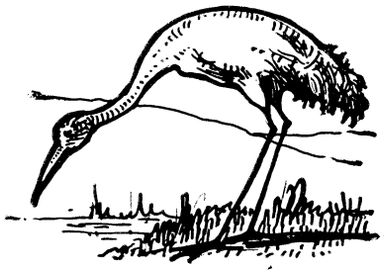
WILDLIFE

NATURE RAMBLINGS



Whooping Crane

➤ WE HEAR much about the great slaughter of passenger pigeons that took place during the early days of the last century, resulting at last in the total extermination of the species.

Less is said about several other birds native to America which have been pushed very near to the doors of final doom; so near that not only the average citizen, but the average professional naturalist, never gets to see them in the wild.

One such is the whooping crane, a great white bird once fairly common all along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Early records attest to the presence of this bird as far north as New England, where it was harried and driven out because it stole corn.

Now only a few of the birds still survive, and they are fighting a battle against extinction. The whooping crane might not have survived, but perished like the incomparably more numerous passenger pigeon, except for the fact that, like all cranes, it is a rather canny bird. The passenger pigeon had no more sense than any other pigeon and flew in clouds over towns blazing with guns and into trees set with nets. The longer-lived crane looked about him more wisely, learned something of man and his destructive ways, and finally came to shun him like the plague.

Another reason for the continued survival of the last few of these fine birds is the nature of their habitat. They are marsh-dwellers, nesting and picking up their living in regions where few human beings care to go, even if they are able. Recently, for deciding to build a dock on the opposite side of the marsh that is the chosen winter habitat of the few remaining whooping cranes, two oil and gas companies were presented a citation of merit from the National Audubon Society.

The two companies, acting within their rights under terms of lease, had wanted to build a loading dock on the edge of the cranes' wintering marsh, with a pipeline and road crossing to it from the other side of the Arkansas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas. After being advised by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, they decided to build the dock some distance away, even though substantial increase in expenditure was involved.

"It is extremely heartening to the Society," John H. Baker, president of the Society, said in presenting the award, "that in this instance the natural desire to market oil and gas in the most economical manner has been tempered with genuine concern for the preservation of a magnificent bird that is fighting for survival. Any serious disturbance to the cranes' habitat at this time might swing the pendulum toward extinction."

The most important news about the whooping cranes, Mr. Baker reports, is the fact that the wild birds again brought back from the North five young whooping cranes born during the past year.

Science News Letter, March 1, 1952

MEDICINE

ACTH Gets Asthma Victim Off Morphine Safely

➤ A 71-YEAR-OLD morphine addict was rapidly gotten off his morphine without the usual withdrawal symptoms by the use of the pituitary gland hormone, ACTH.

This use of the hormone, famous for the relief it brings in cases of arthritis, asthma and various other conditions, is reported by Dr. Samuel E. Di Figlia of Corona, N. Y.

The patient had suffered from bronchial asthma since childhood. He got the morphine habit 12 years ago when he was in the hospital eight months with a broken leg. The morphine was used then to control the pain and the asthma.

For a month before Dr. Di Figlia saw him, the patient had required half a grain of morphine plus adrenalin every four hours and had refused all food. He was in such poor physical condition that the doctor was afraid he would not survive the shock of morphine withdrawal. While arrangements were being made to get him into a hospital, ACTH was cautiously injected. He brightened visibly. A second dose was given six hours later, after which the patient asked for food for the first time in a month.

The doctor then decided to continue ACTH treatment at home. On the second day the patient was up and about and free of asthma; the fourth day he was off the morphine and the adrenalin. The ACTH was stopped within two weeks.

The case is reported officially to fellow physicians in the NEW YORK STATE MEDICAL JOURNAL (Feb. 15).

Science News Letter, March 1, 1952

INVENTION

Keep Rice Bran Oil Fresh

➤ A NEW and better way has been found to keep the oil in rice bran from turning rancid. This means that more nutritious brown rice can be stored for much longer periods, that the rice bran can be used as cattle fodder and that the edible oil can be more easily and economically extracted from the bran.

The method received a patent recently. Its inventors, scientists at the Department of Agriculture's Western Regional Research Laboratory, Albany, Calif., are Drs. Ernest B. Kester and Harold S. Olcott, and George R. Van Atta, all of Berkeley. Their patent, number 2,585,978, has been assigned to the Department.

The scientists discovered that merely by blanching the freshly harvested rough rice with steam or a steam-air combination, the lipase in the oil, which makes it rancid, is substantially inactivated.

The rice is subjected to the steam at temperatures of from 185 to 212 degrees Fahrenheit, for periods of one to 15 minutes. Then it is dried until it contains between 10% and 15% moisture.

For storage, rice is usually dried out to this stage to prevent spoilage by spontaneous heating and fermentation.

A comparison between ordinary dried out rice and rice which had first been blanched and then dried showed that, after eight weeks of storage, the ordinary rice had 6.6% of fatty acid in its oil, while the treated rice had only .5% to .6%. It is the swift increase of fatty acid as a result of lipase activity which makes the rice malodorous and unusable.

The inventors say that this instability of the oil has plagued the rice industry for many years. With this system for licking the instability, crude, neutral, edible oil can be extracted from the rice bran, the bran can be used as cattle fodder and brown rice will be much more readily available as a food for humans.

Science News Letter, March 1, 1952