

MAN THE EXTERMINATOR

ANIMALS THAT ARE EXTINCT OR ARE BECOMING SO.

The Birds and Beasts Slaughtered for Fashion's Sake—Effect of Man's Presence Upon Some Species—Causes of The Extinction of Some of Them.

Prof. Frederic A. Lucas, the assistant curator of the Department of Comparative Anatomy of the United States National Museum, has made a very interesting study of the animals of America and other countries which have become extinct within the last ten or twenty years, as well as those threatened with extinction in the near future.

"It is not perhaps generally realized," said Prof. Lucas, "how extensive and how rapid are the changes that are taking place in almost the entire fauna of the world through the agency of man. Of course, changes have perpetually taken place in the past through the operation of natural causes, and race after race of animals has disappeared from the globe, but there is this wide difference between the methods of nature and man: that the extermination of a species by nature is ordinarily slow and the place of one is taken by another, while the destruction wrought by man is rapid and the gaps he creates remain unfilled."

The cause of man's slaughter of animals is in general the desire for their various products, but there are other simple and destructive forces at work. For instance, the erection of telegraph wires, especially in sparsely wooded regions, has proved very destructive to birds, and a deadly, though restricted, source of danger is found in elevated electric lights against which birds dash themselves during their nocturnal migrations. The extinction of the sea cow and great auk, the almost complete extinction of the buffalo, and the seal, and the greatly reduced numbers of the walrus are attributable to the hand of man. Those species used for decoration, or having an economic value, suffer the most. The fashion in wearing apparel effects some and others are necessarily destroyed for the protection of man. Year by year halibut is growing scarcer and scarcer, the lobster canneries find difficulty in obtaining necessary supplies, and there is already a dearth of oysters in the once seemingly inexhaustible waters of Chesapeake Bay. The Fish Commission is doing a good work in keeping alive some of the species. The Atlantic salmon have been greatly reduced in numbers, and the same is true of shad in many localities. The shad and the cod are receiving the attention of the Fish Commission, and they will be kept in existence by artificial culture.

One reason for the growing scarcity of some species is found in the belief held by the great mass of people that because some species of animals exist in large numbers the supply is unlimited, and those most directly interested in the preservation of game are usually the most bitter opponents of any measures for their own protection. The lobster catchers and dealers object to laws prohibiting the capture and sale of lobsters under a certain size. The Potomac fishermen complain because they are not allowed to prevent shad and herring from ascending to the spawning ground. Nevertheless wherever laws have been put into force, the result has been within a comparatively short time so to increase the species that it has been of the greatest benefit pecuniarily and otherwise to those who protested in the first instance.

The dictates of fashion are the cause of the destruction of fur-bearing mammals for clothing and of birds for millinery purposes. In 1885 peccaries were so abundant in certain parts of Texas that their well-worn trails were to be seen everywhere. About this time hogskin goods being in favor, a price of 50 cents each was offered for peccary hides, with a result that five years afterward peccaries had become practically exterminated. This shows how short a time is required to cause the practical extermination of a species in a community. A yearly record of the sales of some London firms would indicate clearly the whims of fashion. Some of the present tendencies are shown by the fact that 30,000 monkey skins and 250,000 Australian opossums were disposed of at a single sale. Among the items at one sale of birds were 6,000 birds of paradise, 5,000 Impayan pheasants, 360,000 skins from India, and 400,000 humming birds. The number of birds disposed of on this one occasion exceeded that contained in all the collections, public and private, of the United States. The fashionable sealskin cloaks demand a yearly slaughter of about 185,000 fur seals. To supply the world with ivory for a year necessitates the death of 100,000 elephants. If these were placed in single file they would make a procession over 180 miles long. Henry M. Stanley makes a still more extraordinary statement. He said that the death of an elephant was but a portion of the price paid for ivory, every pound of which had cost the life of a man, woman, or child, while every twenty tusks had been obtained at the price of the destruction of a district, with all its people, villages, and plantations.

The extermination of the buffalo over large areas of country was in the beginning partly a matter of necessity in order that the land might be rendered available or stock raising. The wolf and coyote

were poisoned for the preservation of sheep. Following this necessary destruction there comes the unnecessary but unavoidable loss caused by the domestic animals which are brought by the newcomers, such as the more or less complete extermination in certain parts of the country of rattlesnakes that followed the introduction of hogs. While the extermination of rattlesnakes is a consummation greatly to be desired, it is none the less a case in point. Among some of the larger game whose extinction is threatened by the rifle of the sportsman is the true zebra, now confined to a small area in South Africa. The giraffe is rapidly disappearing from the same cause. The same may be said of almost every variety of the large game of North America. The only parrot of the United States, the Carolina parakeet, will probably be exterminated in Florida, and the Eastern pinnated grouse is restricted to the island of Nantucket, although long ago laws were framed for the protection of the "Heathen," as the compositor caused the bill to read.

In Western Kansas jack rabbits are on the increase, owing to the fact that the bounty on coyotes is \$2, while the price of a rabbit scalp is only 5 cents, a difference that has resulted in the rapid decrease of the rabbit's natural enemy, the coyote. Western Kansas, too, affords another excellent illustration of the direct influence of population upon the increase or decrease of the larger animals. Up to 1884 that region was very sparsely settled. Antelope were comparatively abundant and mule deer were frequently seen. During 1885 and 1886, under the impression that western Kansas was suitable for farming purposes, there came a tide of immigration from the East, and before the wave of increasing population the mule deer disappeared entirely and the antelope became extremely rare. The country, so far as farming was concerned, having been tried and found wanting, an ebb tide of immigration took place, and as the farms were abandoned by man their former occupants again took possession, and by 1888 and 1890 antelopes became not uncommon, while the mule deer appeared in localities where none had been seen for years.

Here is a list compiled by Prof. Lucas of some of the animals which have recently become extinct or the extirpation of which seems imminent, with descriptions of them and the mode of their extinction, based on papers and specimens among the collection of the National Museum.

The West Indian seal, the range of which was from the Bahamas to the Gulf of Campeche, is supposed to be very near extinction. This seal was discovered in August, 1494, when the flotilla of Columbus was cruising among the West India islands. The sailors then called them sea wolves. Few of these animals have recently been seen by naturalists, and it is difficult to tell just how few there are left. Whether it has been doomed to destruction or not is a little uncertain, but no specimens have recently been seen. As far as food, climate, and suitable breeding places are concerned, everything is favorable to its existence, and it may in time fill up its now decimated ranks. The Professor says however that, on the other hand, when a species has been reduced below a certain point it seems, like a stone rolling down hill, to pursue its downward course with continually accelerated speed until the bottom is reached and the species exists no more.

The California sea elephants, the largest of the seals, having a length of from twenty to twenty-two feet, are now very scarce, considering the former abundance of these animals on the Californian coast, and from the fact that very little is ever seen of them it is considered by naturalists that they are in a fair way to extermination. By 1860 sea elephants had become so scarce that their pursuit was no longer profitable, and from that time up to 1880 so few stragglers were seen about the southern coast of California that the animal was currently regarded as extinct. In 1884 a schooner visited the southern coast of California in the interests of the United States National Museum and found none. It is therefore quite possible that the end of the California sea elephant has come. It is much to be deplored that these animals should have been exterminated, when they could so easily have been preserved by sparing each year the young and a few adults.

The walrus is well known, but the walrus of the Atlantic and Pacific differ in many respects. As the whale decreased in numbers the whaling men directed their attention more and more to the walrus, and between 1870 and 1880 there were brought to the market nearly 2,000,000 gallons of oil and nearly 400 pounds of walrus ivory. These amounts represent the destruction of about 190,000 animals. Although it is far inferior to elephant ivory, the demand for walrus tusks is nevertheless great; and while the price by the pound was in 1879 only 40 or 45 cents, it was in 1880 from \$1 to \$1.25, and in 1883 from \$4 to \$4.50. The walrus being a stupid animal under

favorable conditions it is slaughtered in much the same manner as the buffalo was killed by the skin hunters. The Pacific walrus is a greater danger of extinction than the Atlantic walrus, owing to the fact that the range of the species is restricted, while its haunts are regularly restored to by the North Pacific whaling fleet.

The Arctic sea cow, or rhyina, is extinct. This animal was nearly related to the existing manatee and dugong. Dr. Stejneger has succeeded in mounting a skeleton of the sea cow in the National Museum.

The California vulture disputes with the condor the claim of being the largest of the New World vultures, for, while the condor is more strongly built, the California vulture has a greater spread of wing, large specimens having a wing spread of ten feet. Four of these birds have been known to drag the carcass of a young bear, weighing 100 pounds, for a distance of 200 yards. Its threatened extermination is due indirectly to the agency of man, for its suspicious nature has always rendered it difficult to capture and the breeding places are in out of the way and often inaccessible localities. At about the Mexican miners of Lower California are said to kill the bird that they may use the quills as receptacles for gold dust, this is not the main cause of their reduction in numbers. The use of strychnine in ridding the cattle ranches of wolves and coyotes has, more than anything else, caused the disappearance of this bird, which has been poisoned by feeding on the carcasses prepared for the four-footed scavengers.

The Labrador duck is one of the many sea ducks which during their southern migrations furnish considerable sport to gunners along the coasts. These ducks range southward in winter to the coasts of New Jersey and Chesapeake Bay. The Labrador duck seems never to have been very common, and many of them died during the winter of 1876 and 1877, and although their numbers have since increased they have never attained their former abundance.

The great auk, the largest member of the auk family, distinguished not only by its size, but also by being the only bird in the northern hemisphere incapable of flying, was confined to the North Atlantic, ranging from Greenland to Virginia. It has been completely exterminated, and its more rapid extinction seems to have been due to the fact that it was very gregarious in its habits and had only a few large breeding places. Had the bird bred in small colonies at localities scattered along its territory, the scientists think that it would have been in existence today. Just when the great auk ceased to exist in America is unknown, for there were few naturalists on this side the water when it was being done to death. Few birds have received more attention than has the great auk since it became extinct, and it has been the subject of many papers, both popular and scientific, while it remains in the museums of the world. Its remains bring extravagant prices whenever chance brings them to the market. The last skeleton brought \$600, the last skin \$650, and an egg brought \$1,250 and was then resold for \$1,500.

Every one knows of the frightfully rapid extinction of the American bison or buffalo in this country. This, according to American scientists, is the saddest of all cases of the extinction of species. The wild buffalo is practically gone forever, and in a few more years, as Prof. Hornaday, the superintendent of the National Zoological Park, has said, "when the whitened bones of the last bleaching skeleton shall have been picked up and shipped east for commercial uses, nothing will remain of him save his old well-worn trails along the water courses a few museum specimens, and regret for his fate."

The area once inhabited by the American bison extended almost from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast. The animals were gradually shot off in the eastern and middle sections of the United States, Canada and Mexico, and in 1870 they were divided in two herds, which range through parts of Kansas, Colorado, Texas, and New Mexico, Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, and the north of Idaho. In 1880 the herds were still further diminished; they occupied only parts of Wyoming, Montana, Dakota, and Colorado, together with a small breeding ground to the north in Canada. The greatest slaughters were in 1870 and 1873, and from 1880 to 1883, at which time the herd was reduced to a small number in the Yellowstone Park, another small herd in Montana, and a third small herd to the north in the Dominion of Canada.—N. Y. Sun.

Uses for Dead Show Beasts.

When an animal dies in a menagerie it is not likely to be a total loss. The skin is usually of some value, and in the case of some animals as, for instance, the lion or the tiger, it may be of considerable value. The value of any skin depends largely upon its condition, and its condition may determine whether the skin should be mounted as a rug or as a showpiece. The manner of mounting a skin might also be influenced in some measure by the state of the market at the moment. There might be a greater demand for rugs of the skin of some animals, or a greater demand for such animals mounted as showpieces. The menagerie owner sends the skin to the taxidermist and has it mounted, perhaps as a rug for his own use, or as an animal to be added to the menagerie museum, or to be sold as a rug or as a furrier's showpiece. In any event when an animal dies there is likely to be more or less salvage.

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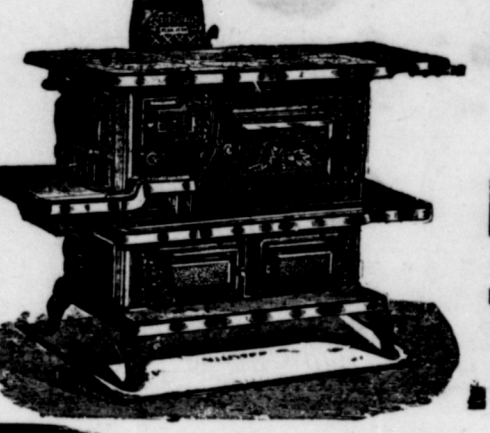
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