When Game Was Plentiful

By A. S. JACKSON

DURING the past few years the writer has spent more than 370 spare-time hours in searching Texas newspapers for items bearing on wildlife, its abundance, utilization, and public opinion relating thereto in the early settlements of Texas.

In this paper some items from the 214 at hand are cited and discussed. They are representative of the lot with the exception that no reference touching on the buffalo have been used. In brief, these newspaper items illustrate two phases of thought and action toward wildlife. The early ones seem to indicate that wildlife was taken for granted as an asset to be used along with soil, water, and wood for fuel and fencing.

The first newspapers were largely devoted to heated political discussion, and the reader looks in vain for references to wildlife or subjects closely related to it.

In the **Telegraph**, published at Columbia, May 2, 1837, this note to emigrants occurs:

"Let no able bodied man emigrating to Texas neglect to provide himself with a good rifle or musket and at least one hundred rounds of ammunition. Those who wish to enjoy the advantages of a country should come prepared to defend it; . . . " Prophetic words in 1945.

That these words did not go unheeded is implied by the following on the editorial page of the same newspaper, issue of December 2, 1837:

"Large numbers of emigrants are continually arriving from the United States. We notice with pleasure that most of them are well supplied with good rifles. We fear however that too small a portion of them are farmers. Those desirous of emigration should continually bear in mind that Texas is an agricultural country and therefore offers at present but few inducements to any except practical farmers."

However, a column entitled "Recollection and Reminiscences, "The Better Class," appeared in the Galveston Daily News, issue of August 28, 1877 which indicates that the emigrants to Texas set up their own criteria of fitness for citizenship. Signed by "Wood, A.," it relates:

"Old Pioneers of 1820 to 1835 were often given to understand by speculative prospects traveling through the colonies that so soon as Indian depredations ceased, this beautiful fertile country would settle up with a better class of emigrants—Therefore the newcomer was often greeted with the exclamation, 'I suppose you are of that better class we have been advised were coming. We are all anxious to see that better class.' The country so vast was slow in filling up, and though emigrants were constantly arriving, it was like the waters of the river constantly pouring into an ocean—scarcely more perceptible. An old lady, a mother pioneer, was overheard gossiping with a neighbor who lived only seven miles away, and who had made a fashionable call to spend three days, 'Have you seen any of the better class? I have been waiting and waiting and waiting to see the better class. Those who are coming in have fine clothes, it is true, and I have seen none of the ladies wearing moccasins or homespun, **but the men are not educated.** Deer, bear, and turkeys don't mind being shot at by them. They seem to know that they are entirely safe. They know nothing about Indian fighting, which is a constantly recurring necessity. I would not feel secure if I depended on men whose education had been so much neglected, for defense and protection! Better class indeed! What is a little book learning in a country like this in comparison with the strong arm, the brave heart and dead shot, of dauntless men like your husband, and men who have got to love the sport of Indian fights."

Early settlers came to Texas armed with excellent rifles which performed double service — winning a new Republic and providing fresh meat.

Newspapers at a later date were to record that the newcomers whom the old lady so harshly criticized, were apt pupils in the school of education she recommended.

In at least one instance the status of wildlife as an important asset was recorded. In the Colorado **Tribune**, Vol. V, No. 13, July 12, 1852, reference is made to the hardships of Austin's first colony. Reproduced in whole, it follows:

"Facts relating to the first settlement of a new country are generally interesting to the emigrant. The following hasty sketch, composed from materials furnished in conversation, by one of the first three hundred may prove illuminating.

1822.—: "From the 20th of April to the 20th of August, there was no rain, and then but one or two showers. About the 29th, the wet season set in but the crops were by this time ruined. The only corn in the neighborhood was raised by Andrew Robinson, and but for the game with which the country abounds, the inhabitants must have perished for hunger. At this period, it was no uncommon sight to behold from four to six hundred deer on the newly burnt patches of the prairie; which together with turkeys, snipe, grouse, quails, partridges and the endless variety of birds so common in the country, sustained them . . ."

Squandered wild game stock. A later period, variable in time as settlement for given areas stabilized, but reaching a peak in the 70's and early 80's is depicted, when wild game was slaughtered on an unprecedented scale. It is to be noted that the peak, as shown by occurrence of news items, was reached during the decade when the Winchester repeating rifles, models of 1873 and 1876, and their efficient fixed ammuntion was gaining favor. Texas, for all her vast size, was filling up, life for the settler had become more secure, and a rough and ready social order had come into being.

Enough of the items occurring in Texas newspapers during the era are reproduced to give the reader, willing to read between the lines, a picture of what appalling destruction of wildlife must have occurred.

Items are by exchange appearing in State News Column of the Galveston Daily News on dates cited.

August 1, 1877—Henrietta **Journal**—Scarcity of water is driving all kinds of game eastward. Mr. Bartlett, living near Red River in this county, has killed 278 head of deer in a circumference of 10 miles from his house. In addition to these he has killed countless numbers of antelope and other small game—.

August 31, 1877—San Antonio **Herald**—gives the result of a two-week hunt at Kickapoo Springs, on the Sycamore, north of Ft. Clark, by the two brothers, Messrs. Henry and James Dignowity: Three bears, sixty-seven deer, two hundred and nineteen turkeys, (104 of which were shot in one day, all with the rifle) four geese, forty-six ducks, thirty quails, two hundred and seventy-five pounds of honey—.

July 21, 1878—**Hardin County**—Game

is plentiful and venison hams are selling at 25 cents each.

March 1, 1879—**Kimble County**—Streams in the county abound with fish, beaver and otter, while in the mountains deer are plentiful, and some bear are found. There are a great many wild turkeys here—so many in fact that Judge Patterson killed twelve in one night last week.

August 24, 1879—Mason County News Item—Mr. Tom Gamel killed over 100 deer so far this year.——our woods are alive with deer and other game. We hear of a number of men in this section who are following no other pursuit this year but that of killing deer, the skins when dressed, bringing a fair price.

September 26, 1879—Mason—: A Mason County man made $112 this year from deer pelts.

December 26, 1880—Brownsville **Cosmopolite:** Mallard and teal ducks sell in our markets at a little over 4 cents each; Brant geese at a bit apiece, and a leg of venison for 37½ cents.

December 4, 1880—Henrietta **Shield:** A load of wild turkeys was brought to town last Sunday and sold out at fifty cents apiece. They are reported abundant in the west.

December 10, 1880—**Bugle:** A wagon load of wild turkeys were brought in town last week and sold for 25 cents apiece.

Small birds and non-game species did not escape notice as is shown by the following unique items:

September 2, 1879—Corpus Christi **Free Press:** One day this week a boat arrived from Bird Island, 22 miles south of here, with a novel cargo—the skins and oil of some three thousand pelicans.

September 24, 1879—Comanche **Chief:** Bob Stephens came through town last week with a cargo of live prairie dogs, one hundred in number. He got them out west, and is on his way to Fort Worth, where he will dispose of them.

The question of what use could have been anticipated for these prairie dogs is suggested by a second reference:

October 14, 1879—McKinney **Inquirer:** A man from Coleman county was in the city on Thursday with a lot of prairie dogs which he was selling for ratters. It is said they are equal to the ferret for hunting out and killing rats and mice.

July 30, 1878—Gainesville **Hesperian:** One hundred and fifty mocking birds were carried to Chicago this week from Gainesville.

Throughout the newspaper record of game slaughter as depicted above, was found no note sounding the word conservation. Indeed, public opinion seems to have been asleep to what was happening. In all the peirod leading up to publication of the first general game law of 1879, one item ventured to suggest that among certain elements the slaughter of birds was not welcomed. On June 25, 1878, the Galveston Daily News, in its State News carried the following item:

McKinney **Inquirer**—June 22: We saw a couple of ducklings captured in East Fork a few days ago. This is a long way south for these birds to raise their young. Sportsmen are killing a great many birds in the grain fields. As a rule, this is not relished by farmers, and many may say they will post their farms in order to protect the birds. Those who have orchards begin to appreciate the labor of birds in protecting the fruit from the ravages of insects.

So much for the newspaper record. If one is sickened after reading the entire collection of notes at one sitting, and for a time afterward travels the roads of Texas with a sense of unreality, he must be at the same time heartened by the changes which have followed, changes which reflect by contrast, an awareness on the part of news editors to wildlife, values and needs, and an awakened public consciousness. This, it may be said, belongs to a third phase in Texas news—the conservation era.

How About It Sportsmen?

AN INFORMAL, yet practical program to give pleasure to wounded veterans and to increase the number of good sportsmen in the United States is rapidly gaining momentum. It consists of the formation of local committees to organize casting clubs and lure-making and fly-tying classes at veterans' hospitals, and to arrange fishing trips to nearby waters for boys able to make them. Lure-making and fly-tying equipment and fishing tackle are contributed by civilian sportsmen. Speakers also regale the boys with tales of hunting and fishing. Anecdotes are especially popular.

Andy Anderson, sports editor of the *Houston* (Texas) *Press*, originated the idea, which came to him following a visit to a local hospital, where the boys evidenced considerable enthusiasm. Since then he has outlined his program to sportsmen's and civic groups in many parts of the country, and has gained many recruits for the crusade.

This looks like a splendid way for sportsmen everywhere to show in some small measure their deep appreciation of the price these boys have paid to safeguard the many privileges Americans enjoy. Anglers all over the nation can contribute materials, tackle and other equipment. Members of hunting and fishing clubs located near service hospitals can give active help. How about it, sportsmen?

Whitewings ARRIVING

By CHAS. G. JONES

THAT favored feathered knight of the air, who means so much to the Rio Grande Valley, now is sending out advance guards to look over the nesting situation.

Yes, Whitewings are arriving in the Valley, and somewhat puzzled they are, for many of their nesting sites of last year have been converted into fields of tomatoes, beans and other vegetables, causing thousands of these birds to abandon all hope of raising their young in a favored area used for 50 years or more.

In times gone by, Whitewings were seldom seen any great distance North of the Rio Grande. However, in recent years large colonies of these birds have taken up in the Beeville, George West, Catarina and Uvalde sections where vast acreage of brushland offers isolation and protection while nesting.

In the Valley where more and more land is being cleared every year, it is a question as to how long this part of the State can have and hold the Whitewing. The lack of nesting grounds also jeopardizes many of the other distinctive border birds.

Where agriculture and wildlife are in competition, it seems inevitable that wildlife must give way, unless both State and Federal authorities take over by lease or purchase, sufficient acreage to justify the continuance of such species as Whitewings, Chachalacas and Red-Billed Pigeons, all birds peculiar to the border section of the State.

What a pity to have something of value and then lose it by lack of forethought. Game and fish are an asset. They are irreplaceable.

Baseball, golf, polo and tennis have their following, but American men and women when really seeking recreation spend their vacations hunting and fishing. It should be the ambition and effort of every one of us to increase wildlife—for the benefit of our returning war veterans, and the millions at home who live close to nature.