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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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PRESS SERVICE



Release - Immediate

WASHINGTON, D. C.

May 19, 1934.

NELSON, FORMER CHIEF OF
BIOLOGICAL SURVEY, DIES

Noted Biologist's Career Ends
at Age of 79

Dr. Edward William Nelson, Chief of the Bureau of Biological Survey, United States Department of Agriculture, from 1916 to 1927, died at Washington, D. C., on May 19, at the age of 79. The immediate cause of death was heart trouble, from which he had suffered for many years.

Dr. Nelson's name is perpetuated in numerous writings and in zoological and geographical nomenclature. It is now borne by the Nelson range of mountains in California, Nelson Lagoon in Alaska, and Nelson Island at the mouth of the Yukon River, and by one genus of mammal and one genus of plant, and by more than one hundred species and sub-species of animals (including birds) and plants.

On learning of the death of the former Chief, Jay N. Darling, now Chief of the Biological Survey, spoke of Dr. Nelson's career as one of great courage and vast accomplishment in a life-long struggle against ill health. "Dr. Nelson," he said, "was one of the outstanding naturalists of North America, and he was active in this work by correspondence and conference up to a few days before his death. During his eleven years' of aggressive leadership as chief of the Biological Survey the Bureau developed from an organization chiefly concerned with research to an agency that has been generally recognized as an outstanding force for conservation.

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His administration of the Survey saw the expansion of the Bureau's work on bird conservation through administration of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and the development of cooperative work with the States in predatory-animal and rodent control, including the building up of a trained field organization. During this period also the Biological Survey initiated its studies of the habits and distribution of birds through the bird-banding method, and the effective development of the movement in favor of bird refuges culminated just before his retirement from the Bureau in the passage of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act. In fact it was Dr. Nelson who originated the movement that reacted finally in the passage of this bird-refuge act and in the enactment this year of the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act.

"Dr. Nelson was instrumental also in the negotiation of the treaty with Great Britain protecting birds that migrate to and from Canada, in the enactment of the Alaska Game Law of 1925, which established the present Alaska Game Commission, and in establishing the Bureau's work for the improvement of the reindeer herds in Alaska. His broad interests in wild-life conservation and his indomitable courage in the face of physical handicaps have been an inspiration to his associates in the Government and to hosts of officials and members of scientific and conservation organizations that should long continue."

Dr. Nelson had been associated with the work of the U. S. Department of Agriculture since 1890. Before he became Chief of the Biological Survey, he spent more than twenty years as a scientific explorer in different parts of the continent from the Arctic to the Tropics. From the collection of birds and mammals obtained at this time he and others have described hundreds of species previously unknown to science. As a part of his Arctic experiences he was a member of the "Jeannette" search expedition in 1881 and was with the first party to land on Wrangell Island. His work on the customs and history of the Eskimos, made as a result of his study

of these people while in Alaska in the 70's, is still an authoritative publication. In Mexico his travels during fourteen years extended into every State and Territory of that country and resulted in obtaining large collections of specimens of mammals, birds, reptiles, and plants and in the accumulation of a vast store of data, on the publication of which he had been working during the past few years.

His published work includes monographs of mammals and birds and descriptions of many new species. He was also the author of popular books and articles dealing with various phases of wild life and wild-life conservation. In connection with one of Doctor Nelson's books on the Wild Animals of North America, Theodore Roosevelt once said that the author was "one of the keenest naturalists we have ever had and a man of singularly balanced development."

Dr. Nelson remained in the Biological Survey, following his relinquishment of administrative duties for two years, until his retirement at 74 years of age on May 8, 1929. He was third chief of the Biological Survey, his predecessors (1885 to 1916) being Dr. C. Hart Merriam and Henry W. Henshaw. He was succeeded by Paul G. Redington (1927-1934) and by Jay N. Darling, the present chief.

Dr. Nelson was born at Manchester, N. H., on May 8, 1855. He spent his boyhood on his grandfather's farm in New York State, and in Chicago, Ill. He was graduated from the Cook County Normal School, Chicago, in 1875. He was unmarried. He held the honorary degrees of A. M. (Yale) and Sc. D. (George Washington University). He had been president of the American Ornithologists' Union, the American Society of Mammalogists, and the Biological Society of Washington, and was a member of numerous scientific and conservation organizations.