

knows very little about the genesis or effect of bird protection laws in Australia generally. Similarly, it is doubtful whether one should waste time discussing the bland contention that the killing of birds is as justifiable as the killing of mice and mosquitoes. If Mr. Ashby really believes this, he provides a startling example of the state of mind that may be brought about by intensive collecting.

Let us, then, while giving seemingly thanks for the laws that limit the killing of birds, advise Mr. Ashby's enterprising "young fellows," if they are still determined on cultivating "endurance" through skinning, to turn their attention to mice and mosquitoes!—EDITOR.]

Some Aspects of Bird Protection.

By JAMES POLLARD, R.A.O.U., Perth.

IT is said that birds are the first and last favourites of man. The simple peasant and the advanced bird-student alike can appreciate the charm of the singing of a small, obscure form in the bush. But not all birds are favourites, and there are many opinions as to which birds need to be regarded as such. There is no general understanding of the value of birds. And so long as this exists there can be no true protection.

Bird-study should have as one of its principal aims the maintenance of a proper balance of bird life, and this cannot be achieved until we have that general understanding of its value in relation to human life and development. How can it be achieved? One man says: Kill that Eagle, for it killed my lamb; another says: Let the Eagle live, for it kills many more rabbits than lambs. And so with other birds which are both useful and destructive. Admittedly, the best course to pursue with these is to destroy when they become a menace, and to let live when the harm they do is inconsiderable compared with the good they do. Legislation should be along these lines. The laws of the land are as educative to the grown man as the curriculum of the State school to the boy—perhaps more so, for the mature mind is more retentive and laws thus make more lasting impressions than the rules of the school.

Mr. Ashby in his address advocated teaching boys collecting so as to prevent the random and wanton destruction of wild life, for which we grown-ups are always condemning them. But if this idea were adopted in all schools, I am afraid it would be of more danger than service. Such teaching would inevitably result in training many boys to go on collecting throughout their lives, and thus make for too many collectors. It would be a far better thing if the youth were taught how to appreciate, how to value, and how to respect bird life—and not how and when and where to collect.

But before we can hope to impress the young idea in this direction we have first to put our own house in order. The general public is more impressed by the trade in birds and eggs than it is by what students and scientists are doing in the direction of educative bird-study. The ordinary man recognizes the usefulness of this education, though he may not want it for himself, and he is generally resentful when he hears that this bird or that is being trapped in thousands. He is, I fancy, at a loss to understand why, for instance, a government goes to the extent of preserving Mutton-Bird rookeries from sand-blows while the young birds and the eggs are permitted to be taken for trade in incredible numbers each year.

You know the tragedy of the Egrets and the Birds-of-Paradise, of the Grass-Parrots and the Superb and the Night-Parrots. All these are approaching extinction mainly because man has trapped them to gratify the desires of an uneducated people.* I say "uneducated people" because I believe that were many of those who have worn plumes, or caged birds for pets, aware of the slaughter they indirectly caused, there would soon be more limited markets for birds and plumes. Happily the trend of natural history education to-day, both through the Press which reaches the public and in the schools where the juvenile mind is touched, is in the direction of what I term, for want of a better phrase, "understanding of natural balance in life," and we should encourage this wholeheartedly.

This aims at putting our house in order. So long as the youngster notes the grown man amassing eggs or birds in either a large and careless way, or in a limited and systematic manner, he has some moral right to challenge any suggestion from the man that he should not kill and collect as he pleases. Ornithologists who have as one of their front-rank objectives the preservation of bird life are not excused by the youth. Most of us have eggs or birds, skins or plumes, or even bills and claws. Is it necessary that even we should collect? True, we are not wanton destroyers; but the more collectors we have, the more waste occurs.

I have dealt so far with local phases. I might add that destruction is going on in almost all countries, not only among birds, but also among mammals and fishes. The beaver and the musquash and other fur-bearing animals are persecuted year by year with increasing ardour. Even the elephant, one of the most noble of animals, is massacred at times. The pollution of rivers and coastal seas destroys fish in inestimable numbers. Turning again to birds, and to our own birds, we know that the Finches of the north are trapped in thousands

* The Night-Parrot has certainly not been decimated by trapping.—EDITOR.

annually, and that many of them die during export overseas. Waste again. I believe that the Finches have become so rare in the north-east as a result of this trade that the Queensland Government have prohibited the trapping and export of these birds. It devolves upon us to do all we can, in combination with kindred associations, to prevent such terrible wastage of life. I know that we have game laws and "protected lists," but it is patent that these fail of their purpose when each year sees many and various species of birds steadily diminishing.

I would turn now to another phase of bird-destruction which some will no doubt think is antagonistic to present ornithological methods. Now and again it happens that a bird becomes so rare that some collectors, acting on an allegedly scientific basis, regard it as imperative to exterminate the species—to capture it so that we may possess it for all time in some museum or other collection. To me it is a sad thing that the rarer an animal becomes, the more keenly man hunts it. Your advanced collector is never so thrilled by the acquisition of a specimen as when it is one extremely rare. He says that the educational value of possession excuses him its destruction. So much, then, for the value of one of Nature's, and man's, dearest treasures! Once I read in a book: "A bird in the hand is a pathetic thing—either a limp and drooping bundle of feathers with a loose neck and a glazed eye; or else a quivering handful of fear, so fluttering and poignant that no sensitive hands can continue to be its prison walls. But a bird in the bush! It is a very battery of life in little compass; and in its own haunts, skilfully masked from the marauder, there may be lyrics and a love-match, and the breath-catching beauty of five blue shells in that cupola of twigs!"

Dr. Leach has written in his *Bird Book*: "Collectors as well as plume-hunters should be compelled to keep hands off our exquisite birds." That is something worth remembering; and if the bird sought is so rare that in a little time it will in all probability be extinct, then I think that competition for the possession of it should end. That is the essence of bird-protection.
