

THE INTRODUCTION OF WILD LIFE INTO SOUTHERN ILLINOIS

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ABSTRACT

Wild life in Illinois as our fathers and grandfathers knew it has almost vanished. Passenger pigeons, prairie chickens, wild turkeys, deer, buffalo, and the countless nests of song birds that one found in every hedge and apple tree are gone or remain only as remnants. Wild life in Illinois is a shadow compared with conditions fifty years ago and a tradition as compared with 1841. Comparatively recent attempts have been made to replenish this waste of our natural resources.

Two government agencies have undertaken replacements of the losses in Southern Illinois, beginning with State action many years ago. Illinois distributed 51,000,000 fish in 1939, 46,000 quail and 57,000 pheasants. The State Department of Conservation, according to its 1940 report, has produced 108,082,125 game fish of seven species distributed from 1935 to 1939 in bodies of water numbering up to 1107 in 1939.

Twenty-five years ago, prairie chickens were frequently seen from the railroad trains in passing through Hamilton County which is in the third tier of counties north. I have been over that county frequently in the past ten years and I have noted but a half dozen pheasants and one prairie chicken.

The Illinois Division of Conservation had \$483,493 on deposit in its Game and Fish Fund December 31, 1939. I cannot agree with the statement in its 1940 report that, "This fund belongs to the sportsmen of Illinois," although the total sale of licenses for the biennium 1937-1938 amounted to \$1,451,497. The sale of 751,381 such licenses in 1939 does not necessarily mean that wild life is increasing as the report seems to imply. The report says, "This artificial production of wild life by the department materially aids natural propagation and insures more game for those who enjoy the sport of hunting." This is true. Without ar-

tificial production the game might be reduced to extinction if the present rate of slaughter were continued. It is apparent that wild life in Southern Illinois grows less in spite of artificial production. In our efforts to increase game resources are we not thwarted by our eagerness to obtain more revenue by destroying it?

The Shawnee Federal Forestry Unit has introduced into its territory twenty deer about seven of which are thought to survive, twenty beavers which have increased to about seventy, and seventy turkeys about thirty-five of which are thought to be alive and wild. More than 30,000 fish have been planted in the area of 185,000 acres which were controlled by the Unit in 1940.

The following estimates of wild life populations in the Unit as recorded by their numerous official observers give some idea of the struggle which goes on. The figures are estimated populations: Of Quail, 87,900, 6,300 hunters, 1,600 killed; Pheasants, 48, 12 hunters, 2 killed; Woodcock 5, 4 hunters, 0 killed; Mourning Dove 41,000, 8,000 hunters, 2,200 killed; Mink 620, trappers 125, killed 235; Otter 20, trappers 80, killed 5; Muskrat 3,800, trappers 210, killed 1,000; Skunk 8,700; trappers 430, killed 2,200; Raccoon 3,100; hunters 970, killed 500; O'possum 9,600, hunters 2,400 killed 3,100; Red Fox 1,500, hunters 500, killed 270; Gray Fox 6,270, hunters 1,100, killed 700; and ten Wolves and Coyotes were counted in the Jonesboro unit.

It is estimated that there is a permanent waterfowl population of 30 mallards, 30 blue winged teal, 15 green winged teal, 840 wood duck, 80 coots, 50 black duck, 90 lesser scaup, 35 pin tails, 10 canvasback ducks, 15 geese. It is also estimated that 380 mallards, 90 blue winged teal, 15 green winged teal, and 20 coots were killed in the area. The Federal Forestry Unit has no control over the game in its territory.

In addition to planting many thousands of trees in the Shawnee Unit the most important game conserving practice has been the construction of many small lakes, feeding grounds, and shelters to supply food and shelter for the game that already exists. They number 233 and are located as follows: 24% in open fields, 8% in brush, 31% in cultivated areas and 37% in timber. Their average size is less than one fourth acre. Two larger areas of 82 and 33 acres each and three of three each have been constructed. Gravel, moss, etc. have been used in 33 places to improve conditions for aquatic life over an area of 68 acres. Cypress, dogwood, plum, red cedar, and similar growths have been used in five to ten acre shelter patches. Lespedeza, rye, broom grass, etc. have been sown over 400 acres about the ponds and erosion areas. Aquatic plantings such as wild rice, cat tails, smart weed, and sweet flag have been made.

Much of the efforts of state and federal authorities will come to naught if drastic steps are not taken to stop the killing of wild life. Larger areas should be set aside where no hunting or trapping would be permitted. The open season for more kinds of game should be closed for a term of years and then under severe restrictions. Since rabbit fever became a menace to hunters, the number of rabbits has increased perceptibly. It is estimated that there are 238 rabbits per square mile in the Shawnee Unit. It is

true that diseases of domestic turkeys may have attacked the wild ones and that severe winters and drought have resulted in the death of many quails; but the greatest menace to wild life increase has been hunters both legitimate and otherwise.

Releasing game in areas where there is lack of protection and where it will mean that the total number grows less each year, is only postponing the time of their practical extermination. Limited reservations which attract large numbers of waterfowl should be surrounded by large areas of cultivated or forest land which could not be especially attractive to water fowl but would give them protection in coming or leaving the water refuges.

A water refuge which is so hemmed in that it can be surrounded by a multitude of hunters in rented shelters every day of the open season appears to be more of a trap than a conservation project.

With due respect to the good efforts of authorities and the many really faithful game wardens, it should be urged that game wardens be selected and continued in office upon their merit only, that they should be assigned to territory where their political friends are absent. Poachers and those who hunt out of season under any pretext should feel safer when the game warden is absent than when he is present.