



Vanishing American

➤ AMERICANS who want to get a glimpse of the great bird that figures in our national heraldry must content themselves with caged specimens in the zoological gardens, unless they happen to live in a few favored spots, mostly near the seacoast. From the interior of the country, where the bald eagle was once abundant, it has vanished practically altogether.

Greatest numbers of eagles are now to be found along the coasts and up the rivers of Alaska, continuing southward through British Columbia and down into Oregon. There are not many in California, and relatively few in the Rockies.

On the Atlantic coast there is a considerable concentration near the mouth of Chesapeake bay, and another in Florida, with smaller numbers scattered between and extending along the Gulf coast to Louisiana and eastern Texas.

But along the great inland waterways, the Ohio and the Mississippi and their larger tributaries, where Audubon, in his travels a little over a century ago was hardly ever out of sight of an eagle's nest, you will search the skies in vain for a sign of one.

The extinction of the bald eagle

throughout so large a part of its former range was due to only a minor extent to outright killing by white men. To be sure, there have been very bad spots here and there, as in the long-standing bounty paid by the Territory of Alaska, on the theory that eagles were harming the fisheries, now happily repealed. Indians, too, must take some of the blame for the killing of eagles, for eagle plumes are the only acceptable feathers for the ornate war bonnets highly prized by the braves—and now commercialized to a considerable extent for rodeo purposes.

However, on the whole the disappearance of the eagle has been a result of the advance of agriculture and the growth of industrial cities. Despite romantic notions that eagles build their nests only on inaccessible cliffs, many, perhaps a majority, built in towering trees near the rivers that supplied them with fish, their principal food. This was certainly so in the great central valley. So when the timber was cleared it was inevitable that the eagles had to go.

Moreover, the cities grew and befouled the rivers with sewage and industrial wastes; the once teeming fish population vanished. With their main source of supplies thus taken away, it was only natural that the eagles should vanish, too.

Science News Letter, July 3, 1943

AGRICULTURE

Treatment of Seed Pieces May Help Potato Shortage

➤ POTATO growers in parts of the country where length of season permits two crops a year to be produced are having difficulty in obtaining enough seed potatoes to put in the second crop. For their benefit, Dr. R. A. Jehle, state plant pathologist at the University of Maryland, suggests possible use of seed pieces from this year's early crop, chemically treated to induce them to sprout without

waiting through the rest period usually required by seed potatoes.

The treatment, first developed at the Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research in Yonkers, N. Y., consists in soaking the cut seed pieces for an hour in a solution of sodium thiocyanate, one pound of the chemical to 12 gallons of water. It is essential that the seed potatoes have a cut surface; whole ones will not respond.

Planting such treated pieces is not as satisfactory as the use of seed potatoes that have been in storage for a normal period of time; germination of several varieties tried was only about half as high as that of stored seed potatoes. However, Dr. Jehle points out, it may well be considered justified in the present emergency.

Science News Letter, July 3, 1943

AGRICULTURE

Species of Hops Crossed To Produce Better Beer

➤ BETTER BEER and ale can be expected from recent crosses of European and American species of hops, accomplished for the first time at South-Eastern Agriculture College at Wye, Kent. Reports of success in developing five very promising new varieties has just been received from the British Council; the hops themselves have been planted in this country and Canada, as well as in England.

Acceptance for commercial propagation of the new varieties, which are disease-resistant as well as superior in flavor, represents the culmination of more than a third of a century of patient improvement breeding initiated by Prof. E. S. Salmon, and continued under the leadership of Dr. R. G. Hatton, Jesse Amos and F. H. Beard.

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