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CAN WILD PIGEONS SURVIVE

by

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One of the questions raised by bird-lovers in Oregon is whether our band-tailed pigeon can survive the hunting seasons under the present law. Last year the state hunting laws allowed anyone to kill ten pigeons a day from September 1 to September 15. This year the open season is for thirty days. If there are enough wild pigeons to shoot, the hunter has a right to kill ten a day or three hundred birds during the season, providing he is never caught with more than ten in possession at one time. Several people have asked if this is the right law for the future protection of pigeons.

There are several factors in the habits of the pigeon that tend toward its depletion. In the fall, these birds collect in flocks and perch in the tops of trees where a gunner can make a real killing. Besides this, they are stolid in temperament and not easily frightened away. All other game birds such as ducks, quail, grouse, and pheasants lay comparatively large clutches of eggs and raise large families. The mourning dove regularly lays two eggs, but the band-tailed pigeon lays but one egg. Records of two eggs in a nest are very scarce.

In Oregon there are many more ring-necked pheasants than wild pigeons. Yet the State Game Commission has more carefully protected the pheasants. In the Willamette Valley only three days' hunting is allowed, and no more than two male birds can be shot in one day, and not more than four such birds during the entire season of three days. Where they are most abundant in Malheur County in eastern Oregon, no more than four birds in any one day or eight in seven consecutive days are allowed to be killed. As a comparison, while a hunter can shoot three hundred pigeons in one month, he is allowed to take only forty pheasants in the same time.

The most striking tragedy in bird life in America is that of the passenger pigeon, a near relative of the band-tail. The former bird was

once enormously abundant in the eastern United States. Its demise is a gruesome recital of almost unbelievable slaughter that wiped it out in a comparatively brief period.

Some of the early ornithologists reported that the flocks of the passenger pigeon darkened the sun and estimated that there were untold millions breeding throughout the wooded portions of Canada, east of the Rocky Mountains, and from Kansas over to Pennsylvania and New York. They wintered in the southern states from Texas to Louisiana and Florida. They were slain by millions during the middle of the last century. From one region in Michigan, it was reported that three millions of these birds were killed for the market.

It was about forty-five years ago, or the beginning of the present century, that these passenger pigeons were completely exterminated. A few birds were kept in confinement for some time after the wild birds were gone. The last survivor of its race was in the Cincinnati Zoological Park in 1914. Years ago when these birds were over plentiful, it was thought they needed no protection as there were so many of them that they could be bought in the market at a very low price. Today it is almost impossible to buy one of these mounted specimens for \$500.

The band-tailed pigeon of the West might have followed in the path of this eastern bird years ago had the people not been aroused to the necessity to save it. The enactment in 1913 of the federal law for the protection of migratory birds was the most important step that was taken to save our wild pigeon of the West, as well as some other species. Under the provision of this Act, the band-tailed pigeon was removed entirely from the list of game birds.

This pigeon ranges up and down the Pacific Coast and occasionally as far as Colorado and western Texas. Fifty years ago, these pigeons were very abundant in Oregon, and many people made a business of shooting or netting them for the market. Years ago, Mr. O. G. Delaba of Corvallis told us that he caught a great many of these birds in the coast hills. He said he took twenty-five dozen at one spring of his net at Eddyville, and many others

got away. At that time they were shipped to markets in Portland and San Francisco. He shipped as many as eighty dozen at a time. The birds were accustomed to collect around mineral springs or at watering places at certain seasons of the year.

During the winter of 1911-1912, Mr. W. Lee Chambers of Los Angeles reported an immense flight of band-tailed pigeons from Pasa Robles south to Nordhoff, and all through the coast mountains. Great numbers were killed and shipped to San Francisco and Los Angeles. One hunter shipped over two thousand birds. A great many hunters from all through southern California were out daily to shoot pigeons. This is an example of a certain time and place where a great number of pigeons collected together and staid in one locality until they were practically destroyed.

The band-tailed pigeon, after being protected from 1913 up to a few years ago, had increased in numbers, and now that the season has been opened for one month, careful study is needed to estimate how many of these birds are killed through the West so that the present numbers, which are not nearly as abundant as formerly, are not reduced too much.

Some birds survive the hunters that wage war against them every year better than others. The China pheasant which was introduced in Oregon over fifty years ago and the Hungarian partridge have been able to hold their own better than our native game birds. These two foreign birds thrive better in the eastern part of the state than in the West, and they are totally different from native Oregonians like the mountain quail and some of the grouse. In other words, these birds that came from Asia and Europe are more sturdy and tenacious than our native species. From the standpoint of many hunters, they seem to want our nation occupied by foreign birds instead of natives.