

## LOUISIANA BIRD REFUGEES.

BY ALFRED M. BAILEY.

Louisiana is the winter home of the millions of migratory birds that push northward each year as spring melts the icy barrier between the north and the south. And because Louisiana has the inheritance of the rest of the nation in her keeping, she has a great responsibility that has not been realized until within the last few years.

For a long time now this state has been considered one of the black sheep of the country in the protection of our wild fowl, and much of the criticism of the past has been well founded. Indeed, that is what makes present day difficulties so hard to overcome; and yet, through the efficient work of the present Commissioner of the Department of Conservation, Mr. M. L. Alexander, with the sincere coöperation of a few true sportsmen, notably, Mr. E. A. McIlhenny of Avery Island, La., the state is now able to take her place in the front rank in conservation of our wild life. Through the generosity of Mr. McIlhenny and other wealthy people, there have been given the state four vast areas amounting to a total of over 180,000 acres of marsh land, where birds may rest and feed, secure from molestation. And that the birds take advantage of this great refuge, may be seen by the number of mallards that were caught in a run of sixty muskrat traps. Thirty-eight mallards were taken from sixty traps in a single day, and the swamp men do not set their traps in favorable places for birds, either.

I have never seen Louisiana reported as a great state for birds; in fact, I always thought of Florida as being the bird state of the union. Louisiana is not limited to game birds, but has her great heronries that include practically ninety per cent of the Snowy and American Egrets of the country, according to statistics given me. Also Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Ibis, Wards, Louisiana, Little Blue and Green herons, White and Glossy Ibis, and Sandhill Cranes are among our breeding birds. These heronries were guarded by men with winchesters this spring, and gradually the "cajuns" in that

part of the country are learning to leave the young birds alone.

Then on the outlying marshes and islands are the thousands of sea birds, the beautiful Royal, Caspian, Cabot, Least and Forester terns, the graceful Laughing gulls, and the swift flying skimmers. It is easy for the inland states to criticize when it appears there have been violations of the law, but only when one has traveled over these different bird refuges can the enormous task of patrolling such a great area be realized, and the impossibility of preventing all slaughter. The Commission has more than a dozen boats, in charge of competent men, and the reservations are constantly guarded, so that men no longer shoot out the colonies of egrets, leaving the young to die, nor rob the nests of the Roseate Spoonbill because the young are considered good eating. You would be impressed by taking a boat trip along the salt marshes of Louisiana. Fish is supposed to be good brain food, but one trip among these people whom the Commission is trying to educate, will convince you that there is a mistake somewhere; and that has always been the difficulty—the matter of education; for where you can not reason, you get no results.

The terns, skimmers and gulls on the outlying islands were constantly robbed of their eggs by the oystermen. But no longer are the birds interfered with, for a few captains, successfully prosecuted, have put a finish to that mode of plundering. These little islands scattered along the coast on both sides of the Mississippi are great out-of-door laboratories, which will prove fruitful in the near future in the study of bird lore. The captain of the "Royal Tern," the special patrol boat of the Audubon Society, reported White Pelicans as breeding on one of the gulf islands. Of course we all know that White Pelicans breed only in the north; but do they? The plumage of young terns is being studied by the State Ornithologist, Stanley Clisby Arthur, and many interesting facts are being compiled; in fact, Louisiana has a wealth of material awaiting to be discovered.

One little island, only a few acres in extent, named Battledore, lies off the coast to the east of the Mississippi and almost in sight of Fort St. Philip. There the sea birds breed yearly and thousands of these graceful feathered folk swarm here and on neighboring islets. I visited this little place during the first week of August, long after the real breeding season, and yet I found young gulls, terns and skimmers of all ages, and even fresh eggs. It is a beautiful sight to see those thousands of flashing wings, and even the shrill and monotonous cries do not take away the effect. The grey immature gulls came out to meet us as the boat approached the island, and escorted us back with many a swoop and circle, coming in close to the boat to dip up a few scraps thrown out by the cook, and then sailing away with scarcely a wing movement. A few terns shrieked their defiance, and as we drew near the shore, we could see the long lines of Black skimmers walking gravely along the shell, and at our too near approach arose as one, and, flying by us, wheeled about with military precision. The skimmers are interesting birds. Their glossy black plumage, the grotesque elongation of the lower mandible, with their resultant mode of skimming the surface for food, and their swift erratic flight, appealed to me more than did the other species, and I enjoyed several hours trying to photograph them.

The skimmers lay three to five whitish eggs, blotched with brownish, in a small depression in the shelly ground. Taken in hand, the egg is conspicuous enough, but on the sand they melt into the background, even as do the little grey youngsters. They are queer fuzzy beasts, and when I came from behind a clump of mangrove onto the shell where the skimmers were raised, they all took to their heels as fast as they could. But even when fluttering as they were, they were nearly invisible, and when too closely pressed, flattened out and would allow themselves to be touched without budging. But all the time I could see those dark brown eyes watching me, just as a cottontail crouching in the long grass will do. And to photograph a nest of these fellows takes more patience than I have. I would get a nestful nicely posed, and

by the time I snapped the picture, one was on each corner of the plate. Then I remember taking one that was just learning to fly. First he squatted down flat in the characteristic skimmer position, and then he bolted pell-mell when I tried to make him pose properly, but perseverance finally won, although he showed his displeasure by shrieking continuously. The young skimmers are of particular interest, because with the very young, both mandibles are of equal length, and I think a good museum group could be made, using a series to show the gradual elongation of the lower. The adults are as interesting as the young, too, and they seemed as much concerned over what I was doing as I was myself. A continual line of them flashed by within a few feet and went skimming across the water, their lower mandible cutting the surface as they searched for food. The sooty black of the plumage makes them very conspicuous as they pass side to, but when they wheel together, as is their custom, they seem to disappear, for the broad strip of white tipping the wings and tail makes them almost invisible against the light of the sky. In flight the skimmers remind me of waves, for they have that gentle wave-like motion in their irregular, undulating flight as they all rise together and swirl away with a flash of white and the rhythmic beat of their wings. One does not notice the combination of color, but notices first the black, and then the white as they turn.

The skimmers did not take all my time, for the beautiful Cabot, Royal and Caspian terns were doing their best to make themselves noticeable. To me, the Royal terns resemble the Tropic-birds of the Pacific, and more than once I thought surely a tern must be one. Bands of young waddled ahead of us and took to the water, and young laughing gulls skulked ahead in the wiry salt grass. These birds objected to being photographed as much as the others, and one young royal tern submitted only after I chased him down the beach. They were grotesque little beggars and never showed a sign of fear, but always sat up and showed defiance when cornered. The adult birds circled around and shrieked their dis-

pleasure, with never ceasing raucous cries, and came in for their share of our attention.

But time flies swiftly and the patrol boats have a long way to go, so all too soon we reëmbarked and were on our way to the next refuge. Battledore was only a dark streak marking the horizon and the broad stretch of silvered sea gradually widened until the little bird refuge slipped from view.

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## HARRIS HAWKS IN OHIO.

BY THOMAS M. EARL.

On the afternoon of December 29, 1917, I received a parcel by parcels post, the sender being J. H. McKinley, cashier of the Harrisburg Bank of Harrisburg, Ohio. The thriving little country town is located some fourteen miles southwest from Columbus and on the border line of Franklin and Pickaway Counties. It was customary for me to receive parcels from my friend McKinley, as he has a fancy for mounted birds, such as hawks, owls and the like, some of which he displays at his home and some at the bank. The parcel in my hand, therefore, excited no curiosity until I opened it and found before me a fine specimen of Harris hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus harrisi*). All of the specimens which Mr. McKinley had previously sent me I knew to have been collected in the vicinity of Harrisburg, but here was one, sent to me without comment as others had been, which I knew was far away from its particular avi-Tipperary, and I could not bring myself to think that it had not been shipped in from the Texan border by some soldier friend perhaps of the cashier.

Several weeks elapsed before I saw Mr. McKinley personally, when I obtained from him the following statement, which clears up all doubt as to the locality of the capture:

“The hawk in question was shot by a farmer, living some four miles southwest of Harrisburg, on or about December 24, 1917. On the morning of that day a pair of these hawks were molesting this man’s poultry and had killed one or two