THE GREAT VALUE OF BIRD SANCTUARIES:
BY T. GILBERT PEARSON

STANDING on the levee of the lower Mississippi River, the eye of the traveler wanders in all directions over a vast expanse of wild salt marsh which sweeps eastward along the Gulf Coast line toward the swamps of Mississippi, and westward to the timber lands and prairies of Texas. Through these interminable sea meadows there meander numerous creeks and narrow tide channels extending many miles inland until the higher lands are reached. The grasses of this boundless marsh, as well as the watery sod beneath, teem with many forms of insect and crustacean life, and the surface of the creeks is continually rippled by a million schools of little fish. This abundance of small forms of life seems to have been designed by Nature to supply food for the wild birds which here abound. If the time be summer, rails and gallinules call from the tangles; and the great lordly grackles, with the sunshine glistening from their purple wings, pound ponderously overhead. Seaside finches dart in and out of the cover, or cling swaying to a stalwart rush while they voice their joy of life in the marsh. Herons of many species feed along the creek shores or slowly wing their way northward to their nests in the swamps.

Winter lays its finger but lightly on this country of the far Southland, and the waters are never frozen, so the bird life is abundant the year around,—the population simply changing with the seasons. With the first suggestion of the cold nights of autumn, the ducks and geese which have passed the summer on the lakes or tundras of the far north begin to arrive. With them also come the hunters, men from the higher lands who often bring in their boats outfits for camping. All winter long they remain, and hardly ever is the air free from the roar of their guns. The mallard, black duck, pintail, widgeon, teal, canvas back and wild geese are all savory food for mankind, and the markets of the world bid high for them at so much per head. It has been stated that during the winter of nineteen hundred and nine and nineteen hundred and ten the hunters of Louisiana gathered four million game birds. These figures, being official, are probably much below the number actually killed.

Living in the midst of this prodigality of bird life, Mr. E. I. McIlhenny, who is a bird lover by profession and a successful business man incidentally, saw the possibilities of a great game preserve the like of which had never been established in the Southern States. On his own lands, perhaps ten miles north of Vermillion Bay, he prohibited shooting and by artificial means established a colony of herons in the small trees surrounding a pond near his house. These birds
increased so rapidly under protection that in a few years fully twenty thousand herons were nesting here, and he now finds it necessary to haul annually from a distance many wagon loads of twigs to provide the birds materials for nests. Here today exists perhaps the largest colony of snowy egrets in the United States. In nineteen hundred and ten, cooperating with Mr. Charles W. Ward, he purchased a tract of eighteen thousand acres of adjoining marsh land and presented it to the State of Louisiana as a perpetual refuge for wild birds. Just off Vermilion Bay and closely adjoining this reservation, lies Marsh Island, seventy-five thousand acres in extent. Of all the lower coast region, this has perhaps been the most ideal spot for the market hunter to ply his trade. Literally tens of thousands of wild fowl have been killed here annually by the men who shoot for the money their guns will bring them. Last spring Mr. McIlhenny and Mr. Ward came to New York filled with the idea of having some one buy this island in order that it might be preserved as a game refuge. It seemed to many a rather large undertaking to raise the necessary funds for such a purchase. How well they succeeded is told in the press dispatches sent out from New York on September twenty-nine, nineteen hundred and twelve, stating that Mrs. Russell Sage had, by an expenditure of about one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, purchased Marsh Island, and that for all time to come the plume hunter and market shooter would be banished from its confines. The full extent of the value of the efforts by these Louisiana gentlemen and Mrs. Sage to preserve the wild water fowl of America can best be told by the appreciative Americans in the years to come.

Another private effort at bird protection on a large scale was undertaken two years ago by Mr. Henry Ford of Detroit, Michigan. Mr. Ford owns a farm of two thousand one hundred acres, not many miles from the city. His estate is a land of hills, glens, fields, open groves and forests. In other words, it is a typical upland farm of the Middle West, and normally the character of bird life which inhabits it is similar to that found generally throughout the State. Meadow larks, doves and finches of many forms frequent the fields. Thrushes, thrashers, orioles and warblers haunt the thickets; while chickadees, nuthatches and woodpeckers patrol the boles and limbs of the trees making their daily round in quest of insects or their eggs and larvæ. Now Mr. Ford is another man who loves birds and likes to have them about him; then, too, he appreciates the fact that the bird inhabitants of the land are of great value to agriculture and forestry because of the numbers of injurious insects which they destroy, and the vast quantities of noxious weed seeds they consume.
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The number of birds to be found in any given locality is dependent on the food supply, water, suitable nesting sites and adequate safety from their natural enemies. Mr. Ford determined to increase these favorable conditions on his farm. He went about this in the same thorough business-like manner which has made him so successful in the world of affairs. His first move was to employ the services of Mr. Jefferson Butler, hitherto the Secretary of the Michigan State Audubon Society and a man on familiar terms with the wild birds of his State. Mr. Butler for some time devoted his attention to making a thorough ornithological survey of the Ford farm. This has resulted up to date in the identification of one hundred and six forms of wild birds.

Boxes of a character suitable for nesting were made or purchased and fastened to trees or poles at frequent intervals throughout the woodlands. Shrubs or trees which produce fruit of a character esteemed by birds were encouraged to grow. For the winter birds feeding stations were established, tempting provisions being placed on elevated platforms each of which had a cover to protect it from the rain and snow. To be more exact, it may be stated that in the autumn of nineteen hundred and eleven ten thousand fruit bearing shrubs were planted. During the winter sixteen feeding stations were kept constantly supplied with bird food, consisting of cracked corn, wheat, hemp, European and American millet, sunflower seed and buckwheat. Besides this interesting menu two hundred pounds of suet were used. Some of this, in its natural form, was tied to the limbs of trees but most of it was made into cakes filled with hemp seed.

PATCHES of sunflowers were planted this year in various open places. These not only added beauty to the landscape but were highly appreciated as a food supply for the birds. Long before the ligules of the yellow involucre had faded, the inquisitive nuthatch had discovered and showed to the goldfinch the world of goodies in each sunflower head. Food was provided to suit the taste of every member of the one hundred and six varieties of birds as far as this was possible. Some covies of bobwhite made their home on the Ford farm and for these, patches of buckwheat were grown and left to go to seed. There is no reason why a seed-eating bird should go hungry on the Ford farm. Water for drinking and bathing purposes was abundantly supplied at most seasons by Rouge River and a large creek which winds about among the hills. Last winter, when the severe weather covered the fields and streams with an icy blanket, snow was ingeniously melted to supply a drink even on the coldest day. In one of the receptacles a song sparrow was seen to enjoy a bath on a freezing morning in January.
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The difference in the Ford and McIllhenny plans of operation is as wide as the conditions of territory and bird life with which they are dealing. The one seeks to protect birds by bringing about a condition which will prohibit their slaughter, the other having but little to fear from this source goes a pace farther and aims to attract birds to his farm sanctuary by making it a bird paradise. Both have the same noble aim, namely, the protection and increase of our native American birds. Both plans are highly practicable and will doubtless be equally resultful of success.

The propagation of game birds and animals for shooting purposes has long been an established custom, particularly in various countries of Europe. In England today there are many farms on which as many as eight or ten thousand pheasants or wild ducks are raised annually for profit, and there are more than twenty thousand professional gamekeepers. Game preserves maintained for shooting purposes in the United States have become comparatively common only in recent years. During the past two decades they have rapidly increased in number and today there are many hundreds, if not thousands, maintained by clubs or individuals throughout the country. A small per cent. of these provide hatcheries, but the owners of by far the larger majority depend entirely upon conserving the native stock by protecting the birds from their natural enemies and especially from the inroads of the shooting public.

The general term "game preserve" as almost universally applied refers to a boundary of land whereon birds or game animals are "preserved" for the private shooting of the owners and their guests. The McIlhenny and Ford preserves, however, like the Government Bird Reserves and those owned and guarded by the Audubon Societies, have been established and maintained for the purpose of preserving bird life for the public weal, and it is not intended that the birds which frequent the protected areas shall ever be shot or otherwise disturbed.

A few of the State Governments have been showing a disposition of late to adopt the same broad idea of bird protection. For example, in the State forests of Pennsylvania various areas amounting in the aggregate to many thousands of acres are now patroled by guards, whose chief duties consist of ridding the neighborhood of all predatory birds and animals which destroy song- and game-birds. By means of poison and guns immense numbers of hawks and weasels especially, are brought to bag. We have the authority of Dr. Joseph Kalbfus, executive officer of the State Game Commission, for the statement that many birds have increased in numbers under this system. The State Game Protective authorities of Indiana for a few years past have
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been encouraging the farmers to discontinue shooting on their lands, by furnishing them with game birds for propagation after the owners of a number of contiguous farms have signed agreements to permit no shooting on their lands.

The most extensive efforts yet put forward in this country in the matter of establishing bird sanctuaries have been those inaugurated by the Federal Government under various acts of Congress. In addition to the fifty-five bird reserves, which include many vastly important breeding territories of water birds, there are several national parks wherein the wild feathered life receive absolute protection from hunters at all seasons of the year. The most important of these parks are Yellowstone, Wyoming; the National Zoological and Rock Creek Parks, District of Columbia; Sequoia, Yosemite and General Grant Parks in California; Mount Ranier, Washington; Crater Lake, Oregon; Wind Cave, South Dakota; and Glacier, Montana. These ten parks occupy a total area of four million, three hundred and twenty thousand, four hundred and ninety acres.

We might go even farther and mention the Federal protected Battle Grounds of Chickamauga, Antietam, Shiloh, Gettysburg and Vicksburg, on which birds are protected at all times.

More important for bird preservation than all the Federal and State reserves and all the game farms of the country is the ever increasing number of American lawns and gardens where the owner never permits any bird or its nest to be disturbed by the hand of man. Throughout our country every year thousands of thoughtful and appreciative men and women are exerting their influence on behalf of the birds. The feeding place in one yard, the drinking fountain in another and a little group of bird boxes on poles, scattered about the lawns and in rear gardens all do their part toward the great cause of conserving America’s wild bird life. Any one who has a farm or a small estate, or even a little garden patch, can by these simple methods not only enjoy the privilege of having wild birds for his neighbors, but may also have the satisfaction of knowing that he is helping to increase one of our most interesting and valuable natural assets.

The National Association of Audubon Societies, with headquarters at nineteen hundred and seventy-four Broadway, has for free distribution to all interested parties leaflets giving practical directions for feeding birds in winter and providing nesting places for them in summer. No one who seriously undertakes this joyous work of attracting birds about his home is likely to lose interest in the subject, and the results will well repay the small effort involved.