

CONSERVATION

Hemisphere Protection

All But Three of 21 Republics in the Americas Sign New Agreement; Trade in Wild Bird Feathers Banned

By DR. FRANK THONE

TWO BIG things have happened recently for the good of the birds and beasts and plant life of the two Americas.

One is hemispheric in its scope. It is the conclusion of a convention or agreement, to be participated in by all the nations of the New World, for the protection of wildlife of all kinds and for the establishment of national parks and similar scenic areas for the enjoyment and education of the people.

The other concerns the United States more particularly. It is the establishment of a legal setup that is expected to put a final stop to the reckless killing of rare species of birds to get plumes for the millinery trade.

The two together represent an impressive advance in the protection of wildlife in both continents, whose beauty in nature is becoming increasingly appreciated by everyone, as vacations and travel become more generally possible.

The Pan-American Convention for Nature Protection was signed by Secretary of State Hull and representatives of a number of South and Central American republics last Oct. 12—anniversary of the day whose dawn showed Columbus the blossoming shores of a New World. In a little over half a year, all but three of the 21 American nations have added their signatures—very fast action, as diplomatic proceedings go. El Salvador was the first republic to sign; the United States was second. Most recent signer is Argentina, on May 19. In time, unanimous acceptance is expected.

Not Hard and Fast

There is nothing hard-and-fast about the document. It does not bind the agreeing parties to any course of drastic action; indeed, it does not have the force of law or treaty at all. It simply outlines a course for future action, each nation undertaking to carry out its part with its own means and strictly within its own sovereignty.

Each of the signing nations agrees to set up certain protected categories. Some of these are fairly familiar to most Amer-

icans. National parks are provided for; and the national park concept has been pretty well and rather generally understood since the first one was established in 1872 as the Yellowstone National Park.

A second category is designated as National Reserves. These will combine features of the national forests and the wildlife sanctuaries, already familiar in this country. In them, conservation will be combined with regulated use of natural resources.

Diametrically opposite is the idea governing the third category, called Strict Wilderness Reserves. As defined in the Convention, such a region is to be "under control characterized by primitive conditions of flora, fauna, transportation and habitation wherein there is no provision for the passage of motorized transportation and all commercial developments are excluded."

There is also a clause providing for the protection of migratory birds whose travels take them across international boundaries. It often happens that birds well protected in one country are exposed to wholesale slaughter in another.

First step toward the remedy of this situation was taken by Canada and the United States in 1916, in the Migratory Bird Treaty. Mexico has recently become a party to the same treaty, so that the safety of migratory birds, especially ducks and geese, has been greatly increased throughout the whole of North America. More time will be required to extend the system over South America because of the larger number of nations there and the greater complexity of conditions generally, but eventually all the peoples of the southern continent will doubtless wish to gain its benefits for their own wild birds.

An idea new to the United States is introduced in the inclusion of a category known as Nature Monuments. This is defined as "regions, objects, or living species of flora or fauna of esthetic, historic or scientific interest to which strict protection is given." It will thus be possible to designate as a "monument" such highly movable objects as all trumpeter swans, or all grizzly bears, or such widely distributed things as all fringed gentians or all trailing arbutus plants. Such monuments will be where they are found, not where they have been put.

It is not expected that all this program will be carried out immediately,



THE LAST STAND

Muskoxen form defensive rings, like ancient Roman legions, when threatened. All of the muskoxen left in the world are now the wards of the United States and Canada, since this country has undertaken the protection of Greenland until that frozen sub-continent (with its rare animal herds) can be returned to the post-war Danish Government.



MARTYRS OF FASHION

Real aigrettes are almost as unfailing a symbol of the wealth of the wearer (or her husband) as an ermine wrap. But to get them involves butchering family groups like these, and leaving the young to die of starvation and thirst.

especially in view of the imperative pre-occupation of all the Hemisphere nations with the menace of aggression from overseas. However, the terms of the Convention agree that each signatory power will set up what is possible now, and designate definitely appropriate areas and species for future action when that becomes possible.

One thing has been undertaken for immediate action. This is the submission by the various nations of lists of specially protected species, which are not to be admitted as imports by the other nations except as accompanied by export permits. Thus far only three of the nations have prepared such lists: Bolivia, Brazil and the United States. Others, however, are expected.

The Bolivian list includes 21 animal species and nine plants. Brazil's list is very much longer, covering some scores of species. Only ten names appear on the list of the United States: woodland caribou, sea otter, manatee, trumpeter swan, California condor, whooping crane, Eskimo curlew, Hudsonian godwit, Puerto Rican parrot and ivory-billed woodpecker. All these are very rare, even to the point of threatened extinction. These lists are looked upon as flexible, and subject to change as conditions warrant.

Without waiting for international action, or indeed for any treaties or laws at all, conservation and commercial interests got together in New York and reached an agreement among themselves to make an end for all time of all traffic in the United States in wild bird plum-

age of any kind from any source. This was the gist of a declaration of policy signed by the National Audubon Society and the Feather Industries of America, Inc.

It was followed quickly by a bill embodying the mutual wishes of both organizations, passed by the New York state legislature and signed on April 18 by Governor Lehman. This is looked upon as a model bill, and it is hoped it will be one of the first in a whole series of similar acts by other states and by the federal government. New York of course is an exceedingly important state in this connection, because of its outstanding position as a world fashion center and because so much of the country's feather trade centers there.

In order not to work hardship upon dealers who now have large stocks on hand, or commitments which cannot be abrogated, a period of six years is permitted for liquidation of the wild-bird feather trade. During this time dealing may take place in inventories now existing, but no new additions are to be made. In the spring of 1947 the law provides that all remaining wild bird plumage, except that in personal use and not for sale, shall be turned over to the State Conservation Department for destruction or for distribution to educational institutions for exhibition purposes.

The Feather Industries of America, Inc., with membership including at least 90 per cent of all manufacturers and

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dealers in wild bird plumage, has placed on inventory all storks now in existence, and all this plumage has been placed in storage. Strict control should therefore be possible, the more so since the legitimate trade is keenly interested in the suppression of bootlegged plumage originating with poachers.

One exceedingly important and self-sacrificing thing was done by Feather Industries. They agreed to the immediate sacrifice of several classes of feathers that have long been an especially severe source of grief to conservationists: egret, heron, bird-of-paradise, and bald and golden eagle. Of course, a society matron possessing an aigrette may continue to wear it without breaking the law. But the thing has automatically become old, passé, dated. The chances are that in far less than six years aigrettes will be as scarce on ladies' heads as elk-tooth watch-charms are on the vests of B.P.O.E. members.

Some humorous situations have arisen as a result of the new plumage legislation. An officer of the Audubon Society repeats a story told him by a socially prominent woman of his acquaintance. She was stopped on the street by a policeman, who was evidently also something of an ornithologist. He asked her if she knew what kind of a feather that was, in the new hat she was wearing. She admitted she didn't know.

"Well," said the officer, "that's an eagle feather, a golden eagle feather, and it's against the law to buy and sell them now. I think I'm supposed to arrest you for having it, but if you'll go home and take it off your hat I'll say no more about it."

"And you can bet a hat," the woman concluded, "that I'll never be caught out with that feather again!"

Actually, of course, the lady was well within the law, and in no real danger of arrest for owning and wearing an eagle feather. The new setup merely bans the commercial importation and sale of wild-bird plumage. Moreover, ladies' hats will not have to go completely featherless after the present stock of wild-bird plumage is liquidated. The new legislation, and the voluntary action of the feather trade, provides for legal traffic in ten species of domesticated birds, ranging from chickens and ducks to ostriches and peacocks. What with the skill of present-day feather workers in trimming and dyeing, the old wild-bird plumage, marketed at the price of so much suffering and death, will hardly be missed.

Science News Letter, July 5, 1941

BACTERIOLOGY

Bacilli In Soil Prove Deadly Enemies of Many Bacteria

Either of Two Species Found Able to Kill Cultures Of Bacteria of More Than Score of Kinds, Fungi Too

TWO species of bacilli that live in the soil have been found to be deadly enemies of a considerable number of species of bacteria and fungi that cause diseases in plants, animals and man, by Dr. P. A. Ark and Miss Marjorie L. Hunt of the University of California. This adds to the list, only recently started, of germs that kill other germs, in microscopic version of the "bug-eat-bug" struggle that has long been known to go on incessantly in the insect world. (*Science*, April 11.)

One of the two newly recognized germ-killing bacilli has been known for many years as an abundant but apparently harmless dweller in the soil. Bacteriologists call it *Bacillus vulgatus*. The other is a yellow bacillus that has not yet been identified; it may be a species hitherto unknown to science.

Either of the two species has been

proved able to kill cultures of bacteria of more than a score of species, as well as half-a-dozen kinds of disease-causing fungi. These included the diphtheria bacillus, the staphylococcus that causes common boils, the germ of a fatal disease of chickens, the fungus that produces wheat scab, the bacterium of soft rot in vegetables, and many other undesirable citizens of the microscopic world.

The two bacilli do their deadly work by means of substances, of still unknown composition, which they secrete. Dr. Ark and Miss Hunt have already learned, however, that these substances are soluble in water, that they are effective in extremely small amounts, and that they can be boiled for an hour without losing their potency. Further investigations are still in progress.

Science News Letter, July 5, 1941

MEDICINE

Alcohol Only Incidental In Causing Liver Cirrhosis

OLD Man Alcohol was absolved largely, if not completely, from blame as causing cirrhosis of the liver in a report by three government scientists to the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, meeting in Chicago. The scientists are Dr. R. D. Lillie, Dr. F. S. Daft and Dr. W. H. Sebrell, of the National Institute of Health.

Too little protein or maybe too few vitamins in the diet, rather than too much alcohol, is seen as the fundamental cause of the condition.

Rats kept on a diet low in protein foods, which would mean little meat, cheese, eggs and nuts in human diet terms, got cirrhosis of the liver, Dr. Daft reported. When the rats were given 20% alcohol instead of drinking water, the cirrhosis was a little worse and developed a little faster, but the rats got cirrhosis on the poor diet without any alcohol.

Whether it is the small amount of protein in the diet or some other feature of it that caused the cirrhosis is not yet known. The government scientists have a

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