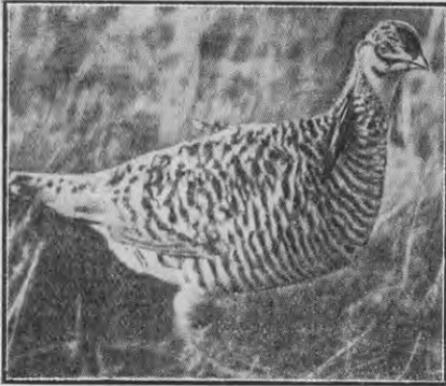


THE LAST HEATH HEN.

From American Nature Magazine.



THE SOLE REMNANT OF A DYING
RACE.
The Last Heath Hen.

The last of his race. Solitary, conspicuous, with never a sound, he feeds quietly on the farm of James Green near Tisbury, Martha's Vineyard Island, while bird lovers come from far and near to study him and to pay him homage before death blots out his species.

To the traditional "booming" ground, where, in former years, flocks of his kind gathered to carry on in the early morning and late twilight hours that curious courtship performance, he came once more this spring, perhaps for the last time. But the warming days meant nothing to him. Not once did he inflate his curious orange sacs. Not once did he boom majestically, as males have been wont to do to attract a mate. He knew. There was no female to admire him; no male to challenge him to such exertion. So he contented himself with quiet feeding, now crouching invisible against the ground as a hawk's shadow floated by, now erecting his head carefully to scrutinise the surroundings—a pathetic figure.

Once so plentiful in the East that servants in their contracts with their masters stipulated that its flesh should not be served more than twice a week, the heath hen has gradually dwindled. Legislation in the past was inadequate and irregular. Though as early as 1839 Lewis rated it as a rare species, it was continually shot down and destroyed. Completely exterminated on Long Island and in New Jersey, where it had formally been abundant, it made a last stand on Martha's Vineyard Island. The State of Massachusetts, through its Division of Fish and Game, generously aided in the fight to save the species, and up to 1925 had expended more than 56,000 dollars on this work. But a series of disastrous springs, fires and epidemics cut down the brood, and by 1927, only three birds were left. The last two annual heath bird censuses, taken by Dr. A. O. Gross of Bowdoin College, have revealed but one lone individual.

This single bird has been accorded all the honour and attention due to a sole representative of a dying race. For more than a month this spring extensive observations and photo-