

h. Indelicat

On paper by W. Edwards
Bapt. - Feb. 1880/81.

Mr. Chairman & Gentlemen

I think this valuable paper of Mr. Edwards the Scottish naturalist ought ^{to be} widely known & read by every body. I must say I read it with much profit & pleasure. Although happily we don't ^{know} much about bird catching here, and some of the evils Mr. Edwards complains of. Still I have seen a little which makes me anxious to support Mr. Edwards view to a great extent. Gentlemen I am very glad to have an opportunity to say a word or two on the subject. The most important in my opinion is where he insists upon protection for birds nests. This in my opinion is the first and most important clause that should be in the wild birds protection act. Without this it is nothing. I am not like Mr. Thrs. do I want to interfere with people who may be anxious to procure as many specimens as they can for scientific purposes, but I would like to draw your attention to this matter which is, that they should be careful who they encourage & employ to get their specimens for them. Boys should never be employed for any such purpose. This only requires a commencement. They very soon come to think that there is no harm in robbing any nest. I have known some

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eggs to be left here by boys prowling about collecting eggs. Now I think Mr. Stenning our Secretary and schoolmaster ought to lecture his boys well against bird robbing, not that I want to interfere with his duties in any way but just throw out the remark in passing. Although I should not like to go quite so far as Mr. Edwards as to include all birds in the protection act.

My opinion is that all birds that suck eggs should be destroyed or kept down as much as possible. This would include the following egg suckers and fish destroyers.

Raven. Grey Crow, Hooded Crow, Magpie. Jay. Black back Gull. Lesser Black back Gull. Herring Gull. Large Murrelets. Gull. the Cormorant & the Merganser. I think all the other gulls are harmless and ought to be protected. This brings me now to the Hawk tribe. I have no doubt several of them do more good than harm. the Noddy and the Owl I believe do good & probably some others I will put down such ones as I think are savages & destructive viz. The Prairie Falcon. Merlin. Sparrow Hawk. Red Winged Blackbird. Buzzard. Kite & Osprey. I don't think the Eagle does much harm unless he makes

a Lamb nor other but they are so scarce now that I think this happens but seldom. I would have had the Pheasant protected, but he is such a savage although a noble bird. I once came upon a Sparrow Hawk preparing to make a dinner of a Thrush. I came so near him that he made off and left the Thrush who got up and flew away with half of his feathers plucked off - I have no doubt they take their feathers stem off before they are dead, which I compare to skinning alive. A really cruel work.

I am sure I have left out a great deal I intended saying owing to writing this in a hurry. I did not expect the Club would have met until this day week. So ^{must} excuse me if I have said some foolish things. It is quite true what Mr. Edwards says, every thing ~~seems~~ has been sent here for some wise purpose and the wisest of men are often ~~are often~~ ^{very} wrong. One instance I will mention that happened last June with my self. On one of our fields or dunes by the wood pigeon were feeding in it in hundreds. I killed about 30 of them to see what they were feeding upon. I opened the crop of every one of them and found that they contained nothing but mustard seed

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In this case they were doing a great deal of good. and I have no doubt a great many other cases would have similar results if they were closely examined.

Sutherland Field Club

Protection of
Wild Birds

G. R. Lawson

4th Jan'y 1881

Protection of Wild Birds

Mr President & Gentlemen

As requested by you at our last meeting I have carefully gone over the paper upon the "Protection of Wild Birds" laid before the Bauff Field Club by Mr Thomas Edward. It was not until I had done so and ascertained his views that it dawned upon me that I, a mere beginner in the study of ornithology had undertaken to criticise the opinions of such a veteran observer as Mr Edward; and not only to criticise but I fear to combat some of the arguments used by him. You may believe, that looking at it in this ^{light} ~~way~~, it is with considerable diffidence that I approach my task.

Taking the case of the song birds first, — I think Mr Edward has taken much too narrow a view of the causes of their decrease and it appears to me that even with the help of legislation it is improbable that their numbers will again increase very much. It must be granted, that to have

many wild creatures of any species in a country. ~~from~~ there must be in that country localities suited in every way to their habits and requirements. Let me illustrate this rule by an example. Not very long ago large tracts of land in Britain which are now fertile farms, were lying in a state of neglect and in many places formed vast swamps and marshes. Land however became more valuable, & those marshes were drained, generally by means of large open ditches, and as they dried up, the birds whose haunts they were gradually disappeared until at least two of them, the bittern and the water rail, are nearly extinct in the British Isles. I will now apply this rule to the song birds. They were not much affected by that first step of improvement although their day of persecution was close at hand. A new generation of farmers arose, who, objecting to ragged open ditches, laid down drain pipes, - filled up the ditches whose banks by this time were hot-beds of weeds - trimmed their hedge-rows, - plucked the weeds from their corn fields and thus by degrees destroyed many

of the favourite nesting places of the small birds and materially reduced their supply of food. In many other ways the face of our country has been changed and is still changing, and as our summer visitants find their old haunts broken up, they decline to remain with us as formerly and pass on - seeking for more hospitable districts.

I question, however, if there is any danger ^{of any} of them becoming extinct for we have now, throughout the country so many game preserves inside the walls of which the birdcatcher and birdnesting school boy dare not venture, and in which the birds find the quietness & retirement they are so fond of, - that they may almost be said to be under the protection of the ubiquitous gamekeeper.

We come now to the question of Egg stealing and egg dealing, against which I think Mr Edward makes out a very meek case. He admits that the eggs form a ^{valuable} source of revenue to many people and he must grant, that they also add largely to the food supply of the country. The only objection he has to their use is the

sentimental one of cruelty to the birds whose eggs are taken. Why does he not upon the same grounds object to the use of the eggs of our domestic poultry. Had he objected to eggs of wild birds being taken, on the plea that there is not a sufficient number left to continue the species, there wd. have been some reason in his howl of "righteous indignation", but he does not and cannot allege that either the green plover or the sea gulls are decreasing. I think therefore that this "storm in a teapot" arises from a bit of false sentiment which in this utilitarian age will be valued at its true worth.

As regards the sea birds Mr. Edward cannot evidently say much good and anything which he could bring forward in favour of their further preservation, must I think be thrown into the shade by the amount of evidence we have, of the ravages committed by them. I cannot attempt to go over all or nearly all the list of those voracious birds & their prey but will give you a few instances. There are the Gannets, the Cormorants, the Gulls & the Terns, all following, in their

hundreds & thousands, the shoals of fish around our coasts, and destroying who knows how many millions of the finny tribes, which but for them would in all probability at some future date form no mean addition to the food supply of Europe. - and there are the Sheldrake, the Eider Duck, - & the Oyster Catcher with their numerous allies, destroying by the bushelfull the young & defenceless mussels which are already none too plentiful.

Coming inland we again find the gulls at work and here we have still more serious charges against them. - They must plead guilty of the murder of ~~many~~ ^{many} grouse slain long before the 12th of young & tender leverets, and will Mr. Edward believe it, of lambs, aye and even of full grown sheep, - There is no denying it. I have caught them in the act, more than once, - ~~neither~~ neither can they be acquitted of assisting to reduce our supply of salmon & trout but in this heinous crime they do not perhaps take such an active part as the Cormorant and the Merganser. The slaughter of young fish by those birds must be enormous

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and it has long been a matter of surprise and regret to me that our riparian proprietors have not attempted to protect their young and valuable smolts from such insatiable enemies

From the tenor of the ^{foregoing} ~~following~~ remarks, gentlemen, you will I think understand that I am not in favour of further legislation for the protection of wild birds, because, as regards the song birds, I do not think that any protection the law could afford them would be successful in attracting birds to a district in which many of them could find neither suitable nesting places, nor a supply of the necessary food, and as regards the sea birds because I am of opinion that they are already over preserved.

The question must, however, be looked at in another light. Suppose the legislature passed an act containing all that Mr. Edwards suggests. I would ask, how is it to be worked? You will admit that our rural policemen would be quite unable, to effectively watch the

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wide districts of which they have charge. -
The few prosecutions under the acts
already in force show that the general
public will not act as informers, and
surely Mr Edward cannot expect that the
country should be asked to bear the
expense of a staff of special watchers.
Without such a staff however, I hold that
the suggested legislation would not only
be useless in protecting the birds, but
what is more important, actually hurtful
to the morality of our people. It would
of course be widely & generally known
that such an act was in force, but as
the risk of detection would be very slight
our schoolboys (although aware that
in doing so they rendered themselves
liable to be brought under the strong
arm of the law, - would break it upon
every opportunity - familiarity with
danger breeds contempt, - and is it not
probable that, finding they ~~it~~ could
break one law with impunity, they
might attempt to evade others, and
in this way begin a course of life which
would render them nuisances to, instead
of useful members of the Community

The only point in Mr Edward's paper now remaining to be noticed is the way in which the bird-dealers treat their captives and I think you will all agree with me in saying that the state of matters described should not be allowed to continue. This question however occupies a very minor position in the proposed petition to Parliament and I beg to move that our Society decline to support that petition.

George M. Lawes

Colepit 4th January 1881

that now they have got a leader.—Saturday Review.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF BIRDS.—As the face of England is altered by the progress of drainage and the cutting down of woods and copses, the birds which were formerly numerous amongst us, and enjoyed the solitude which fen and forest afforded them, are gradually disappearing. Some may even be regarded as practically extinct, appearing only once or twice a-year in the form of forlorn wanderers who have lost their way on their passage, or some venerable bird striving in vain to discover the spot where as a nestling it was hatched and reared. If we search England through, we shall probably find that it possesses as many birds now as it did a century ago; but the catalogue has lost that agreeable variety which then existed. There are more partridges in our fields and innumerable more pheasants in our copses; but the rarer birds of the fen and the forest have ceased to dwell with us. The heron still lingers, being in some places protected; but the stork and the crane have gone; and the bittern comes to us only as a rare visitant. The avocet, the spoonbill, the stilt-plover, and other forms of exquisite beauty, are now all but banished from Great Britain, only occurring as rare and exceptional immigrants at uncertain periods.—Chambers's Journal.