

ALONG NATURE'S TRAIL by KEN McLEOD

The great impetus to national interest in bird life in general and not just from the narrow selfish point of view of sportsmen came about in 1884 when a committee of the American Ornithologists Union initiated what grew into the so-called Audubon movement, which today is embodied in such organizations as the National Audubon Society, and the various state Audubon societies which may or may not be connected with the national organization, as well as hundreds of local clubs. Thus we can trace the roots of the whole great, truly American movement to John James Audubon himself.

This column has pointed out how this national movement developing an interest in all bird life first gained its inspiration in William Brewster's attic back in Cambridge Massachusetts in 1871, the start from which the bird watching movement became a respectable pursuit in New England long before it was countenanced elsewhere. This has been one hobby, however, that seldom thrives where men are pushing frontiers and game in abundance can fall before their guns. Actual interest in game and in birds appears only to take hold when life has settled down to the complexities of civilization, the game exterminated or vastly diminished.

We see this trend developing in America as the frontiers dissolve and the rough frontier communities begin to develop the polish of civilization. With the decay of the frontier, the center of ornithological interest moves westward and so today we begin to find the more progressive work in the scientific field of ecology, behavior and the like being turned out in Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, in the mid-west and even in the states upon the Pacific Coast here in the far-west. In the field of public interest in the pure subject of Bird Watching, the state of Massachusetts still has more bird watchers per square mile and probably produces more expert field observers than any other state, with the possible exception of New York.

In large cities like Cleveland, St. Louis and Detroit, bird clubs that numbered scarcely 100 members a decade ago now have more than 1,000 members. The National Audubon Society started a group of Junior Audubon Clubs and the numbers of children have been growing by leaps and bounds. This movement started around 45 years ago and today, enrollment has passed 400,000 in one school year. The influence of these clubs is widening like the ripples on a pond.

In a way, the story about the small girl who informed her father that she had joined the "Junior Atom-bomb Society" is a reflection of the period of world history within which we are now moving. We have passed through a bad nightmare and have awakened in what we like to call the "atom age." People are hopeful, frightened and puzzled. Everyone wants a higher standard of living; they all talk about it, while a few, aware of our diminishing natural resources and constantly increasing population, believe that if the world gets much more crowded it will burst at the seams and the Malthusian doctrine, envisioned by

swamped with new members there. Some say this is a form of escapism — not an escape from reality but rather a flight from it — a form of the "somnia-bulism of the hive" as Louis Halle calls it. In this gadget civilization which man has built to insulate

himself against the world, he finds himself entrapped, not knowing whence he came nor where he is headed. We who live close to the vanishing frontier have difficulty in understanding this attitude but let us go back to the beehives of civilization and see how quick we too can appreciate Halle's obser-

vation that "It becomes necessary occasionally, simply to throw open the hatches and ventilate one's psyche, or whatever you choose to call it. This means an excursion to some place where the sky is not simply what you see at the end of the street."

We invent systems. Socialism, Fascism, Communism and Capitalism. Each despises the other, yet they all espouse one creed — salvation by machinery. Is it any wonder then that when these systems prove faulty and men detect the synthetic nature of the civilization of their devising they turn to nature?

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