

that the rest enjoy. And even though some leading light, like the village parson, might think that the idiot should be free to do as he liked because he is a human being like the others, what right would the parson have of enforcing his opinion? None whatever. And because unreasoning sentimentalists wish Crows, Horned Owls and other undesirable birds to have a free run of the sanctuaries there is still no reason why they should get their way, for the admittance of these birds is incompatible with the whole idea and object of a sanctuary. I am quite prepared to believe that in heaven the lion and the lamb will lie down together and the Sharp-shinned Hawk and the Sparrow will nest in peace side by side, but that a government sanctuary notice can produce the same effect is more than I can credit.

While I agree that it would be a pity to confound bird sanctuaries and game farms, it seems to me that to confound bird sanctuaries and vermin farms is an incomparably graver error.

Yours,

Department of Zoology, WM. ROWAN,
University of Alberta,
Edmonton, Alberta,
January 19, 1924. ———

EDITOR OF *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*,
Ottawa, Canada.

Sir:

May I ask you to kindly allow me some space to express my opinion of your criticism of Mr. J. A. Munro's excellent article in the November number on Vermin Control in Government Sanctuaries.

Your editorial expresses the extreme view of many of the protectionists of to-day, that predatory birds and mammals should be protected for their æsthetic value in direct opposition to the doctrine of the greatest possible good to the greatest possible number.

There are many upholders of your theory, which is largely based on that ancient phantasy—the so-called Balance of Nature. That anyone, like yourself, who has travelled in the Canadian wilderness and witnessed the fearful scarcity of bird life away from man's influence should hold this view is only a small degree more inexplicable than that it should have its advocates among men whom we have been led to regard as our leading authorities in bird-lore. In an editorial in the last *Auk* (January, 1924) there occurs the following passage in reference to a proposed campaign against the Crow. "Most ornithologists will differ on this latter statement while the publications of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (Biological Survey) show that the Common Crow does as much good as harm. By all means let the farmer kill Crows

when damaging crops but do not let us *exterminate* an extremely interesting species of bird on the advice of ammunition manufacturers."

Exterminate! (the italics are not mine). Does this editor realize that in the densely populated island of England every effort has been made for centuries to exterminate the Crow, together with the Old World equivalent of our Sharp-shinned Hawk, and yet these two pests still exist everywhere in the British Isles? True, their numbers are held in check, resulting in a wealth of bird-life to be seen nowhere else in the world, but the most ardent game-protectionists know only too well that their extermination is an absolute impossibility. This bogey of extermination is now being worked too hard; at a recent meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union a member seriously advocated the protection of the Sharp-shinned Hawk; they laid such beautiful eggs.

As to the Crow, it now presents what is probably the most serious menace to bird-life in North America, and its numbers are increasing at an extraordinary rate, especially on the prairies. The investigation by the Biological Survey, alluded to above, wholly dealt with its relation to agriculture. No consideration was given to its effect on game and other bird life, nor was any analysis made to detect the presence of eggs in the stomach contents. If this had been done, especially with stomachs from game-producing regions, the verdict would have been so overwhelmingly against the Crows of all sorts that no thinking man would be able to defend them.

We are now at the parting of the ways. There are many intelligent bird-lovers, neither sportsmen nor collectors, who advocate vermin control wherever possible, just as they would advocate the "extermination" of noxious weeds, despite the howls of some fanatic who finds esthetic pleasure in a thistle or a cockle-burr.

The reading of Mabel Osgood Wright's *Stories from Bird-Craft Sanctuary* affords a most encouraging sign of the times. Here we have a sane protection, and I would especially refer to Dr. Chapman's comment on these (*Bird-Lore*, September-October 1922, p. 293). Two quotations from this editorial are apposite. "The Sanctuary has become not only a home for harmless birds but a well-stocked hunting ground for predaceous ones." "It seems to us that basing our actions on the principles of justice and fair play . . . we should protect our native birds from the English Sparrow, our poultry from marauding Hawks, our fishponds from murderous Herons, and make our sanctuaries true havens of refuge."

To the advocates of the principles of leaving birds entirely to Nature's mercies, protecting them only from man, I can cite two recent ex-

amples at the opposite ends of the large territory under the advisory jurisdiction of the Audubon Society. First the Heath Hen on Martha's Vineyard. After many years of protection and the expenditure of large sums this splendid game bird may be classed as wiped out, the last reports giving a total of 40 males and no females.

After reading the reports outlining the factors that have resulted in this condition, one is driven to the conclusion that the employment of one or two European gamekeepers at a very moderate cost would have resulted in the perpetuation of the Heath Hen. These keepers would have known from experience what would be the result of leaving a reduced number of the females of a polygamous bird to the mercies of a preponderance of males. Also they would be under no delusions as to the utility of the Marsh Hawk—that arch-enemy of all ground-nesting birds during the breeding season.

Second example, the effort to protect the Murres of the Farallones. At present, after years of protection, these are reduced to one-fifth of their former abundance when they were entirely unprotected by law and their eggs were used as a source of food supply for San Francisco.

The eggers in those days systematically raided the colonies of Western Gulls, keeping them in check. Now, under absolute protection the Gulls have increased prodigiously, to the detriment and possible future "extermination" of the very birds it was proposed to protect. Even Dr. Nelson, the Chief of the Biological Survey, is unable to get any legislation passed removing the protection from such destructive birds as the larger Gulls, although he strongly advocates this removal.

But California is a wonderful State—it absolutely protects Crows and Magpies at all seasons and places, and further expends large sums in the importation and propagation of game birds to provide the Crows with their favorite food.

However there are a great many sensible bird-lovers in that State who have used their own eyes, and are now ready to break away from the blighting influence of the fanatical protectionist who views with equanimity any bird destruction, however serious, as long as he is left to damage in every way the activities of his two bugbears—the sportsman and the ornithological collector.

Had I space I would have liked to conclude with an account of the making of a true bird-sanctuary, where no illusions as to Nature's protecting ægis were allowed to influence a system which resulted in thirty-four species of birds nesting on less than five acres. It is doubtful if such a condition exists anywhere else on this continent; but I have already taken up more space than I care to, and will conclude with the heartfelt wish that

Government Sanctuaries be made into actual havens of refuge, and that the vast outside wilderness be considered sufficient refuge to prevent the extermination of predatory birds.

Yours faithfully,

ALLAN BROOKS.

Okanagan Landing, B.C.

January 25, 1924.

EDITOR OF *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*,
Ottawa, Canada.

Dear Sir:

In a recent issue of *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* I read with great interest an article by J. A. Munro on Vermin Control in Bird Sanctuaries and your reply to same. Although no one could be more averse to taking life than I am, yet I am bound to confess that I fail to see how a bird sanctuary can be operated successfully if Crows, Magpies, squirrels, etc., are to be allowed to prey on the birds for which our sanctuaries were primarily created. Since our Alberta Natural History Society—of which I am a member—acquired the right to operate a half-section of land as a Bird Sanctuary, I have seen how futile it is to hope for an increase of the birds we had in mind to protect especially—on account of the vermin already mentioned. Our notice boards inform the public that no shooting is allowed and such wise birds as the Crow and the Magpie are quick to learn where they are safe from molestation, more's the pity. Crows, of late years, have been nesting in a park which adjoins our lawn, and it is heartbreaking to see them coming into our gardens and taking young birds out of the nests to feed their broods. Even domestic chicks are taken, and this happens in town! Perhaps you can imagine what it must be like in the quiet of a Sanctuary. Twenty years ago the Magpie was rare here—to-day it is a menace, and it and the Crow constitute the deadliest enemies of our Ducks and other birds during the nesting period.

ELSIE CASSELS.

Red Deer, Alberta.

EDITOR OF *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*,
Ottawa, Canada.

Dear Sir:

The recent number of *The Naturalist* has just come to my hands, and I am pleased to see your well-expressed and liberal editorial on Bird Sanctuaries. Your point is well taken, for, after all, vermin, if native, are as much a part of the wild life and fully as interesting as many of the preferred life forms whose interest is enhanced by sentiment.

The experiment of passive protection, similar



Brooks, Allan. 1924. "Letter from Allan Brooks." *The Canadian field-naturalist* 38(2), 33–34. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.338343>.

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