

DESTRUCTION OF BIRDS FOR MILLINERY PURPOSES.

It is difficult to gather the actual statistics of bird-slaughter for millinery purposes, since it can be done only at the expense of much time and labor. We see on every hand—in shop-windows, on the street, in the cars, and everywhere where women are seen—evidence of its enormous extent. We know also that it is carried on more or less almost everywhere, but especially in the neighborhood of the larger cities, or at points within easy access from them, and also at various distant points, which are visited by the millinery taxidermists or their agents for the express purpose of supplying the demands of the hat-trade in bird-skins. At present only a few specific details can be given, relating to only a few localities; but these may be taken as illustrative of what actually occurs at many points, respecting which the facts are known only in a general way. For many of the data here given, we are indebted to statements published from time to time in *Forest and stream*, the well-known New York weekly journal devoted to field-sports and natural history. In an editorial on 'The destruction of small birds,' published a short time since (March 6, 1884), occurs the following: "We know, for example, of one dealer . . . who, during a three-months' trip to the coast of South Carolina last spring, prepared no less than 11,018 bird-skins. A considerable number of the birds killed were, of course, too much mutilated for preparation, so that the total number of the slain would be much greater than the number given. The person referred to states that he handles, on an average, 30,000 skins per annum, of which the greater part are cut up for millinery purposes." The same article, in referring to the destruction of birds for millinery purposes on Long Island, states, that, during the short period of four months, 70,000 were supplied to the New York dealers from a single village.

A writer in the *Baltimore Sun*, of about the same date, gives some account of the destruction of birds at Cobb's Island, on the coast of Virginia. He says, "An enterprising woman from New York has contracted with a Paris millinery firm to deliver during this summer 40,000 or more skins of birds at forty cents apiece. With several taxidermists she was carrying out the contract, having engaged young and old to kill birds of different kinds, and paying them ten cents for each specimen not too much mutilated for millinery purposes. . . . The birds comprised in this wholesale slaughter are mainly the different species of gulls and terns, or sea-swallows, of which many species in large numbers could formerly be found upon this island. But now only few of these graceful birds remain

upon Cobb's Island itself; and the pot-hunters, or rather skin-hunters, have to go to some distance to carry out their cruel scheme. If we consider, that, with each old bird killed,—and only old birds have a suitable plumage,—also many of the young birds, still unable to take care of themselves, are doomed to starvation, this wholesale slaughter becomes still more infamous and criminal."

Cobb's Island was formerly one of the most noted resorts of the terns, smaller gulls, and other shore-breeding birds along our whole coast; but recent visitors to the island report that the once populous colonies of these birds have been almost completely exterminated by the wholesale slaughter referred to by the writer of the foregoing extract.

Similar butchery has been carried on along the sandy shores of Cape Cod, also formerly a noted resort of these birds; it being reported that 40,000 terns were killed there in a single season by one party for the hat-trade. At points where, a few years since, these beautiful birds filled the air with their graceful forms and snowy plumage, now only a few pairs remain.

The same sad havoc has been wrought with the egrets and herons along our southern shores, the statistics of which, could they be presented, would be of startling magnitude. We only know that colonies numbering hundreds, and even thousands, of pairs, have been simply annihilated—wholly wiped out of existence—in supplying the exhaustless demand for egret-plumes. The heronries of Florida suffered first and most severely; later the slaughter was extended to other portions of the Gulf coast. As an instance of the scale on which these operations are carried, it may be mentioned that one of our well-known ornithologists, while on an exploring tour in Texas, heard an agent of the millinery trade soliciting a sportsman to procure for him the plumes of 10,000 white egrets. Although, in the present case, the sportsman had too much humanity to become the abettor of such a heartless scheme, the incident serves to show on what a grand scale the destruction of these birds is attempted; and doubtless the agent did not fail of eventually securing his coveted plunder.

Among the birds most in favor for hat decoration are the various species of grebes, whose soft, furry plumage is particularly adapted to the purpose, being of durable texture, pleasing in effect, and susceptible of being readily dyed any desired tint. Grebes are used to such an extent, that the source of the abundant supply was not at first evident, owing to the comparative scarcity of the birds in the Atlantic states. It is found, however, that the supply is derived from the far west, mainly from

the Pacific slope, where these birds are more abundant, and whence their skins are brought east in bales, like the peltries of the furrier, or the 'robes' of the bison. The number must range far into the tens, if not hundreds, of thousands annually.

Among the smaller birds it is naturally the brighter colored species that furnish most of the victims, especially the orioles, tanagers, grosbeaks, cedar wax-wings, bluebirds, meadow-larks, and golden-winged woodpeckers. No even approximate estimate can be given of the number sacrificed. Only their conspicuous abundance on hats and bonnets, and their greatly decreased numbers, attest the slaughter to which they are subjected. But scarcely a bird can be named — from the rarest to the commonest, from the plainest of the sparrows to the most gorgeously arrayed denizens of the orchard and forest, from the tiniest warblers and humming-birds to jays, kingfishers, cuckoos, and the larger woodpeckers, and even ptarmigans and grouse (in fragments or entire), and the largest of the shore-birds, with bills half a foot in length (an *outré* and grotesque effect seeming to be sometimes especially sought) — that is not to be met with as an appendage of the female head-dress.

The assemblage of diverse and incongruous forms sometimes met with on the same hat is often striking in the extreme; birds from the opposite ends of the earth, and of the ornithological scale of classification, being brought into most inharmonious combination, viewed even from the artistic stand-point. Bearing on this subject, and illustrating the range of taste in such matters, as well as the extent to which birds are used for hat embellishment, may be given the following inventory, furnished by an ornithological friend, of what recently met his eye in a Madison Avenue horse-car in this city. The car contained thirteen women, of whom eleven wore birds, as follows: (1) heads and wings of three European starlings; (2) an entire bird (species unknown), of foreign origin; (3) seven warblers, representing four species; (4) a large tern; (5) the heads and wings of three shore-larks; (6) the wings of seven shore-larks, and grass-finches; (7) one-half of a gallinule; (8) a small tern; (9) a turtle-dove; (10) a vireo and a yellow-breasted chat; (11) ostrich-plumes. That this exhibition was by no means exceptional as to number or variety is obvious to any one who has given close attention to the ornithological displays one daily meets with in street-cars and elsewhere, wherever he may travel.

Advertisements in newspapers, by milliners, of the stock in hand, also give some suggestions of the extent of the traffic in wings and bird-skins; it being not uncommon to see thousands of wings

(plain or fancy, in natural colors or dyed), as well as thousands of bird-skins (mounted or made up) and thousands of plumes (dyed or plain), advertised by a single dealer, while the dealers themselves number hundreds, if not thousands, in each of our larger cities. Add to these the smaller shops, in country and city, throughout the land, and we get at least some comprehension of the extent of the traffic in birds by the milliners, and the support they receive from the feminine portion of our population.

Respecting the traffic abroad, we learn from an English authority, that there were sold in one auction-store in London, during the four months ending April, 1885, 404,464 West Indian and Brazilian bird-skins, and 356,389 East Indian, besides thousands of Impeyan pheasants and birds-of-paradise.

DESTRUCTION OF BIRD-LIFE IN THE VICINITY OF NEW YORK.

To such an extent has the recent fashion of using birds for hat ornaments been carried, that the waters and beaches in this vicinity have been entirely depopulated of their birds. On the coast-line of Long Island the slaughter has been carried to such a degree, that where, a few years since, thousands and thousands of terns were gracefully sailing over the surf-beaten shore and the wind-rippled bays, now one is rarely to be seen.

The demand for sea-birds of white or delicate shades of color was so great, that many of the professional gunners and market-shooters gave up their usual shooting to enter upon what has proved to be a war of extermination. So long as the taxidermists who work for milliners in the large cities would take all the birds that could be supplied, the gunners were shooting day after day, from daylight until dark.

In the spring of 1884 the writer met a taxidermist from New York city, who was then on a trip along the south side of Long Island, for the purpose of making contracts with the gunners to supply him with a certain number of birds in the flesh, per day. He had facilities for making up three hundred skins daily, and was trying to arrange to get that number of birds. In answer to an inquiry as to whether he could find a market for such a number of skins in New York, he replied that he had no local trade, but that his stock was entirely for export to France.

Between Coney Island and Fire Island inlet there are many marshes, meadows, and low-lying islands, which for years have been the breeding-places of thousands of common terns or sea-swallows; and on the sandy beaches the least