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A History of the Illinois Audubon Society

By C. O. DECKER¹

PROBABLY THE FIRST concerted move toward bird protection in Illinois was initiated by a class of nine boys in Oak Park, Illinois, under the guidance of the Rev. George B. Pratt. This group, in 1886, became known as the "Forest and Stream" organization.

In 1890 a "Chicago Society"² was started under the presidency of Mrs. E. Irene Rood and in 1893 it was incorporated with about 70 members. Its most important work was that it inspired and largely managed the "Audubon Congress"³ held in Chicago in October, 1893, during the Columbian Exposition. Mrs. Rood's work took her away from Chicago, and after a life of about four years the Society's activity ceased.⁴

In 1896 and 1897 another strong movement toward bird protection started. The group was organized through the efforts of such working bird lovers as Mrs. Sara A. Hubbard, Mrs. John V. Farwell, Jr., Mr. Ruthven Deane, Rev. George B. Pratt, Mr. Edward B. Clark and others; on April 1, 1897, eight years before the establishment of the National Audubon Society, the Illinois Audubon Society, the fourth of the state societies, was incorporated with the following aims and principles:

1. To encourage the study of birds, particularly in the schools, and to disseminate literature relating to them.
2. To work for the betterment and enforcement of state and federal laws relating to birds.
3. To discourage the wearing of any feathers except those of the ostrich and domestic fowls.
4. To discourage in every possible way the wanton destruction of wild birds and their eggs.

These aims have been broadened through the years to include conserva-

FOOTNOTES

By Dr. R. M. Strong

1. Efficient treasurer of the Illinois Audubon Society for twenty years and editor of the *Bulletin* for ten years. Mr. Decker has also given freely of his time to much of the other work of the Society. He is now an honorary director.

2. The "Chicago Society" was undoubtedly the organization known as the "Women's Committee of the World's Congress Auxiliary on Ornithological Congress."

3. The "Audubon Congress" was probably the "World's Congress of Ornithology," held October 18-21, 1893, at the Memorial Art Palace of the World's Columbian Exposition. Addresses presented were published in 1896 by the Charles H. Sergel Co., with Mrs. E. Irene Rood as editor. This volume is indexed at the Chicago Public Library under her name.

4. A fuller account of the early history, by Mary Drummond, appeared in the fall number, 1920, of the *Bulletin*, and is the basis for the first two paragraphs of this article.

tion in its various aspects, support of the formation of wild-life sanctuaries, and opposition to all efforts to infringe in any way upon the state and national parks.

Mrs. Henry W. King as president and Miss Emily S. Rumsey as secretary-treasurer took the reins of the new Society and at the first annual meeting in 1898, reported a membership of 580 adults and 2800 juniors.

To "disseminate literature" was very early taken to include illustrated public lectures sponsored by the Society, the first being written by Mr. Clark, illustrated with slides furnished by Mr. Dugmore, and delivered by Mrs. Farwell in 1902. Mr. Henry Oldys was engaged for a series of lectures through the state in the fall of 1913, and on a four-week's tour spoke in 64 towns to over 100 audiences and 30,000 people! In the spring of 1914 he made another tour on which he spoke before 57 audiences of 13,000 people in 32 towns. Moving pictures were beginning to gain popularity, and in 1917, Mr. Orpheus M. Schantz found a way to reach a movie audience in Sheffield when he persuaded the theater owner to sandwich an hour's bird talk between two of his reels. Recently for several years the Society has been cooperating with the National Audubon Society by using its Screen Tours for an annual program.

The Society was active in 1912-13 in support of federal action on a migratory bird law that was passed in the last days of the congressional session and signed by President Taft only a few hours before his retirement. A bill prohibiting the importation and sale of wild bird feathers was up at about the same time, and in 1916 it was announced that all feathers of wild birds had been withdrawn from sale by Chicago stores.

The first "Comprehensive Check List of the Birds of Illinois," one of the many contributions to the Society by Benjamin T. Gault, for many years an active member of the board of directors, was issued in 1922, and a revision of this valuable work is now being prepared.

Spring outings were a regular activity of the Society for many years, beginning in 1924 with a day spent along the Des Plaines River south of Riverside. In 1940 the first of several meetings in cities other than those immediately around Chicago, was held at Havana, Illinois, with the cooperation of the Illinois Natural History Survey. Other sessions were held at Quincy, Savanna, Springfield and Urbana. Gasoline rationing in the war years interfered with that program, but its resumption is now under consideration. Bird walks in Lincoln Park, Chicago, have been conducted every spring since 1940 under the leadership of Miss Doris Plapp, and this past spring, in a few other parks with other leaders.

Meetings of the Society were held in various places until the secretary's report in 1912 noted that "part of our work has been carried on at the Chicago Academy of Sciences for several years — and our headquarters will hereafter be in that building." A change in the by-laws of the Academy was made permitting a somewhat closer association and in 1930 a formal affiliation with it as the "Section of Popular Ornithology" was accomplished. From that time all lectures and other public meetings were held there until the removal of the Society to the Chicago Natural History Museum in the early part of 1949.

Seeking a closer contact with the membership, spread well over the state as it was, a regular publication was thought desirable. The first number of the *Audubon Bulletin* was issued in 1916. This was continued under various editors, consisting of annual and semi-annual numbers until the *Bulletin* was made a quarterly in 1939. A total of 77 numbers has been issued so far. Many famous ornithologists have been among the contributors, and the Christmas census report has become a regular feature.

At the annual meeting in 1898 Mr. Ruthven Deane was elected president, which position he held with great honor and benefit to the Society until 1914. He was succeeded by Mr. Orpheus M. Schantz (1914-1930), Prof. C. W. G. Eifrig (1930-1941), and Dr. R. M. Strong, who is now president. The society was without a vice-president until John M. Blakely was elected in 1913, to be followed by Albert L. Stevenson (1914-1916), Jesse L. Smith (1916-1931), and Mrs. W. D. Richardson (1931-1950). Mrs. Richardson was made honorary vice-president in 1950, and three new vice-presidents were elected. They are Paul E. Downing, 1st vice-president; Mrs. Pauline Esdale, 2nd vice-president; and Dr. Alfred Lewy, 3rd vice-president.

The Society has been most fortunate in its secretaries, through whom so much of the work has been carried on. Miss Rumsey was succeeded by Miss Mary Drummond (1898-1912), Miss Mary A. Hardman (1912-1914), Mrs. Frederick H. Pattee (1914-1918), Roy Monroe Langdon (1918-1920), Miss Catherine A. Mitchell (1920-1938), Miss Doris A. Plapp (1938-1944), and Mrs. Janet H. Zimmermann (1944—). In 1912 the treasurer's office was separated from the secretary's and Miss Amalie Hannig served until 1918, when the offices were again combined in the persons of Mr. Langdon (1918-1920) and Miss Mitchell (1920-1925). Mr. Schantz combined the duties of treasurer with those of president (1925-1927) until the offices were again separated by the election of Stephen S. Gregory (1927-1928), C. O. Decker (1928-1948), Harry R. Smith (1949-1950), and Theodore Dunmire (1950—).

At the annual meeting of 1913 Miss Esther A. Craigmile was named a member of the board of directors, which position she held until she retired and was named an honorary director in 1950, the longest official connection of any member with the Society. The 1913 meeting was also attended by Miss Mitchell, Mr. and Mrs. Pattee, Mr. Schantz and Mrs. Jesse L. Smith, all of whom were very active members and officers for years afterward. Others who were already on the board and whose work left a definite impression on the Society's activities were John M. Blakely, Rev. George B. Pratt and Frank H. Woodruff.

Later the Society benefited from the services of such well-known ornithologists as William I. Lyon, Dr. Alfred M. Bailey, Benjamin T. Gault, Dr. Howard K. Gloyd, Edward R. Ford, Fred S. Lodge, R. J. H. DeLoach, Mrs. Margaret Morse Nice, Dr. T. E. Musselman, Mrs. E. T. Baroody, O. C. Durham, Dr. Alfred Lewy, Earl G. Wright, Leo K. Couch and Philip A. DuMont.

The Society now has its office at the Chicago Natural History Museum, from which all its activities are directed. All lectures are held in Simpson Theater at the Museum.

Present-day activities of the Illinois Audubon Society include:

1. Continued encouragement of the study of birds, particularly by school children, and distribution of literature regarding ornithology and conservation of natural resources.
2. Presentation of the National Audubon Society Screen Tours.
3. Conducting spring bird walks in various parks in Chicago and suburbs.
4. Publication of the Illinois Audubon Bulletin.
5. Active support of conservation programs, both local and national.

The Society, in pursuing these activities, endeavors to further the aims and ideals which its founders inaugurated with such foresight more than fifty years ago.

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Unusual Birds Seen in Evanston

By MRS. JANET H. ZIMMERMANN

A RARE VISITOR from the spruce forests of Alaska is spending the winter in Evanston, enjoying the hospitality of Mrs. George Sollitt, 2324 Lincolnwood Avenue. It is the varied thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*), a relative of the familiar robin. The bird is feasting on the fruit of a Siberian crab-apple tree. Members of the Evanston Bird Club and the Chicago Ornithological Society have been swarming over the Sollitt's back-yard, eager to add the bird to their life list of observations. It was first seen on December 15.

In the summer breeding season the varied thrush nests in spruce forests from Alaska and the Yukon to British Columbia, northwestern Montana, and northeastern Oregon. It winters mainly in the mountains of interior California, south to Los Angeles County. The Evanston visitor is probably a female. It looks at first glance very much like a robin, but the bill is longer and thinner. It has yellow underparts, with a rather smudged gray necklace around the upper breast. There are two golden-orange wing-bars, and a golden-orange eye-stripe. The back is a dark grayish-brown. The mature male has a bright rust-colored breast, wing-bars and eye-stripe, and a black necklace.

Another unusual sight is a flock of nine Hungarian, or European partridges (*Perdix perdix*) on the campus of Northwestern University. They have been ranging up and down the lake-front from the water works at the foot of Lincoln Street, to Dempster Street. This bird was introduced into the northwestern and middle western states from central Europe to supplement the diminishing numbers of native upland game birds. It has become established in Illinois only within recent years, and is still considered a rarity.

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