

NATIVE BIRDS AS NATIONAL MONUMENTS.

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It is always interesting to know how other people and other nations are tackling the problems which engage our own attention. In situation, extent and geographical conditions, Japan has much in common with New Zealand. It has also an abundant bird fauna, much richer in species than our own, although with a very much smaller percentage of peculiar forms. It should be of special interest to New Zealanders to know how the Japanese regard their birds, and what steps they take to preserve them amid all the dangers of a rapidly increasing population and an ever-extending industrialism. We know, of course, that Japan has been phenomenally quick to adopt the most enlightened features of Western civilisation, and we remember also that her own culture is unequalled for its appreciation of natural beauty—an appreciation so widespread among the masses that the Nordic vandalism which crops up far too frequently in our country is probably quite unknown there.

Dr. Nagamichi Kuroda brought with him to the International Committee Meeting at Geneva in May, 1928, a mass of most interesting information on the present position of bird protection in Japan. To a New Zealander the greatest and most striking difference, as the problem presents itself in Japan, lies in the very dense population—a population which, even more than in the thickly-peopled lands of Southern Europe, looks considerably to the birds as a source of food. Man is thus there potentially a much greater direct enemy of birds than in New Zealand.

There are three main reasons for protecting birds—the economic, the scientific and the aesthetic. Japan, by a stroke of administrative genius, welds the two latter together and, under the Law (1919) for Preserving Scenery, Historic and Natural Monuments, protects all her more distinctive species as “natural monuments.” In preserving the breeding-places and special haunts of these birds, an appeal is made also to the popular veneration for the things of Old Japan. These areas are protected as “Breeding places of birds famous in Japan,” as “Places famous for these birds flocking there,” “as “Valuable breeding places of famous birds” and so on. It is interesting that long before these sentiments were expressed in modern legislation they were in many cases felt very strongly among the people. Thus Whooper Swans visit one locality only in large flocks and for this reason: “The inhabitants of this district have, since the olden times, regarded swans as messengers of God, protected