

PRESERVE YOUR BIRDS, ENRICH YOUR COUNTRY

(Extract from lecture by Prof. Fitzsimons, Port Elizabeth Museum, S.A.)

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In our struggle for food and life we have Nature's helpers. Birds stand in the front rank as our allies, and cannibal insects and lizards come second in usefulness. We cannot stem the assaults of our enemies with poison sprays and other artificial appliances supplemented by useful carnivorous and parasitic insects. The birds alone can turn the scale in our favour.

Man cannot exist upon this world without the active help of wild birds. The only obstacle to his complete conquest of Mother Earth is the insect hordes which effectively bar his way. It is now an even fight between insect and man for victory. Dwellers in cities do not realise the intensity of this struggle for the survival of the fittest.

If we are going to continue resting in fancied security, we shall, for a surety, be upon the rocks. Before the advent of man the balance of nature was quickly readjusted when it, for some reason, was upset. Insects in those days had a hard struggle to live with wild plant life only for food, and active watchful birds on all sides. On the advent of man the lands were tilled and the face of the world was covered with tender succulent crops. In the presence of such a food supply, insect life increased enormously.

Now that is the point. When we increased the food supply of the insect armies did we put the same energy into correspondingly increasing the chief enemies of insects—viz., the wild birds? No! On the contrary, we did most illogical things. We made war on the birds; with gun, catapult and trap we mowed them down. We burnt or otherwise destroyed their leafy shelters and their breeding places.

Yea, truly, we are reaping the harvest of ignorance, brutality and cruelty sown by our ancestors. "As ye sow, that also shall ye reap."

BIRD PESTS.

What about these bird pests? Yes, what about them? The bird pests could be counted on the fingers of one's hands.

Would that I could burn this into your minds—viz.: "It is an urgent necessity for us to take every possible means to not only safeguard our wild bird life, but also to do our utmost to increase the bird population to prey on the

countless numbers of insects which breed and multiply in our cultivated lands." Surely it is obvious that if an army doubles its numbers it becomes essential for the opposing army to be reinforced. Then let us set about it, and double the army of birds which war incessantly on our implacable enemies the insects.

CROPS, FRUIT, FORESTS.

Insects breed on pasture lands and invade the crops, hence the urgent necessity to preserve the birds which frequent those lands. With the succulent food provided by the farmers, insects multiply many millions of times, and, but for the birds, farming would become impossible.

Hosts of birds safeguard our orchards both directly and indirectly, and others police our forests. It is idle and a waste of time to stop to argue and criticise and pretend to examine into the question of the importance or otherwise of bird life.

The bitter experience of other countries is sufficient for us. The Governments are spending money like water to bring back the vanishing bird life to save the people from the results of the inroads of insects, which bring poverty, sickness and premature death to the human race.

RESULT OF BIRD DESTRUCTION.

There is much spade work and great battles to be fought by the human race against the adverse forces of Nature, which retard the spread of the human race over earth's fair surface. Our most formidable and ruthless opponents are the insects. It is now almost an even fight for supremacy, and unless we combine and utilise our forces more effectively and efficiently we shall find it very difficult to secure a livelihood. A few more wars, with the inevitable disorganising of the forces employed against the insect hosts, will result in these enemies getting a strangle-hold upon us. Our race may recover, but many millions will perish of starvation and insect-borne diseases. The fecundity of the insect is tremendous, and a little weakening in our offensive will bring disaster, sure and certain, upon our race. The insects are fighting for possession of the earth. It is now a case of insect versus man. All other forms of