

THE LARGER WILD ANIMALS THAT HAVE BECOME
EXTINCT IN WISCONSIN.

(Read at the Racine meeting.)

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A record of the date and order in which native animals become extinct within the bounds of any country is of present interest, and in the future may be perused with redoubled satisfaction.

Fifty years ago the territory now included in the state of Wisconsin was nearly in its primitive condition. Then many of the larger wild animals were abundant. Now all has changed; the ax and plow, gun and dog, railway and telegraph, have completely metamorphosed the face of nature. Not a few of the large quadrupeds and birds have been exterminated or have hid themselves away in the wilderness of northern Wisconsin.

There was a time, away back in the dim past, when the mastodon, ox, elephant, tapir, peccary, and musk-ox roamed over the ancient prairies of Wisconsin, but now only their bones, from time to time, are exhumed and thus exposed to the wondering gaze of the ignorant many and the trained eye of the wiser few. We shall at this time, however, confine our attention to the historic period.

The antelope, *Antilocarpa Americana*, now found only on the western plains, did, two hundred years ago, inhabit Wisconsin as far east as Lake Michigan. In October, 1679, Father Hennepin, with La Salle and party, in four canoes, coasted along the western shore of Lake Michigan. In Hennepin's narrative he says: "The oldest of them" [the Indians] "came to us the next morning, with their calumets of peace, and brought some *wild goats*." This was at or near Milwaukee. "Being in sore distress, we saw upon the coast a great many ravens and eagles, from whence we conjectured there was some prey, and having landed on that spot we found above the half of a fat wild goat which the wolves had strangled. This provision was very acceptable to us, and the rudest of our men could not but praise the Divine Providence which took so particular care of them." This was, undoubtedly, near Racine. "On the 16th" [October 16, 1679] "we met with abundance of game;

a savage we had with us killed several stags and *wild goats*, and our men a great many turkey, very fat and big." This last point was between Kenosha and Racine. Hennepin's goats were without doubt antelopes. Father Joliet, a little earlier, mentions that "on the Wisconsin there are plenty of turkey cocks, parrots, quails, wild oxen, stags and wild goats." All species of the deer family were called stags by the early travelers. Schoolcraft mentions antelopes as occurring in the Northwestern Territory, and as late as 1850. Antelopes were not uncommon in southern Minnesota, only forty miles west of the Mississippi river. It is evident, then, that antelopes have retired quite leisurely.

When the last buffalo, *Bos Americana*, crossed the Mississippi is not precisely known. Governor Dodge told me that buffalo were killed on the Wisconsin side of the St. Croix river the next year after the close of the Blackhawk war, which would be 1833. So Wisconsin had the last buffaloes east of the Mississippi river.

The Woodland Caribou, *Rangifer Caribou*, were probably never numerous within the limits of the state. A few, however, were seen near La Point in 1840; none since.

Elk, *Cervus Canadensis*, were on Hay river in 1863, and I have but little doubt that a few still linger with us. The next to follow the buffalo, antelope and reindeer.

Moose, *Alce Americanus*, continue to inhabit the northern part of the state, where they still range in spite of persecution. A fine cow moose was shot near the line of the Wisconsin Central Railway in December, 1877.

A few panthers, *Felis Concolor*, are yet with us; a straggler is occasionally seen. Benjamin Bones of Racine shot one on the head-waters of Black river, December, 1863.

Wolverines, *Gulo liscus*, are occasionally taken in the timber; one was taken in La Crosse county in 1870.

Of beaver, *Castor Canadensis*, a few still continue to inhabit some of the small lakes situated in Lincoln and adjacent counties.

The badger, *Taxidea Americana*, is now nearly extinct in Wisconsin. In a few years the only badger found in the state will be the one on the coat of arms.

The opossum, *Didelphis Virginiana*, were not uncommon in

Racine and Walworth counties as late as 1848. They have been caught as far north as Waukesha, and one near Madison in 1872, since which time I have not heard of any being taken. I am told that a few are still found in Grant county. They will soon be exterminated, no doubt. The last wild turkeys, *Meleagris Gallopavo*, in the eastern part of the state, was in the fall of 1846, at which time a few were discovered near Racine. They were hunted with such vigor that the entire number were shot, "The last of the Mohicans." I am told, by Dr. E. B. Wolcott, that turkeys were abundant in Wisconsin previous to the hard winter of 1842-3, when snow was yet two feet deep in March, with a firm crust, so that the turkeys could not get to the ground; they hence became so poor and weak that they could not fly and so were an easy prey for the wolves, wildcats, foxes and minks. The Doctor further stated that he saw but one single turkey the next winter, and none since. One was shot in Grant county in the fall of 1872. Possibly there are a few yet to be found in this large southwestern county; if not, then wild turkeys are exterminated in the state of Wisconsin.