

OVERLOOK NO LIVING THING [

THE REAL MEANING OF CONSERVATION

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USUALLY, when we consider conservation, the stress is on soil conservation, forest conservation, or wildlife conservation, as though these fields were entirely separate. With the conservation of song birds and flowers, the tendency is to stress their beauty rather than their economic value plus their beauty. We fail to impress the people with the all-important fact that all nature is bound together by a fine network of dependence and inter-dependence, and that we cannot disturb a part without disturbing all.

All birds, animals, insects, fish and reptiles are directly or indirectly dependent upon the plant life. One cannot change greatly the plant life in any region without affecting the lives of all living things in the region.

This inter-dependence on all forms of life, including humans, is what keeps nature in balance. No species of wildlife, be it bird, animal, insect, fish, or reptile, can get and stay out of control for a long period. As it increases in numbers its enemies likewise tend to increase in numbers, and in time bring it back into a natural balance. Man is the only exception. He appears to do so only because he employs the plants, fish, animals and birds to maintain an artificial balance of nature.

In spite of man's intelligence and abilities, he is constantly forced to fight against the forces of nature. Often he fights a losing battle. Nature takes the upper hand. His crops fail. Insects or animals destroy his crops and kill his live stock. But nature helps man more than she fights him. Authorities tell us that if we removed the birds from the earth, the insects would so increase in numbers in ten years as to destroy every living plant, and cause all other life including man to die of starvation. Remove all the animals from the earth and man would face the same fate. Remove all the insects and the end would be the same.

Many things that a landowner does each day have some definite effect upon the wildlife of that region. When he erects a building, lays a sidewalk, makes or cares for his lawn, spades a garden plot, plants flowers or vegetables, cuts down, prunes or plants a tree, plants, trims or removes shrubs, drains or floods an area, sprays

his trees, shrubs or plants, picks his flowers, harvests his crops, keeps a dog or cat, kills or befriends a bird or animal, and does many other things, he harms or benefits the wildlife of the region.

Likewise, when one dumps refuse in the woods or streams, picks wild flowers, digs trees, shrubs or other plants, picks berries, nuts or other fruits of plants, disturbs the homes of birds or animals, gathers pine cones, or does many other things that are done so commonly by persons, he harms or benefits the wildlife of the region.

The individual act may seem insignificant—of no great importance—but when it is multiplied by hundreds or thousands, which is usually the case, the total effects are of tremendous proportions. Let a thousand persons in a state each pick ten quarts of berries and the combined effects of these harvests might be as great or greater than those of a hundred boys spending an equal period of time shooting the birds and animals which depend in part upon these berries as staple foods.

Conservation is vital to man's interests, comfort, pleasure and very existence. Conservation is helping nature to help us. It is protecting our properties, and making this a better, more beautiful and happier place for ourselves and the coming generations to live in. It is the making of a wise truce with all nature to the end that we and nature will work together for the common good. It is an alliance with nature so that we and the generations yet to come can continually enjoy our great natural resources.

Such an interpretation of conservation is all-inclusive. It means the full development of our soils by preventing erosion, building up and maintaining their fertility, and having each soil type used for the purposes for which it is best qualified. It means maintaining on each area a balance between plant life and all other forms of life.

To make such a programme in conservation effective, we cannot overlook any species of living thing from grass to trees, from the smallest insect to the largest bird, from the smallest mouse to the largest animal, from the tiny minnow to the whale, from light rainfall to the largest body of water.