the most important of all seems to us to be the rearing of them to an age when they shall have passed the first and most precarious stage of their existence. Should the State ever see fit to acquire control of some arm of the sea, then it may be made possible to retain the young lobsters until sufficiently developed to sink to the bottom and escape the most hazardous period of their lives, thereby much increasing the chances of ultimate maturity.

The complaint has been very general from fishermen and those

not fishermen that the law relating to the size of lobsters that may be taken, has been continually violated ; to the detriment of the honest fishermen and the lobsters are not allowed to mature.

We recommend that some one be designated to enforce this law in the different towns where it is violated.

In the study of our fisheries it has often been suggested that the mud dredged from our harbors and rivers and dropped in the channels, was carried to all parts of the bay and in fishing grounds outside and deposited in quantity sufficient to be seriously detrimental to the fisheries. In this way some of the changes that have been noted and complained of have been explained.

In order to get some reliable data on this subject we applied to Capt. W. H. Bixby, who has charge of the U. S. Engineer's Department and he very kindly gave us the following table, giving the desired information relating to the work by the general government.

REPORT OF COMMISSIONERS.

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TABLE SHOWING THE AMOUNTS OF MATERIAL—MUD, GRAVEL, SAND, CLAY, BOULDERS AND ROCK—REMOVED FROM NARRAGANSETT BAY AND ITS TRIBUTARIES FROM 1867 TO 1894, IN CUBIC YARDS.

YEAR.	Pawtucket River.	Providence River, Green Jacket Shoal.	Providence River.	Taunton River.	Mt. Hope Bay.	Newport Harbor.	Potowomut River.	Wickford Harbor.	Yearly Totals.
1867.....	12,480		42,219						54,699
1868.....									
1869.....	878								878
1870.....			18,201						18,201
1871.....	16,257		27						16,284
1872.....									
1873.....	26,073								26,073
1874.....			30,529	3,668		11,530		11,213	56,940
1875.....	7,248			8,244	634	43,303		13,574	73,003
1876.....	31,347			4,145	21,359	58,928		6,336	122,115
1877.....				93					93
1878.....					12,994				12,994
1879.....			72,314	233					72,547
1880.....			327,559	190					327,749
1881.....			484,125	12,100					496,315
1882.....			391,205	23,232		206,800	15,012		636,339
1883.....			502,304	33,723		130,395			666,421
1884.....			217,724	27,806					245,530
1885.....			625,073	7,658		62,673			695,404
1886.....	212,734					20,185			232,919
1887.....	31,069		111,372	11,450		56,353			210,243
1888.....	72,249	206,431	199,580	4,382		60			482,702
1889.....									
1890.....	55,051	147,520	96,034			39,661			338,206
1891.....			140,673	1,020		34,846			176,359
1892.....	72,213	125,104	87,776	2,650					287,743
1893.....			75,489	5,224					80,713
1894.....	32,975	65,272	351,963			150,740			600,950
Totals.....	570,524	544,327	3,774,257	145,906	34,987	815,414	15,012	31,123	5,931,550

This shows the total amount removed as 5,931,550 cubic yards ; besides this is a larger amount done by cities and by private parties. That it has some effect seems certain when we consider that two square miles, one yard deep or seventy-two (72) square miles, one inch deep is thus dumped in our bay and carried about by the tides ; the extent of the effect none can tell, but it is doubtless one of the ways that man has for disturbing what has been erroneously called "balance of nature."

This term has been much used and as applied to the fisheries, we consider a snare and a delusion. As used, it implies that nature has established and would maintain a certain equilibrium in regard to animal life in the ocean, but for the acts of man ; that man bears no part in the economy of nature, his acts are therefore unnatural, artificial and that he alone is a disturbing force.

Now we believe with Sam Slick, that man has a good deal of nature about him, and that he should be weighed and reckoned with other forces of nature. That his is the most potent, none can for a moment believe. Exactly what his relation is to other forces as a destructive agent we cannot say, but upon that one point depends the issue of the controversy over our fisheries.

We must deny that God or nature has any such laws as implied in the phrase "balance of nature." Nature has no balance as implied. When she goes on the rampage she upsets things generally and does not stay, because to go farther would disturb the 'balance.' She has various ways of marshalling her forces and undoes her own or man's work of centuries in a minute.

The whale, the shark, the seal, the blue-fish cannot be counted out of the category of nature's forces. Does any one know of any retaining power that stays their hungry and destructive jaws when their prey is reduced to the limit of this "balance of nature?" Does any convulsion of nature or any of its forces stop before upsetting the "balance?"

We cited the work of man in our bay in twenty-five (25) years ;

the natural forces of a freshet would do more in as many hours in some rivers, but whether done by man or by natural causes the result of a change in the bottom is destructive of small animal and vegetable life and must be deleterious to the fishes.

J. M. K. SOUTHWICK,

Chairman.

State of Rhode Island in account with Commissioners of Inland Fisheries :

1893.		DR.	
Dec. 31.	To balance due Commissioners.....		\$98 95
1894.			
Dec. 31.	“ paid for yearling trout.....		500 00
	“ expenses of Commissioners.....		114 63
	“ “ transportation caus.....		18 00
			<hr/>
			\$731 58
1894.		CR.	
Feb. 27.	By cash of State Treasurer.....		\$98 95
Dec. 31.	“ balance due Commissioners.....		632 63
			<hr/>
			\$731 58

J. M. K. SOUTHWICK,
HENRY T. ROOT,
WILLIAM P. MORTON,
CHARLES W. WILLARD,
ADELBERT D. ROBERTS,

Commissioners of Inland Fisheries.

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