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1916

Bird reservations.

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COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, GAME AND
FUR-BEARING ANIMALS

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BY

DR. T. GILBERT PEARSON

*Secretary, National Association
of Audubon Societies*

Reprinted from the Seventh Annual Report of the
Commission of Conservation

OTTAWA—1916

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PRESENT operations in the United States, in the line of bird-reservations, grew out of the distinct need of preserving certain classes of birds from becoming extinct. We recognize in North America 1,200 varieties of wild birds. The birds that we may distinctly call farm-land birds, such as the native sparrows, the warblers, wrens, orioles, and many other common insectivorous birds, have, despite the contrary claims of calamity howlers, enormously increased in America since the advent of white man. There has, however, been a decrease in the case of certain forest birds. In the open land there have been more plants, more insect-life, more grass and weed seeds, more berry-producing plants, that spring up along the fences and elsewhere to afford an abundant food-supply. As a result birds of that class have increased and we are in no danger of losing that part of our bird-population. As a result of the increased number of insects it is desirable, however, to have an increase of many species of birds, and a great deal has been done, through a general awakening of public interest to the use of feeding devices, nesting boxes, and keeping down the enemies of the birds, to encourage their propagation.

It is chiefly the birds that could be commercialized, either for their flesh, or their feathers, that have suffered great diminution in numbers in North America as a result of man's activities. An important effort to preserve this class of birds is now being carried on in the United States by the establishment of bird-reservations.

Reservation work began in 1902, under the National Association of Audubon Societies for the study and protection of wild birds and animals. This is the best known and most liberally financed bird-protective organization in the world, and we have been in active operation since 1902. A bill making it a misdemeanor to kill a bird destructive to insects or noxious weed-seeds was pushed by the Audubon workers, and has now been enacted in all of the states except Maryland and six or seven of the Rocky Mountain states.

Protection of
the Pelican

One of the states that early adopted this bill was Florida. On the Atlantic coast of that state, in Indian river, there is an island of about four acres, where two thousand brown pelicans have been coming, from time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary, to lay their eggs and rear their young. About the time this law was enacted long quills became very popular in the millinery trade. We found that millinery stores in the large cities were selling feathers taken from the bush turkey, the albatross, the brown pelican, and also from the old turkey buzzard of the south. A gentleman in the Florida Legislature arose and suggested the repeal of this law. He said it was ridiculous, that it protected the pelican, which fed on fish. Evidently he was not aware that these pelicans were feeding almost entirely upon menhaden, which is not usually esteemed as food. Furthermore, he said, the quills were worth two dollars a bird in New York markets, which made \$4,000 worth of feathers on this island, and we had quite a fight to keep the Legislature from being stampeded.

Then, as men might raid a bird colony, the question arose: Would it be possible to get the United States Government to take hold of that island in some way? In Florida there are two Federal courts. A man who kills a bird would rather be haled before a local magistrate, where the jury probably would be composed of friends and neighbours, who had killed birds themselves. In such a case it was a simple matter to leave the plough for a day and stand trial. But in a Federal court it is a different matter. A man may have to travel half way across the state to attend the court, he must appear before men who are strangers to him; and so it comes about that in the southern country men do not care to be haled into a Federal court.

First Bird
Sanctuary
Established

There did not seem to be any way whereby this federal control could be secured until the matter was finally taken up with the President. The President said in substance, "Is there any precedent for this sort of thing, or any law? What is the island good for, can you raise anything on it?" He was told, "No, one cannot raise corn, peanuts, razor-backed hogs, or, in fact, anything, on this island but pelicans, and there appears to be no specific law or precedent for the Government to create it as a bird reservation." Then he said, "If the land office will recommend that this land is not good for agricultural purposes we will make it a bird-reserve under the care of the Department of Agriculture, provided the Audubon Society will agree to hire a man to act as guardian on the island."

That suited us exactly. The chief clerk in the U.S. Land Office, Mr. Bond, is an Audubonian of long standing. In a very short time

the matter was arranged, and the President declared the island a bird-sanctuary in perpetuity—a breeding place for wild birds for all time. He took a short cut in doing this, as in the case of the Panama canal, and we had a federal bird-reservation. Along the coast of Florida were found nine other small islands suitable for this purpose, and Mr. Roosevelt made them all federal bird-reserves. Then we were jubilant and had a good deal to say in the press; but, strange as it may seem, certain gentlemen did not approve of the action of President Roosevelt, claiming he exceeded his powers. To overcome this a bill was prepared giving him the necessary authority, and Congress enacted it into law.

**Sanctuaries for
Water-Birds
in the West**

Later we began to make enquiry about places suitable for sanctuaries for other birds, to find breeding places for water-birds, for, bear in mind, many large birds over extended areas were threatened with extirpation to supply the demand for the market. Sea gulls along the coast, and terns, grebes and others in the west, were in imminent danger from this cause. So the National Association of Audubon Societies began to look for breeding places of ducks and other birds in the west. We examined the western coast and many more bird reservations were the result. When President Roosevelt went out of office, we had thirty-eight bird reserves. President Taft took an interest in the subject and also segregated quite a number. One of the largest of these bird-sanctuaries is the delta of the Yukon, which is as large as the state of Connecticut.

**Reserves in
the Islands of
the Pacific**

One bird-reserve was created in the western group of the Hawaiian islands, including the Laysan island. This, by the way, was raided the past summer by the Japanese feather-hunters. The Pribilof islands were also made a reserve, as well as the Aleutian chain. We have about seventy bird-reserves in all. For six years the government made no appropriation to protect and guard these birds. Therefore, it become our pleasant duty to ask for money from the members and friends of the Audubon Society willing to give money for an idea—people willing to give money to protect egrets in Florida, or cormorants and gulls on the Three-arch rock in Oregon, all so far away that they could never hope to see them. After the lapse of six years, the government made a small grant for the purpose, although, to-day, the Audubon Society owns and operates the launches on the government reserves, and still helps to pay the salaries of a few of the wardens. The government is appropriating more money each year to this work, and the gentlemen of the Biological Survey who have the work

in charge are exercising every means at their command to successfully protect the birds.

**Panama Canal
Zone a
Bird-Reserve** Before President Taft went out of office we took up with him the question of making the Panama Canal zone a bird-reserve. The request reached him, I believe, the day after election—and he took no action. But President Wilson made the canal zone a reserve when he came in. That is a very important sanctuary, as many of our birds go there in the winter. We have many bird-reserves which we are trying to protect that are not on government territory. These are cared for by agents employed by the National Association of Audubon Societies. The islands along the coast of Maine are great breeding places for sea-fowl of various kinds. There are forty-two islands where they nest, and we have sixteen men in service there in summer. We have wardens guarding islands along the coasts of Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, and North Carolina; also in Florida and Louisiana. About sixty important colonies of water-birds are protected by the Audubon Society in the southern states. We have not ownership of all these places. Some we have been able to buy and a few we lease. In other cases we obtained the consent of the owners to protect them. The result is that certain water-birds on the Atlantic coast, such as the herring gull and several species of terns, have come back in great numbers.

**Protecting
the Egret** We are trying to guard the egrets in the south and we know of about ten thousand or twelve thousand of these birds left in the United States. Two of our agents, while on guard, have been shot and killed by plume-hunters, and the colonies have been raided and the plumes sent to New York.

In North America the great nursery for wild ducks and geese is the region between the Great lakes and Hudson bay on the east and the Rocky mountains on the west. We have three great flights of ducks and geese in autumn from that section of the country. Those heading for the Atlantic seaboard chiefly cross the States diagonally, reaching the Atlantic coast about Maryland. In a reactionary migratory movement, many of them go back along the coast at least to Long island and swim back and forth, according to weather conditions. The other end of this movement goes down the coast. There is also the great flight down the Mississippi valley. Under the migratory bird laws, the Mississippi, between Memphis and St. Paul, is a reservation. In the sunken ground of Arkansas we have two large bird-reserves, and on one of these many ducks find

a refuge. This was a famous place for market hunters in days gone by. More than 300,000 ducks were taken there in one year. Another large series of bird-reservations is situated in the state of Louisiana. These include 234,000 acres of marsh-land, where numbers of ducks and geese now find a safe refuge. These reservations were made by the private purchase of Charles Willis Ward, E. A. McIlhenny, Mrs. Russell Sage and the Rockefeller Foundation.

Birds being
Driven
Further North

So we are making some headway. It is a matter in which those of us who are actively engaged are naturally greatly interested, and we are very anxious to see the work extended to Canada. Sloughs in your Northwest are being drained and the wild water-fowl are being driven farther north. Alaska will, perhaps, be the last refuge for some of these. We became so apprehensive of the situation there that we undertook to call the attention of the people of Alaska to the value of their bird-life. The Association sent two men to gather information on the birds of Alaska and collated from publications such material as was available. Then we published the combined data in illustrated book form, and last winter sent a copy of the *Alaskan Bird-Life* to every school-child in Alaska—eight thousand copies in all. As the children would take the books home, it was thus distributed to the people. But let us not drive all the nesting birds out of Canada. You have an immense wealth here yet, and I appeal to you, as a man from the United States, interested in bird-protection, to take up the work, for it is quite worth while. If we are going to conserve the wild water-fowl, which is a great national asset to both nations, we must have co-operation and must work together.

You have an opportunity in Canada to set aside as bird-reserves very important areas for harbouring wild ducks and geese that cannot be of any great agricultural value. In establishing bird-reservations we have found in the United States it is necessary to bear in mind that people are more important than birds, and, if we set aside land for birds that people can really use for agricultural purposes, it sometimes becomes necessary later to relinquish such areas. But you have many lakes and sloughs in the west that could easily be created bird-reservations without interfering with the agricultural interests of the Dominion. The expense of guarding such territories need not be great. Very frequently some person who resides in the immediate neighbourhood can be secured to give adequate protection. We have found that a little protection goes a long way, that it is perfectly astonishing how kindly and quickly birds respond to protection, how soon they discover the areas in which they are immune from human attack, and how

quickly the breeding birds will increase in number. I feel that the most important feature that Canada can take up in the matter of wild life protection is the guarding of wild ducks, geese and shore-birds. I shall be very glad to go into details on the matter of ways and means should the Commission later desire to have me do so.

We would, I suppose, all agree that the general education of the public in any desired line of reform is the surest way to get lasting results in the long run. The National Association of Audubon Societies has long worked on this principle. For the past few years we have engaged in a systematic work of organizing the school-children into classes for bird-study and bird-protection. The children each pay a fee of 10 cents and receive material which costs us much more than that to publish and place in their hands. This consists of a series of excellent coloured pictures of birds, together with outline drawings which the children, by means of water-colours or crayons, can fill in and thus fasten in their minds the correct colouring of various birds. The children also receive a very pretty bird-button bearing the words "Audubon Society." To the teacher who forms a class of ten or more, and sends in their fees to the New York office, there is forwarded, without cost, a year's subscription to the magazine *Bird-Lore* and other printed instructions on the subject of bird-study. During the past year about 150,000 children were organized into classes of this kind in the United States.

Representing the Association, I am very glad to offer to extend this opportunity to the children of Canada, and shall be very glad if the Commission of Conservation should feel like co-operating by assisting in bringing this matter to the attention of the various school authorities.

As a further indication that there is nothing of a commercial character about this proposition, I may add that this work last year cost us at the rate of 26 cents for each child enrolled. For the present school-year we have at our disposal a fund of \$26,000 to use in this work, and I shall be very happy to share the advantages of the plan with the children of Canada.



