

THE "EVILS" OF BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY.

I was amused to read a statement by a well-known ornithologist in which he claimed that bird photographers caused the deaths of many birds by keeping the parents away from the nest. Evidently that gentleman spoke without knowledge or else his experience of bird photographers has been unfortunate. Perhaps, however, it may be as well to give some idea of the actual methods adopted to safeguard the subjects.

Wood Swallows are seldom trustful and the Masked species is perhaps the least tractable. So that the photograph reproduced and two others of the same bird were the sole result of eight hours' work. But during those eight hours the camera and tripod were removed or shifted further from the nest a dozen times in order that the bird should not be kept from the eggs for lengthy periods.

Young birds are considered in the same way. In very hot weather when the direct sunlight necessary for photography is likely to harm the nestlings I invariably provide shelter in the form of a bunch of leaves attached to the end of a springy stick. The shelter is drawn away by means of a second cord only when the adult bird approaches the nest and is allowed to swing back again should the parent retire.—
R. T. LITTLEJOHNS, Melbourne.

Bird Protection.

THE QUESTION OF BIRDS BECOMING RARE AND THEIR PROTECTION.

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THE question of birds becoming rare, even to extinction, is, I am aware, a well debated point. In the newer countries it appears deplorable, at least at first sight, that so many should go out of existence. Of course, man and his domesticated animals are in most cases blamed off hand. The question is, are we justified in such hasty conclusions?

The Falkland Islands, in which I have resided for more than twelve years, offer, I think, some light on the subject. Although the avifauna of this comparatively small group is not, outside its oceanic species, connected with Australian birds, yet it is a new country with a sparse population (three sq. miles per capita).

We have no authentic information as to the bird population prior to the arrival of man as a resident. Certain it is that there was a fox on the two main islands which existed on birds. This fox, being stupidly tame, soon went out. The horse, cow and pig were introduced at an early date and went wild. These must have greatly altered the conditions. The greatest alteration probably followed the introduction of sheep, these being closer feeders.

The unbalancing of any form of nature must in itself adversely affect many species, not birds alone. The introduction of animals would so alter conditions, both of food and shelter, that some would die out or become reduced in numbers in their struggle against the new arrival. Those unfitted to compete must go, while those to which the new conditions are a benefit, or which can adapt themselves with benefit to the change, continue to live, and in some cases increase, as a result. I am certain that no form of protection by legislation could in any way either assist or prevent such vital and natural laws operating.

If we carry this law just a step onward, and proceed from grazing to agriculture, the destruction is probably worse. Drain a marsh, and the inhabitants go. Drain all the marshes in a large area, in England for instance, and they have gone. Carry this over the whole range of any bird and it becomes extinct. Destroy by any means vital conditions necessary to any bird's existence, *e.g.*, food or shelter, and it must migrate to suitable spots or go under. Conversely, other species will benefit, but we never hear of this unless the favoured individual becomes a pest.

Here, we have a Ground Starling (*Trupialis falklandica*) whose principal food appears (so far as we know) to be the grubs of beetles. With the arrival of man came potatoes, which meant digging to plant them. The dug ground proved to be a beneficial spot to beetle larvae and potatoes appear to be acceptable food to them. Undoubtedly, the Starling in searching for the grubs that commonly burrow in potatoes also found that potato was good eating. The result of this is to-day that potatoes are, in many parts of the islands, severely destroyed by these birds. Being an insular species it is protected. The point is that, so far, man and his potato gardens have been a benefit to this bird.

The destruction of the fox must have given a great impetus to bird-life, notably geese and plovers, for it was observed by Darwin that the smaller, fox-free, out-lying islands were their breeding places in 1833. This holds good to-day in a general sense.

The introduction of sheep, though destructive to some, probably helped other forms of bird-life. Geese undoubtedly benefited greatly from the shortened grass, for they have long been considered and treated as a pest.

There are no trees in the Falklands, consequently we have few small birds.

A Sparrow (*Phrygilis*) almost vanished on badly overstocked land near the town of Stanley. It is a seed eater. A Seed-snip (*Attagis*), a seed eater, is rare if not gone from the group, but was not uncommon.

The experiment has conclusively proved that sheep and tussock-grass (*Poa flabellata*) cannot exist together; the tussock dies.

Now, tussock-grass is a massive thing, growing profusely adjacent to the sea shore, on points and generally within sea spray. The blades are some six feet long and grow in large raised tufts; progress through it is difficult. This grass is the home and food of at least

three species of birds, a *Cinclodes* and two Wrens. On the main islands (all given over to sheep) this fine grass has gone, and with it its bird population, leaving large areas barren. We shall never know what birds lived in it.

I could extend this, but I think I have shown sufficient to make my point, and that point is that though we may deplore species becoming rare and going out, man is not usually capable of preventing the extinction, for the progress to that end is usually complete before the threat is noticed.

I have said above that this is a sparsely peopled country, yet we have a number of species protected. Beyond those which are game birds (ducks and snipe) I have yet to find the reasons. On this list of birds protected, either partly or wholly, there is not a single bird fit to eat, none rare, or even threatened. Under ordinary circumstances no one would waste a 3d. cartridge on any of them. But protect them by law, and you advertise the fact, "Don't touch," and like children everyone wants to, and does.

Next, the collector who hears something has become rare must have it. If he has sufficient money he gets it. Legislation may hamper, but it will never prevent this or any other form of smuggling. This fact is seldom looked in the face. You have advertised by law that something is rare, and as at a draper's summer sale, there is a rush for it.

I feel confident that many species of birds become extinct from causes that have never been suspected, yet they go, as a result of the natural law of evolution. Others, even if not observed, in most cases fill the void. Apart from the plume hunter and the species he preys on, I think that the greatest bird destruction is as follows:—

New Country.

Graze : Some slight effect on ground feeders.

Drain : Waders and aquatic forms go.

Burn forest : Destructive to most species.

Till the land : Very destructive to most ; a benefit to some.

Intensive cultivation : Only benefited species remain, mostly Passerines and Raptors that prey on them.

KERGUELEN TO BE DECLARED A SANCTUARY.

Seven years ago Dr. A. Menegaux contributed to the *Revue Francaise d'Ornithologie* an article on the possibility of using the Kerguelen Islands as a national park for the preservation of animal life in the Antarctic. In this article he urged the French Government to take action in Kerguelen similar to that which had recently been taken by the Tasmanian Government with regard to Macquarie Island, when it refused to renew a licence for the capture of penguins. (See *Emu*, XVIII., p. 64.)

The Paris correspondent of the *London Times* now reports that "the French Government has decided to make this sanctuary a reality by creating a preserve for the wild animals of the Southern Seas on