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HELPFUL AND HARMFUL IOWA BIRDS.

BY FRED BERNINGHAUSEN.

Forty million dollars is the estimated loss annually to the United States on account of weeds, according to Prof. Beal, member of the Department of Agriculture. That a generous share of this loss belongs to Iowa we must all admit, for Iowa is a great agricultural state. Since such is the case it would not seem at all strange if Iowa people should take steps to make this loss as small as possible.

Further than this estimated loss, Iowa has to put up with a loss in crops through insects and their work.

That the loss to the United States and to Iowa through these two causes is as small as it is, is due in a large measure to the presence of helpful bird friends. For the better protection of these feathered friends of the farmer and of all the people in fact, we would solicit your support. Before proceeding further let us look into the details a little more. Here is what Prof. Judd of the Biological Survey has to say. "No less than fifty different birds act as weed destroyers, and the noxious plants which they help to eradicate number more than three score species. Among these are pigweed, knot-weed, thistle and chickweed." Prof. Beal goes on to say that "It is estimated that the tree sparrows of Iowa alone will destroy during the year 875 tons of weed seeds." Wild canaries, and the mourning doves follow in rank as named. Still another government authority, W. L. McAtee, gives the robin a high ranking, especially as an insect destroyer. According to naturalists every bird of the owl family excepting the great horned owl is a helpful bird. Some few people hold that all owls are helpful, others say all are harmful, but such seems not to be the case, at any rate we can see easily enough by the foregoing that "Birds" means money to Iowa.

Knowing then that our financial welfare is to an appreciable extent dependent upon the activities of our bird friends the most natural and expected thing for us to do is to set about means to assist them. In so far as Iowa has game laws and statutes to prevent the slaughter of her native birds, a step has been taken in the right direction, but is this enough? Provision has been made to control the hunter with the gun

and dog, but no step has been made to check the destructive work of the feathered foes of our helpful birds. Iowa laws allow these birds to be killed by any random hunter, but no attempt has been made to exterminate them. A small bounty would work wonders in this situation and our helpful birds would soon be rid of their harmful feathered foes.

The two birds most dangerous to the welfare of our seed and insect eaters are the great horned owl and the crow. Other birds frowned on and much despised by naturalists seem to be the English sparrow and the blue jay.

Concerning the great horned owl let me quote from N. Blenchan in "Birds that hunt and are hunted."

"The horned owl should be exterminated for it does much harm. Chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys and pigeons on the farm will be decapitated if too large to eat entire, for the brains of the victims are the choice bits that this executioner delights in. Coops and dove cots are boldly entered, entire coveys of Bob Whites destroyed, grouse, wood-cock, water fowl and snipe know no more relentless enemy. Song birds do not escape this stealthy murderer that picks them from the perch as they sleep, and all the rats, mice, squirrels, rabbits and other mammals eaten can not off-set the valuable birds destroyed."

Here then is one bird that is hindering the good work of our helpful birds and we owe it to ourselves to become active at once.

Of all the thieves among our birds I believe the crow holds first rank. Did he do no more than to steal the seed corn the farmer has just planted, we might forgive him, for he is a wise bird, in fact much more so than the owl. But when added to this evil he persists in the habit of carrying eggs from hen's nests and later on even grabbing young chickens, his smartness becomes a nuisance. But even this is not the whole of his work, and I imagine most men have known him to do much more. If he takes hen eggs and very young chicks it stands to reason that bird eggs and young birds are also his legitimate prey, and such is the case, many times have I seen three or four little birds pursuing or driving off this destroyer. Granted that the crow eats some seeds, or some insects and feeds on carrion, he is an enemy of our helpful birds and should meet the same end as the great horned owl. Blue jays are a pest to our good birds for much the same reason as the crow.

One argument set forth as to why the English sparrow should be exterminated is that they are crowding out our native birds. Since such is the case some step towards wiping them out is needed.

One other bird enemy needs special attention and that is the hawk. So many hawks are of value to the farmer because of the mice, rats, and insects that they destroy making it a problem as to just which ones should be exterminated. According to N. Blanchan, and above named authority, four hawks at least deserve to be wiped out. These are the large and the small Coopers Hawk and the Goshawk, and for the protection of our friendly birds especially, the small sparrow hawk should not be spared.

This is but a brief and incomplete survey of the field as to the birds of value and those of harm. Some authorities state that the yellow-bellied woodpecker and the sap-suckers should be exterminated also.

But of greatest important to us just now is the further and immediate protection of our helpful birds. Iowa laws are good, but not good enough. Iowa laws in respect to birds, both harmful and helpful, are merely passive. What we need are laws that result in action, and not until such are obtained will our bird friends be amply protected. The great horned owl, the crow, some of the hawks, the blue jay and the English sparrow and the yellow-bellied woodpecker and the sap-sucker are placed on the black list, hence should be exterminated.

Material for this paper has been taken from:

1. "Birds that Hunt and are Hunted," by N. Blanchan.
2. "Bird Enemies of the Codling Moth," in U. S. Agriculture Department, Yr. Bk. 1911, p. 237-44.
3. "Craftman" 23, Nov., 1912, pp. 233-6, extracts from, W. L. McAtte, Prof. Judd and Prof. Beal.
4. "Woodpeckers," Harpers Weekly 56:23, Feb. 18, 1912.

No. 4 is good, but gives nothing on the harm done to any other birds by the woodpecker.

GOOD AND BAD WOODPECKERS.

Harpers Weekly.

Sap-suckers never pay for their keep. These birds peck holes in trees, but instead of withdrawing the destructive insects that may be lurking under the bark they feed upon the pieces and the soft parts of trees. In getting their food they often destroy so much of the growing layer that the death of large limbs or even that of whole trees may result. There is no record in this country of any woodpecker killing a tree by drilling except of these two species of sap-suckers, one the "yellow-

bellied" and the other the "red-breasted." In many cases where the tree is not killed outright by the action of the sap-suckers the wood is stained and distorted to such an extent as to reduce considerably its value for ornamental and even structural purposes. From this source alone there is a yearly loss to this country of more than a million and one-fourth of dollars. How many birds could nest in this timber? There is practically nothing in the activities of these birds to compensate us for the harm they cause. An examination of the tongue of such birds discloses the fact that they are incapable of drawing insects out from under the bark like other woodpeckers, since they have not the appropriate barbs at the tip of the tongue. On the other hand they have a peculiar swab-like arrangement that makes sap-sucking a very simple operation.

These birds it seems all have yellow bellies, whereas very few other woodpeckers have. All sap-suckers have a white patch on the upper part of the wing, as seen from the sides. Other woodpeckers having white patches on the middle or lower portion of the wing. Also it is a destroyer of the bluebird's eggs.