



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Office of Information

Press Service



Release - Immediate

May 3, 1929. 82

PROTECTION OF SWANS  
NOT TO BE DIMINISHED

Biological Survey Chief Explains Continued  
Protection of the Species in Spite of  
Alleged Destructive Habits

Explaining why no open season on Swans had been provided in the recent amendments to the regulations under the migratory-bird treaty act, Paul G. Redington, chief of the Biological Survey of the United States Department of Agriculture, stated that he considered that to recommend an open season in the United States at this time on these beautiful and comparatively rare birds would be a violation of this country's obligations under our treaty with Great Britain. Many requests had come to the Biological Survey to allow limited shooting of swans, the plea being made that they were destroying wild-fowl food plants by pulling them up by the roots in such quantity as to menace the future supply for other waterfowl. Answering this charge specifically, Mr. Redington said that investigations made by the Biological Survey do not show that swans destroy wild-fowl food to any greater extent than do other species of waterfowl. In fall and winter they take the parts they like, but leave sufficient seeds, fragments of rootstocks, tubers, etc., to insure reproduction of the food crops the next season. "If this were not true," he stated, "swans would be compelled to abandon their favorite wintering grounds, and the fact that they do not do so, but instead return to them year after year is really a guarantee that their feeding habits are not so pernicious as is believed."

Swans have been given complete protection throughout this country, Mr. Redington explained, for two reasons. In the first place the total number of our two species combined is not large, and in the second place, as practically all the swans of eastern North America winter in a limited area in the Middle Atlantic States, irreparable damage to the species would result if shooting were permitted. "Of the two species of swans," he said, "the trumpeter swan has been for years near the verge of extinction. Owing to the fact that it is impractical to expect the average gunner to distinguish between the trumpeter and the whistling swans, it has seemed necessary to give all swans close protection. The Biological Survey has given the situation the most careful consideration, which it greatly deserves, since an error at this stage might very well result in the total extermination of a rare and valuable species.

"We must not lose sight of the fact," he added, "that swans are wild fowl and even while entirely protected are entitled to a share of the common food supply. In other words, the swans should not be held guilty of stealing food that does not belong to them. The complexities that enter into the situation are due to the increasing popularity of the sport of duck shooting and to the fear that swans may be unduly damaging the feeding grounds of wild ducks. The consumption of wild-duck foods and of baits by swans is one of the hazards of the sport of duck shooting under existing conditions, and it is impossible by regulation to arrange every detail of the whole problem to the entire satisfaction of everyone. The swan is entitled to a very charitable attitude on the part of the gunner, especially in view of the bird's rarity and its unique qualities."

The Biological Survey is keeping the matter under investigation with a view to safeguarding the species for the enjoyment not only of the present generation but of those to follow in later years. Mr. Redington closed his statement with a plea for the sympathetic consideration of all sportsmen, "in view of the rather precarious condition of the whistling swan and the still more dubious situation of the trumpeter swan." Swans enjoy similar protection in Canada, under the terms of the treaty protecting birds that migrate between the two countries.

# # #

845-29