

THE VALUE OF WILD LIFE.⁽¹⁾

BY AMBROSE PRATT (Australia).⁽²⁾

When we introduce to our thoughts the subject of wild life and its preservation, it is, I think, necessary for us to clarify our minds and to determine what wild life is. Originally all life was wild including that of man. In the pre-historic age there was no distinction between tame life and wild life, but when we use that phrase to-day almost immediately there is conjured up into the mind a picture of a wall, strictly differentiating one form of animal life from the other. That is because people have become so accustomed in the course of the ages to considering animals which man had subjugated, tamed and domesticated to be different in character and quality from the other animals which still remain wild.

Tracing how wild life was transformed and made of service to civilized society, we realise the following facts. Man in pre-historic times developed into a cleverer hunter, than any of the animals of the sub-human type, and his superior intelligence and his brain-power enabled him to accomplish what all other preying animals were doing with greater difficulty than man by reason of the fact that they were only armed with teeth and claws.

DOMESTICATION AND DEPREDTATION.

The first animal to be subjugated by man was the dog, who became the guardian of his home or cave; and from that first attachment sprang the wonderful friendship between man and dog to-day. Then followed the taming of the cat, who was seen by man to be attacking the rodents which were destroying man's food, which he had stored against future use. The cat also became the friend of man and with the dog followed him wherever he went.

Other animals were then domesticated, and made of use to man as the latter's intelligence developed and he became more civilized, till to-day the list of domesticated animals is a large one.

(1) From Notes of G. C. Earde, Staff reporter of *The Bangkok Times*.

(2) Presented August 18th before the Natural History Section.

But there are other animals still unsubdued, still untamed, moving about jungle fastnesses, who in time become as domesticated as the ones which have been trained for the service of man.

The danger lies in the possibility of the extinction of these species through wanton destruction by man in his desire to hunt game. Every country in the world can give instances of how certain types of animals have become rare owing to the depredation of man, the hunter.

PRESERVATION IN AUSTRALIA.

Giving instances which came under my own observation in Australia of how animal and bird life was being preserved, I cite the case of crops being badly affected by insect pests. An investigation into the causes led to the discovery that while a certain species of bird life was allowed to live in the crop-producing areas, insect pests were non-existent. The farmers had either destroyed or driven away such birds. With the newer understanding of the utility of that bird it was allowed once again to take possession of the fields, and the insect pest disappeared. To-day those birds are welcome visitors to the farmers' fields and are allowed to establish their rookeries round the area.

The next example relates to the koala, an Australian arboreal marsupial, the study of which enabled a young Australian surgeon, who afterwards became very famous, to discover a treatment for infantile paralysis. Other experiments, which might be of great benefit to man, if successful, are being made in connection with the same animal who, with a very heavy fur, prized by people living in the Antarctic regions, was able to live in differing climates without being affected thereby.

PROTECTION NEEDED IN THAILAND.

Those instances I have given to prove that wild life has an inestimable value. I have recently read in the newspapers of Thailand that farmers had suffered greatly from insect pests attacking their crops. From my experiences in Australia I unhesitatingly assure them that, if they would only protect and preserve their bird

life from the ravages of man, they would quickly solve the problem. They should preserve their wild life, equally in the interests of science and for the protection of many beautiful forms of life to be found in this world, in order that the succeeding generations might enjoy them.

GAME LAW NEEDED IN THAILAND.

MR. GUEHLER'S REMARKS.

Mr. Guehler said they had to congratulate themselves on their good fortune in hearing the speech which had just been delivered by Mr. Pratt. His plea was for the protection and preservation of all forms of wild life. He (the speaker) did not think he would be considered indiscreet if he told them that Mr. Pratt had spent a large portion of his fortune in the preservation of that little animal, the the koala, which was on the verge of extinction in Australia. He thought mankind owed Mr. Pratt thanks for that. He also thought that the subject was of great interest to those who lived in this beautiful country as guests, because there did not exist, up to the present, any game laws.

“I should like to take the opportunity, once again, of appealing from this chair to the powers that be in order to do our bit to hasten and to promote Game laws which will protect the animals of this country. If you read the export statistics you will find included in them hundreds of tons of deer-skins and deer-horns. It is all the more remarkable that in this country, where the faith of the Lord Buddha is recognised, as Dr. McCormick Smith puts it, ‘any animal at any time of the year, irrespective of sex and whether old or young, with the exception of the elephant, can be killed by anybody who is in possession of an arms licence.’

“Thailand has an abundancy of wild game, and we who live in Bangkok know that our gardens are well filled with wild birds. It requires only half an hour's walk out of town to notice how abundant the bird life is. But, very often, when I go to office in the morning I meet two or three people going about with traps to catch doves and other birds. Within the period of ten or fifteen years which I have spent in this country I have seen a marked decrease in

the number of birds. These birds can be killed by anybody in Bangkok itself.

“So I wish to take this opportunity to appeal once more that Game Laws should be passed which will prevent the killing of the female, at certain times, and which will prevent the killing of specimens of wild game; this includes a large variety of bird life which is being destroyed every year.”

Mr. Guehler then expressed his thanks to the lecturer for a very instructive speech, and hoped that it would stimulate local people in the desire to protect and preserve all forms of wild life in this beautiful country of Thailand.

COMMENTS OF THE BANGKOK TIMES.

Over a period of twelve years animal lovers in Siam, Thai and alien, have been endeavouring to interest the Government in preserving the wild life of the country. Laws have been drafted, the Committee of Legislative Redaction have had the matter in hand, and the subject has been before any number of Ministers of State. Despite all efforts a law to give the wild life of Siam its first freedom from unregulated indiscriminate slaughter has yet to be. It has been publicly stated by experts on the subject that “no other country in the world has been so indifferent of its wild animals, and this is all the more surprising in that Thailand is the most outstanding follower of the Great Teacher, one of whose noble injunctions was against the taking of life.” Forests and fisheries are preserved, but the wild life finds no friend in the Government or the Assembly. Thus at the headquarters of the Prasak river trade, Gengkoi, in one dry season three thousand skins of sambhur, and ten thousand skins of barking deer alone have been handled. In five years it has been estimated that from this region alone no less than seventy-five thousand deer skins have been traded. Who benefits by this trade, Thai or Chinese, or both?

The following table shows the export of Deer-hides and Deer-horns from Thailand from B. E. 2476 to 2480:—

2476	2477	2478	2479	2480
<i>Deer-Hides, in Kilogrammes.</i>				
176,820	193,080	219,780	279,120	210,600
<i>Deer-Horns, in Kilogrammes.</i>				
28,800	25,860	12,180	26,580	15,120

As Dr. Hugh McCormick Smith pointed out years ago, unless this indiscriminate slaughter is stopped it will be "eternally too late" as far as Thailand is concerned.

