

III.

Extracts from "Conserve the Collector," by Dr. JOSEPH GRINNELL (printed 12/2/1915).

It is with considerable apprehension that I have observed an unmistakable decrease in the number of collectors during the past six or eight years. Matters of precision and accuracy in the field of ornithology are, I have no doubt, suffering as a consequence of this forsaking of the "shotgun method." Our faunistic literature, to be of the highest scientific character, must be based on the surest means of establishing the identification of species. The "skin record" is essential, and the availability of this is dependent upon the existence and activity of the collector. The type of field observer who depends solely on long-range identification is becoming more and more prevalent. But the opera-glass student, even if experienced, cannot be depended upon to take the place of the collector. Accuracy in identification of species, and especially subspecies, rests for final appeal upon the actual capture and comparison of specimens. Ornithology as a science is threatened, and it should not be allowed to lapse wholly into the status of a recreation or a hobby, to be indulged in only in a superficial way by amateurs or dilettantes. It is to be doubted whether authoritative and expert systematic and field ornithologists can be developed through any other process than by personal collecting of adequate numbers of specimens in the field. The processes of

hunting and personal preparation of bird skins bring a knowledge of the characters of birds, both in life and as pertaining to their structure and plumage, which can be secured in no other way. The present tendency toward extermination of the collector bears obvious close relationship to the increasing number of extreme sentimentalists. The latter, beginning in a good cause, now continue to urge stringency in State and Federal laws beyond all reason. Those in authority "high up" ought to know better than to contribute to this stringency; but they, yielding to the pressure of the militant sentimentalists, are allowing laws and regulations to go through without giving, apparently, any thought to their duty toward the field naturalist, whose function is essential to the conduct of important phases of ornithological study. Permits should be issued by both State and Federal Governments freely to applicants, upon avowed sincerity of purpose. There should be no hesitation unless there be suspicion as to the honesty of the applicant. Limitations may be properly imposed, as, for instance, by excepting rare or disappearing species like the Ivory-billed Woodpecker or the Caroline Parakeet. This is just as feasible as it is to forbid the sportsman to shoot rare or disappearing game species. Furthermore, the collector, by reason of his more expert knowledge, is far better able to discriminate between closely-allied species, and, because of his appreciation of the facts upon which the principles of conservation are based, is more likely to abstain from killing the wholly-protected species. As a rule, the birds which particularly interest the collector consist of small species, of wide distribution and large numbers. And the daily "bag-limit" of the collector, self-imposed because of the subsequent labour entailed, is small, seldom exceeding twenty birds all told, and, in my own experience, averaging twelve. Collecting, at best, will be indulged in by but comparatively few people, for it involves much more effort than hunting. The successful collector must possess a considerable equipment in the way of industry and artistic skill if he expects to reach recognized standing in the fraternity of collecting ornithologists; and at the outset he must possess the naturalist's gift or "bent," which is itself not common. It can be rightly urged in this connection that the justification for collecting non-game birds is just as well grounded as for shooting or otherwise destroying *game* animals. Practically all small birds can better stand an annual toll than most game birds. Citing a single species of non-game bird, the Audubon Warbler, I believe that its numbers within the State of California at the beginning

of the winter season exceed the combined numbers of all the species of game birds within the State at the beginning of the open season. Yet for the pursuit of game birds 130,000 hunting licences were issued last year here in California alone. In the same State, only 100 permits for scientific collecting were allowed, or only one permit to collect non-game birds to 1,300 licences to hunt game birds! . . . As compared with the value of the game bird shot, does not the bird killed for a specimen come much more nearly justifying its end? The game bird practically ends its career of usefulness when it falls before the gun. It has incited recreation and a certain amount of the aesthetic in the way of admiration. Perhaps the latter obtains for a few minutes or hours after the death of the bird. But it soon goes to the pot, and that is the end of it. With the bird hunted for a specimen, the collector is searching discriminatingly among many species and often among a great many individuals. He is observing many things beyond the mere object of the shot. In addition, full recreative value is being obtained as in the case of game (and this is generally urged nowadays as the value of game—in its service, not as food, but as an object of pursuit and contemplation before killing). The value of a bird shot for a specimen does not end with its death, although it has served the other functions already. The collector prepares the bird with painstaking care, at the same time acquiring added information, and installs it under safe conditions as an object of study and appreciation for all time. Instead of being merely eaten, it becomes a joy for ever. To my mind, there is no more practical reason for shooting a Snipe for sport than for shooting a Savannah Sparrow for a specimen. My thesis is not that hunting game for sport is unjustifiable, but that hunting both non-game and game birds and mammals for specimens is, at least, equally justifiable. The State and Federal warden system should be revised so that the collector and the sportsman shall be treated on the same basis. That is all I am pleading for. The laws and those officers whose duty it is to interpret and enforce them should *allow* collecting, and regulate it, just as is done in the case of hunting. Those in high official position should recognize the claims of the private collector as well as the claims of the sportsman. . . . Collectors themselves probably fully compensate for the number of birds they destroy for specimens in the incidental destruction by them of vermin. Collectors are practically the only people who can and do distinguish between the destructive and harmless Hawks. It is true that in the past collectors have in some instances

behaved indifferently toward people who are sensitive to bird-killing. This lack of sympathy on the part of the collector may be one factor that has brought him into disrepute. It is to be deplored. To control the thoughtless among collectors it is feasible to devise and enforce regulations, such as one to establish a three-mile limit around all cities and even villages of a given maximum size. By similar action already taken in some States hunting is prohibited within specified distances of "public grounds." A system of local refuges and parks, where shooting for any purpose whatever would be prohibited, would certainly be approved by most collectors, and would go far toward meeting the wishes of other lovers of living birds. It should not be forgotten that the collecting ornithologist has furnished the bulk of the reliable data upon which our game laws are based, and upon which the economic value of our non-game birds has been established. Furthermore, the training involved in bird-collecting can surely be given some credit in several cases of eminent men of science in other fields. The making of natural-history collections is useful as a developmental factor, even if dropped after a few of the earlier years in a man's career. Collecting develops scientific capacity; it combines outdoor physical exercise with an appropriate proportion of mental effort, both enlivened with the zest of a most fascinating and at the same time widely suggestive line of inquiry. As a rule, all collecting adds sooner or later to scientific knowledge, either directly through printed contributions from the collectors themselves, or through the subsequent study of the material by others, often after it has been acquired by some public institution. The ultimate fate of practically all private collections is the college or museum. Very few bird skins, for instance, are destroyed, except through fire or other catastrophe. They live on and on, sources of added knowledge and instruction. In conclusion, let me urge that I consider judicious collecting absolutely indispensable to serious ornithological research along certain important lines, namely, faunistics, systematics, migration, and food studies. There is still an enormous amount of investigation to be done along these lines. Right now progress is perceptibly retarded, because the field of ornithology is being avoided or deserted by the younger students. This desertion is often due to difficulties in the way of securing permits and to lack of encouragement on the part of older men. The legal attitude toward collecting should be revised so as to take in the needs and proper demands of the collector, as well as those of the sportsman.