



U. S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of Information



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UNIFORM LAWS NEEDED TO  
PROTECT MIGRATORY BIRDS.

Good Effects of Present Statutes Shown  
by Increase of Wild Fowl.

Perhaps migratory birds will never again be seen in such vast flocks as when the early settlers pushed their way westward, but specialists of the Bureau of Biological Survey, U. S. Department of Agriculture believe their numbers are now increasing year by year. Widespread interest in their preservation, prompted by American sportsmen who saw the birds would be exterminated by unchecked destruction, is thought well justified when it is considered that the birds' food and economic value amounts to many millions of dollars annually. Growth of sentiment for the conservation of so valuable a resource by preventing destruction, through spring shooting, of game birds and by other protective measures, has been notable in the last half century.

In 1900 only nine States had laws prohibiting all-spring shooting, while in 1918 there were thirty-one. Only three States now afford no legal protection. Uniform and adequate preservation was first given attention by the Federal Government in 1904, when a bill was introduced in Congress, but failed to become law. The subject, however, was kept before Congress almost continuously until the enactment of the migratory bird law in 1913.

This Federal statute merely conferred on the U. S. Department of Agriculture the power to fix closed seasons during which it would be unlawful to capture or kill migratory birds. This law did not provide for effective enforcement, but it exerted a wonderful influence upon the public mind, and its passage laid the real foundation for more adequate protection. Fully 95 per cent of the sportsmen abided by the regulations established under this law and refrained from shooting during the closed seasons.

Law's Good Effect Shown.

The result was almost instantaneous. Waterfowl and other migratory game birds not only showed at once a marked increase in numbers, but, owing

to the cessation of spring shooting, remained unmolested in ever increasing numbers to breed in places from which formerly they had been driven every spring by incessant gunning. At the end of the five years during which this law was in operation, State game commissioners and leading sportsmen were practically unanimous in their expression that wild fowl were more abundant than at any time in the preceding twenty-five years.

The marked improvement under this law instilled a new spirit into the advocates of bird conservation, and showed the wonderful possibilities under a Federal law broad and comprehensive enough not only to protect the birds during the mating and breeding season, but to equalize hunting privileges and opportunities by more uniform State laws.

To protect birds further a treaty affecting birds migrating between this country and Canada was concluded in 1916 between the United States and Great Britain. Altogether 537 species of migratory birds are included in the various families protected by the treaty. It provides for continuous protection for migratory insect-eating birds and certain other migratory non-game birds and protection for five and ten years for certain migratory game birds. The hunting season for other migratory game birds is limited to a period not exceeding three and one-half months between September 1 and March 10 of each year, except shorebirds in certain Northeastern States, where such hunting season must be between August 16 and February 1. Regulations promulgated under the Act of Congress approved July 3, 1918, to give effect to the treaty, establish open seasons on shorebirds in such Northeastern States from August 16 to November 30, and with this exception no migratory game birds can be hunted in the United States between February 1 and September 15, inclusive, of each year. The treaty does not, however, include some valuable birds, such as quail, pheasants, grouse, and wild turkeys. These still remain wholly within the jurisdiction of the States. Approximately 220 species of migratory birds are also excluded from the terms of the treaty, because they are not specifically named or do not feed chiefly or entirely on insects.

#### Uniform Laws Needed.

The Federal laws for the protection of migratory birds are expected to go a long way toward insuring a supply for all time, but the interests of the States are so inseparably related to the interests of the National Government that all efforts to conserve these birds must be coordinated

for full success, Federal officials point out. Much already has been done along this line. The open seasons for wild fowl in twenty-five States have been made to conform to the Federal seasons, and in many other States game commissioners and sportsmen have manifested a spirit of cooperation in game conservation that indicates a general sentiment favoring uniformity in State and Federal laws.