

## BIRD PROTECTION.

The immediate aim of bird protection is the rescue of rare species which, from one cause or another, have fallen into danger of extinction, and the defence and encouragement of bird-life generally. The ultimate aims are the speedy re-establishment of the balance of Nature and the gradual restoration (so far as it can be effected) of the lost confidence between birds and man.

The future is always determined by the past, and in the history of birds and bird protection we have found a growing scientific interest in birds accompanied by a growing destruction of them in the name of Science, Sport, Business, and the rest of the new gods. These changes have facilitated, and even demanded, the increase of the more adaptable parasitic kinds at the expense of the rest, but the destruction, by its extent and callous barbarity, has been the principal means of reviving the bird-loving spirit as a counterblast. At a time when the bird-life of the country, though far from being depleted, is, nevertheless, impoverished and distorted by the loss of most of the predatory and more significant kinds, the side of protection has overtaken in strength the party of destruction. But for want of energy, initiative, organisation, and, above all, a considered idea of what it means to do, it has accomplished practically nothing of vital importance.

### COLLECTORS VERSUS RARE BIRDS.

It has been laid down that the immediate aims of bird protection are the rescue of the rare species which, for one cause or another, have fallen into danger of extinction, and the defence and encouragement of bird-life generally. There are several species which this first danger threatens most urgently at the present moment, and all of them are species with a very limited breeding range as a general rule and usually with an uncommon number of foes to reckon with. They suffer not only from the common risks of flood, fire, and famine, which affect birds of all kinds, but from the deliberate selective persecution of humanity. All men, from the head-hunters of Borneo to the most exalted and omnipotent millionaires, are susceptible to the curse of wanting to possess something rare or unique. It is not by any means a modern curse, but its worst manifesta-

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tions are almost all modern. The system of collecting, which harasses and decimates our scarcest birds, is no isolated thing, but part of a vast freemasonry, which has this single general rule to guide it: that not the beauty, or size, or antiquity of an object determine its price, but simply its comparative scarcity. If it is plentiful it may be as beautiful or ancient as it likes but it will be practically worthless. In a unique possession ugliness does not matter. I do not propose to discuss the abstract question of whether all collecting is bad; I merely have to drive home, for the last time, the truth that, not only does collecting inevitably result in arranging many birds on a price list, but it inevitably makes the rarest birds the most valuable, and because the rarest birds are most valuable it is most profitable to kill them or plunder their nests, and because there is such a tempting price on their skins and eggs these birds are continually being shot and robbed, and will go on being shot and robbed, in defiance of protection until either they or the egg-collectors are stamped out. That is the inevitable decision; we must choose between our egg-collectors and our rarest birds, for we cannot keep them both much longer.

### ENEMIES OF BIRDS.

There have been more grouse lost through disease than the peregrines which would have averted it would ever have taken. More pheasants fall victims to rats than the slaughtered owls and hawks which would have destroyed these vermin could ever have accounted for. The killing off of insect-eating birds of omnivorous kinds is notoriously followed by a visitation of noxious insects which makes the farmer long to have them back again.

I am not sure that to many misguided Nature-lovers it would not be more cause for wonder that the removal of persecution was not immediately followed by a plague of "vermin." Seeing that some birds make a practice of killing others, they cannot for the life of them believe that if these "bird foes of birds" are not systematically slaughtered by man they will not soon succeed in killing off the rest altogether. Their faith in the competence of Nature to look after herself is lamentably weak, for they do not