

# Protecting Our Endangered Birds

Twelve valuable and interesting birds have disappeared from America in the less than 200 years of its existence as a Nation--the Great Auk, Passenger Pigeon, Heath Hen, Labrador Duck, and Carolina Parakeet, to name a few. Still others are endangered and may vanish within a few years. This is a matter of grave concern to the Federal Government. The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife is working in close cooperation with the States and private conservation agencies to do what can be done to stem this tide of extinction.

## What Causes an Animal to Disappear?

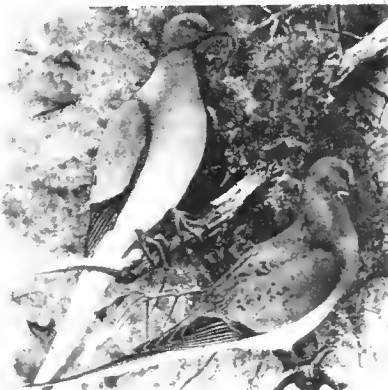
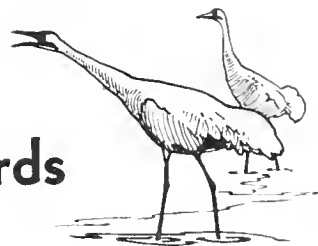
Whenever a species is reduced to a small number of individuals it is in danger of extinction; a catastrophe such as destruction of important habitat, a severe winter, an outbreak of disease, or excessive shooting, can easily wipe it out. In America, a number of species were greatly reduced or destroyed during settlement of the country. The building of cities, roads, dams, draining of marshes, and cultivation of large areas literally pushed many species from their homes. During the 19th century, market-hunters, killing thousands of birds for feathers and meat, destroyed or nearly destroyed some species before the American people realized what was happening.

Today, the drainage of vast marshes and thousands of potholes throughout the country is destroying habitat essential to certain wildlife species. These wetlands are sorely needed by our waterfowl, shorebirds, and many other birds and fur animals.

Pollution is another problem facing us today. Sewage from our cities and wastes from our factories, mines, and ships, are turning many of our lakes and streams into open sewers.

## Some Endangered Birds

Several American birds are in immediate danger of disappearing: the Eskimo Curlew, Ivory-billed Woodpecker, Whooping Crane, Attwater's Prairie Chicken, Everglade Kite, California Condor, and Nene or Hawaiian Goose.



Passenger Pigeon



Heath Hen



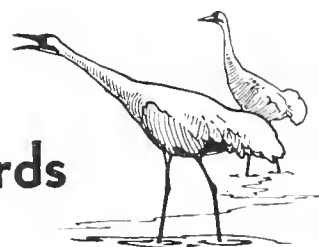
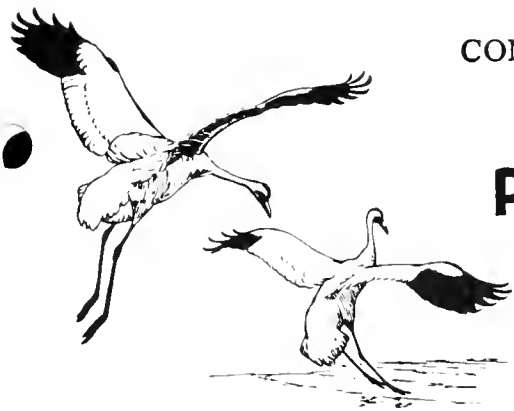
Great Auk



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
Stewart L. Udall, *Secretary*  
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE



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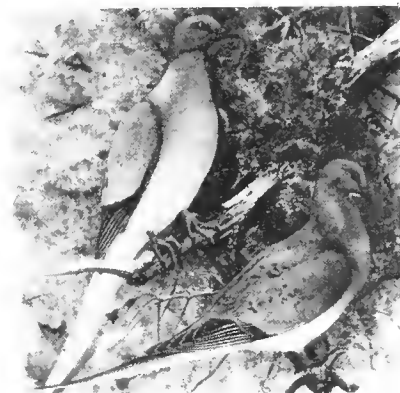
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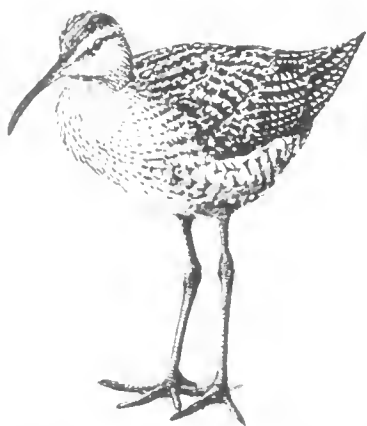
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Eskimo Curlew



Prairie Chicken

The Eskimo Curlew once migrated through the coastal prairies of Texas and the Great Plains in countless numbers. In spring, immense flocks of the long-legged shorebirds stopped to feed on insects in freshly plowed fields and burned-over prairies. Hunting for the fine-flavored birds was a popular sport and thousands were shot for city markets. The curlews were easily killed because of the habit of a flock staying with a wounded companion. By 1892 the great flocks were nearly gone, and the species has never recovered. The last record was a sighting in Argentina in 1937, but hope still remains that a few birds survive.

Too few people living have ever had an opportunity to see the magnificent Ivory-billed Woodpecker with its shining black plumage and great scarlet crest. It is a shy, wild bird that lives in mature, broad-leaved forests of our southern swamps and river valleys. It was doomed when loggers began cutting the great trees in the river swamps, as its chief food, a beetle grub, lives under the bark of very old trees. There have been no authentic records for several years.

Former numbers of the Whooping Crane are a matter of speculation. These magnificent birds, nearly as tall as a man and with a wingspread of almost 7 feet, may not have exceeded 1,400 at the time America was discovered. Traveling in small flocks or family groups, they made their 2,500-mile flights each year through the Great Plains between Arctic nesting grounds and winter quarters on the Gulf coast. By 1938 only 14 remained. They could not cope with the draining of the prairie potholes, plowing under the grasslands, and excessive shooting along their migration routes. Public concern for the future existence of these cranes led to the creation of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas on their hereditary wintering grounds. In the fall of 1958 23 adults and 9 rusty-colored youngsters returned to the refuge from northern nesting areas. In all, the whoopers now number 38 birds, including 6 held in zoos.

At one time a million Attwater's Prairie Chickens are thought to have ranged over the coastal prairies of Louisiana and Texas. Today, as the result of pollution from oil drilling, rice farming that destroys their grasslands, and drought, only a few thousand remain. The

Whooping crane with her young one

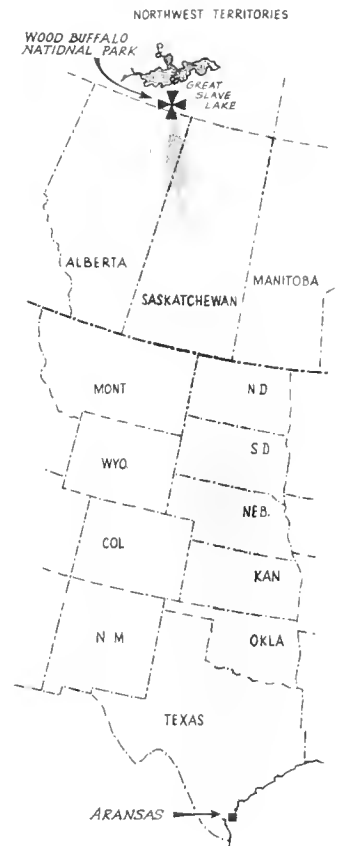


future existence of this splendid game bird demands that it be provided soon with a permanent refuge area in which it will have the tall grasses, fresh water, and protection from shooting that it needs.

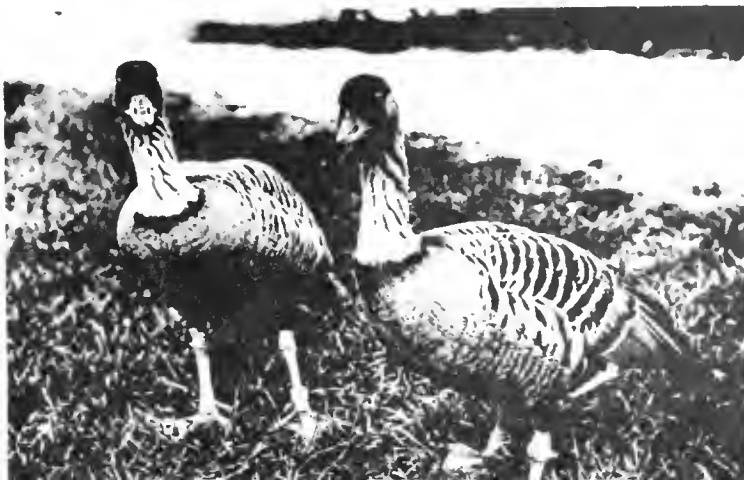
The Everglade Kite and California Condor are endangered by dwindling food supplies. The gentle and graceful Kite lives in the fresh-water marshes of Florida and feeds only on a fresh-water snail. As extensive marshes are drained, the snail becomes increasingly scarce. Looking much like a marsh hawk, this very rare bird is often shot by hunters. The growing shortage in its food and needless killings by hunters make the future of the harmless Everglade Kite very dark.

The once-common California Condor ranged from Lower California to the Columbia River. Today not more than 60 birds remain. This remnant of a great race lives within the Los Padres National Forest in California. Because of modern ranching methods and the trend toward grain farming, carrion is no longer as abundant as in the days of the old Spanish ranches. Ranging widely for food, the Condor risks being shot or feeding on poisoned meat placed on the ranges for coyotes and rodents.

Encroachment of men on its living areas has greatly endangered the Nene, an Hawaiian goose. At one time rather common, the Nene regularly migrated from the sea coasts to the uplands to nest in the kapukas or islands of low vegetation on the open lava flows at the higher elevations. The development of beach resorts, construction of military roads through the uplands, and introduction of domestic animals, particularly dogs and pigs, rats and the weasel-like mongoose, have nearly destroyed the Nene. Probably not more than 50 wild birds remain today. Fortunately, the Nene can be raised in captivity. Some 150 birds live on the Severn Wildfowl Trust in England and a couple of smaller captive flocks are in Hawaii. Recognizing the threat to the Nene, the Congress in 1958 instructed the Department of the Interior to try to save this endangered bird. Consequently, a program of research, breeding, and protection of the Nene (which is the State Bird of Hawaii) in its own habitat has been developed. This work is being done in cooperation with the Board of Commissioners of Agriculture and Forestry, the agency responsible for the State of Hawaii's wildlife.



2,500-mile trip made each year by Whooping Cranes



Nene living at the Severn Wildfowl Trust in England

Great White Heron in mangrove swamps



## Protecting Our Rare Birds

Future generations of Americans will enjoy such beautiful and rare birds as the Trumpeter Swan, Great White Heron, American and Snowy Egrets, Wood Duck, and Hudsonian Godwit because of the foresight of past generations. In many parts of the United States we have set aside refuge areas for the protection of our wildlife. Sometimes endangered animals are saved simply by the setting up of a protected area with the type of habitat they need where they can rest and feed and bear their young. The operation or management of a refuge ensures that food supplies are sufficient, and that living conditions are right, too, for the arrival of the new generations that the adults will produce. This means the land must have good plant cover of the particular kind needed by a species. Overgrazed lands are returned to native grasses and shrubs; marshes, with their great variety of plantlife, are restored. Water is important, especially in arid regions. In desert areas wells are dug, springs opened up, and new water holes developed. On some refuges it is necessary to protect endangered species by controlling predators such as snakes, coyotes, and bobcats. Heavy losses of young animals during the breeding season will help destroy a species already on the danger list.



Snowy Egret



Trumpeter Swan

Frequently a refuge is established on an area that has the last survivors of a species, as the Aransas Refuge in Texas on the wintering grounds of the Whooping Crane. By using a remnant group as breeding stock, every effort is made to restore the species, as for example, the Trumpeter Swan on the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in Montana. The Trumpeter Swan was thought to be extinct by 1900, the result of excessive shooting by trappers and early settlers for their feathers and meat. But in the early 1930's a small flock of about 33 swans was found in the vicinity of Yellowstone National Park. To save these rare birds, many of which nested and wintered on unprotected lands near the Park, the Red Rock Lakes Refuge was created in 1935. By 1958 the Trumpeter has increased to more than 700 birds. Its recovery is the story of conservation in action: complete protection from shooting and from intrusion of men and cattle on its nesting areas. What has been done for the Trumpeter Swan it is hoped can be done for the Whooping Crane.

At the turn of the century, the American Egret, Snowy Egret, and Great White Heron were in great danger of





The Wood Duck is one of our most beautiful ducks

extinction. Feather hunters persistently raided the rookeries, killing the adults for their beautiful plumes and leaving the young to starve. Today, you can visit many refuges in the Southern States and see large rookeries of these beautiful birds.

Seeing a Roseate Spoonbill in its natural environment is a thrilling experience, but in a few years this rare bird probably will not be found outside of refuge areas. It is decreasing in Florida and in Texas drilling for oil is destroying its habitat. National wildlife refuges and Audubon sanctuaries in Florida, Louisiana, and Texas protect several colonies of these beautiful pink birds. The future existence of the Spoonbill seems assured as long as it remains on these protected lands.

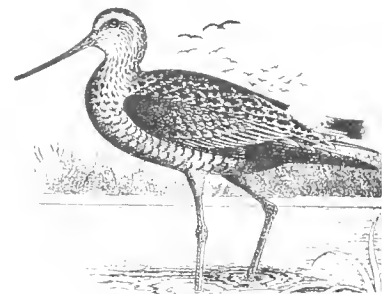
Formerly an abundant bird, the Wood Duck was reduced almost to extinction in this century. Not only was it widely hunted but it was also steadily losing places to live. Many of its swamps were being drained and the woods in which its nesting trees stood were being cut. So much concern was felt for the Wood Duck that in 1918 it was placed on the protected list and hunters could not legally kill it. By 1941 this duck had become numerous enough again that hunters were permitted to take a limited number. Since the 1930's several national wildlife refuges have been developed in its range. Protected from overshooting and given permanent and suitable places to live, the Wood Duck is once more becoming a common bird in many of our inland, swampy woodlands and tree-bordered streams.

The Hudsonian Godwit, one of our rarer shorebirds, also was a casualty of market-hunting days. Considering the continuous and heavy shooting of the birds in those early days as they migrated through our Great Plains, it is a wonder any survived. Only in recent years has this long-legged, long-billed bird begun to show an increase in its numbers. In 1956, several hundred were seen on national wildlife refuges in the Great Plains. The birds stopped over to feed and rest before resuming their long flight to northern nesting grounds. In common with other shorebirds, the godwits are of great value to the farmer. They feed heavily on mosquitoes, grasshoppers, crane-fly larvae, and other insect pests of farm animals and crops.

The future of our wildlife is in the hands of the American people. Constant vigilance and concerted action by all conservationists and conservation organizations are necessary if we are to succeed in saving and restoring our endangered species of wildlife.



American Egret

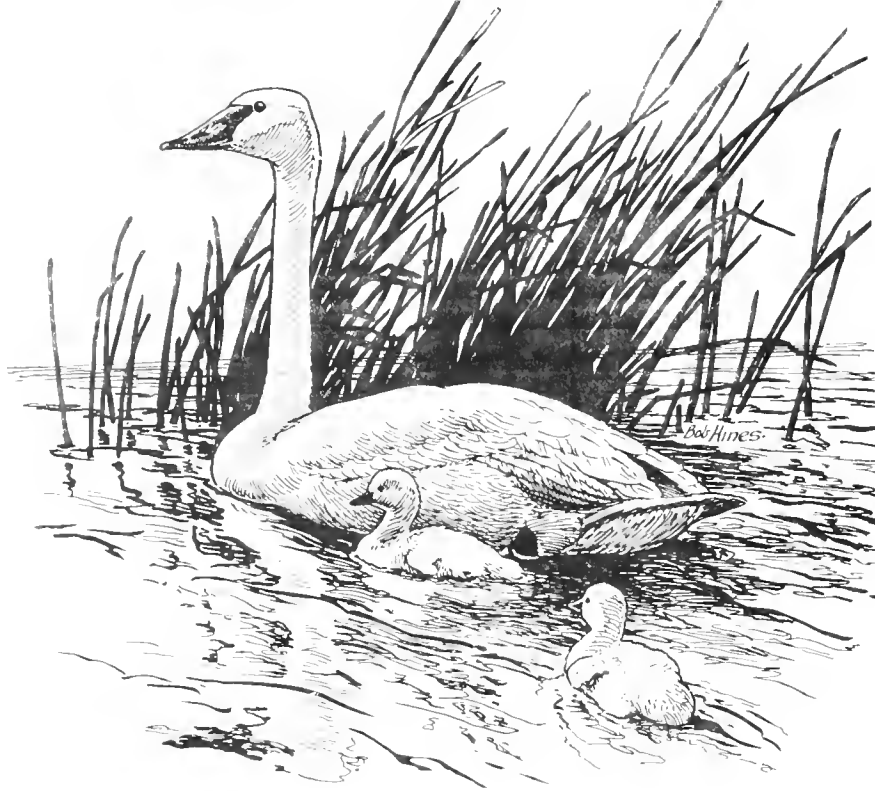


Hudsonian Godwit



Roseate Spoonbill

Trumpeter Swan  
and cygnets



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