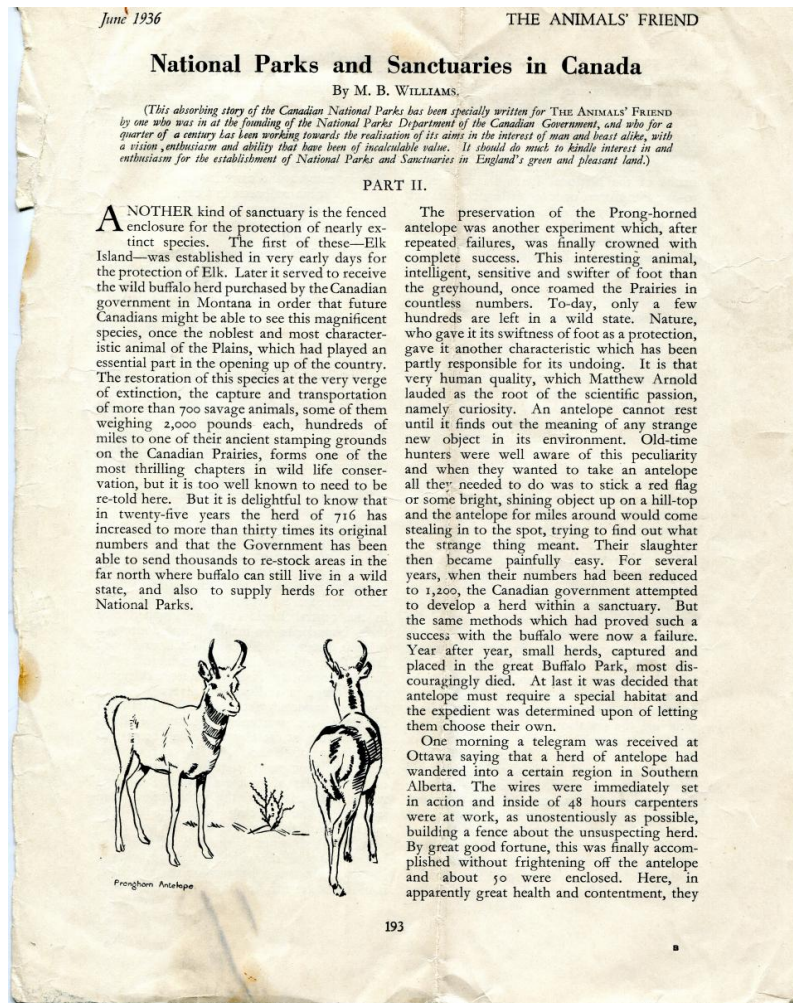




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“National Parks and Sanctuaries in Canada: Part II”

Williams, M. B.



“National Parks and Sanctuaries in Canada: Part II.” First page.

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This 1936 article by M. B. Williams is for England's *The Animals' Friend* magazine and aims to kindle interest in and enthusiasm for the establishment of national parks and sanctuaries in England.

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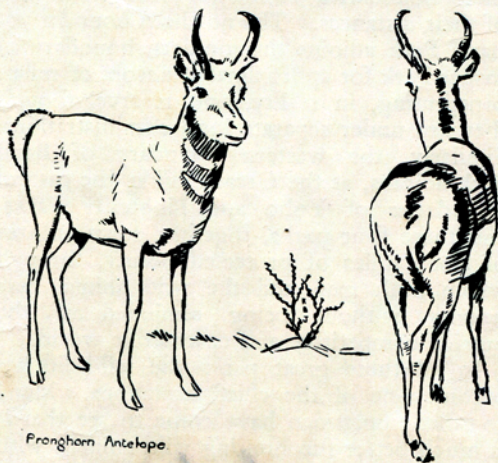
National Parks and Sanctuaries in Canada

By M. B. WILLIAMS.

(This absorbing story of the Canadian National Parks has been specially written for THE ANIMALS' FRIEND by one who was in at the founding of the National Parks Department of the Canadian Government, and who for a quarter of a century has been working towards the realisation of its aims in the interest of man and beast alike, with a vision, enthusiasm and ability that have been of incalculable value. It should do much to kindle interest in and enthusiasm for the establishment of National Parks and Sanctuaries in England's green and pleasant land.)

PART II.

ANOTHER kind of sanctuary is the fenced enclosure for the protection of nearly extinct species. The first of these—Elk Island—was established in very early days for the protection of Elk. Later it served to receive the wild buffalo herd purchased by the Canadian government in Montana in order that future Canadians might be able to see this magnificent species, once the noblest and most characteristic animal of the Plains, which had played an essential part in the opening up of the country. The restoration of this species at the very verge of extinction, the capture and transportation of more than 700 savage animals, some of them weighing 2,000 pounds each, hundreds of miles to one of their ancient stamping grounds on the Canadian Prairies, forms one of the most thrilling chapters in wild life conservation, but it is too well known to need to be re-told here. But it is delightful to know that in twenty-five years the herd of 716 has increased to more than thirty times its original numbers and that the Government has been able to send thousands to re-stock areas in the far north where buffalo can still live in a wild state, and also to supply herds for other National Parks.



Pronghorn Antelope.

The preservation of the Prong-horned antelope was another experiment which, after repeated failures, was finally crowned with complete success. This interesting animal, intelligent, sensitive and swifter of foot than the greyhound, once roamed the Prairies in countless numbers. To-day, only a few hundreds are left in a wild state. Nature, who gave it its swiftness of foot as a protection, gave it another characteristic which has been partly responsible for its undoing. It is that very human quality, which Matthew Arnold lauded as the root of the scientific passion, namely curiosity. An antelope cannot rest until it finds out the meaning of any strange new object in its environment. Old-time hunters were well aware of this peculiarity and when they wanted to take an antelope all they needed to do was to stick a red flag or some bright, shining object up on a hill-top and the antelope for miles around would come stealing in to the spot, trying to find out what the strange thing meant. Their slaughter then became painfully easy. For several years, when their numbers had been reduced to 1,200, the Canadian government attempted to develop a herd within a sanctuary. But the same methods which had proved such a success with the buffalo were now a failure. Year after year, small herds, captured and placed in the great Buffalo Park, most discouragingly died. At last it was decided that antelope must require a special habitat and the expedient was determined upon of letting them choose their own.

One morning a telegram was received at Ottawa saying that a herd of antelope had wandered into a certain region in Southern Alberta. The wires were immediately set in action and inside of 48 hours carpenters were at work, as unostentatiously as possible, building a fence about the unsuspecting herd. By great good fortune, this was finally accomplished without frightening off the antelope and about 50 were enclosed. Here, in apparently great health and contentment, they

have continued to live, and their numbers to-day total over 300 head.

The Bird Sanctuary is not a National Park, but the protection of wild animals led naturally to the protection of wild birds, and when, in 1916, the Migratory Birds Treaty was concluded between the United States and Canada, the enforcement of the Act was placed in the hands of the National Parks Branch, which to-day administers over 60 bird sanctuaries and carries on many activities for the protection of bird life. Canada has a unique responsibility in this respect because the breeding grounds of many species lie within her borders. Though waterfowl and songbirds fly south in the autumn to winter in warmer climes, they breed only in Canada and the protection of their breeding grounds becomes each year more important. As settlement has advanced lakes and swamps, once isolated and secure from molestation, have ceased to be safe. The draining of swamps for agricultural purposes, the lowering of lake levels, as well as the building of roads and the coming of the motor car have destroyed many former homes of birds and increased the number and power of their enemies so that sanctuaries have become a necessity if wild bird life is to be preserved. Fortunately, wild birds, like wild animals, respond very quickly to protection, emphasizing the fact that when a wild species disappears it is almost always due to the thoughtlessness or predatoriness of man.

One thing which grows increasingly clear is that the disappearance of a single species of plant or animal life, may not only be a loss to mankind by depriving him of a source of beauty and interest and one more example of life's infinite, creative power, but that it may effect unsuspected changes in the environment through its inter-relation with other forms of life. For instance, a water-plant with the unpoetic name of Eel-grass, which has been reported to be disappearing, has lately been receiving the attention of the National Parks staff, not because it has any special beauty of its own, but because it forms an important part of the natural food of wild geese and certain other waterfowl. In order to preserve these species it has become necessary to protect Eel-grass, and this is now being done. The recent discovery of the inter-relation between the life-cycles of trees and insectivorous birds provides a new measuring rod for the passage of time and opens up a new path for scientific exploration. Science, indeed, supplies us

continually with fresh proofs of this strange inter-dependence between all parts of nature. They indicate, more and more clearly, the truth of the theory that Life is a whole. It may be that you cannot touch it anywhere without the reverberations spreading to its outermost circle. The poets knew this long ago and—who can say?—perhaps, William Blake's extravagant assertion:

A robin redbreast in a cage

Puts all Heaven in a rage,

may one day come to be accepted as a serious "scientific fact."

To-day, Canada possesses 18 National Parks, with a total area of over 12,000 square miles. Seven of these are large scenic parks, four are fenced enclosures for the preservation of nearly extinct species, two are Historic Parks, and two are small areas set apart for public use in such well-known scenic regions as the Thousand Islands of the St. Lawrence River, and the Thirty Thousand Islands of Georgian Bay. In both these regions the Government purchased a number of islands so that the public may always have free access to them. They are visited every summer by thousands of picnickers and bathers and supply happy camping grounds for Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, and many other camping parties.

The scenic parks of the Rockies and the two great lake and woodland reserves on the prairies in one of which Grey Owl makes his home, form a truly noble possession. On the eastern slope of the Rockies alone they cover an area stretching in a continuous line 200 miles from north to south and from 30 to 70 from east to west. Four of the parks in the central Rockies are so situated that their boundaries co-incide throughout part of their distances. The northern boundary of Banff Park adjoins the southern boundary of Jasper Park for approximately a score of miles, constituting, in reality, one reserve, though they are under separate local administrations. Similarly, the western boundary of Banff Park adjoins, at the Great Divide, the eastern boundaries of Yoho and Kootenay Parks, and these four parks, together, form an area of 8,000 miles of protected beauty, through which both man and the wild animal may wander without being reminded of the outside competitive and destructive world.

In all these great parks the wild life has become one of the chief attractions. Many so-called sportsmen have come to see that it is much better fun hunting wild animals with

a camera than with a gun; parents bring their children there to see wild animals living natural lives instead of the strange lives in Zoos; classes in biology come from the universities, finding that living subjects are much better than lifeless and stuffed exhibits in museums; while the simple nature lover has found a new joy in the landscape, the joy of living things. In these great sanctuaries men are to-day recovering with a strange thrill their ancient companionship with Nature and finding room again for that old sense of wonder at the mystery and miracle of her ways for which our mechanical and material civilisation has often little room.



Photo by]

[Canadian National Railways
Bears in Jasper National Park, Alberta.

Australian Forests Suffer from Loss of Animals

UP till the beginning of the present century the forests of the Eastern States of Australia literally teemed with possums and koalas or native bears—these rare and delightful marsupials which are known favourably throughout the world. The creatures were so plentiful that it was impossible to walk a mile anywhere in the bush without seeing dozens of the wonderful little animals on the ground and in the trees. But then, unfortunately, someone discovered that the skins of these harmless little creatures made warm rugs and overcoats, and a ruthless slaughter followed. The possums and bears were pursued relentlessly; countless millions were slaughtered, and it was not until a few years ago that the Government, in response to numerous public protests, prohibited further killing. But the marsupials had been well-nigh exterminated, and to-day are only rarely seen in the remotest parts of the bush, and in sanctuaries.

There were many persons who believed that the "balance of Nature" could not be upset

in such a manner without serious repercussions, and they have proved correct.

Since the slaughter of the marsupials a plant pest, which was formerly kept in check by the animals, has been increasing by leaps and bounds. This pest is mistletoe, which has now obtained such a hold that it is menacing the valuable forests of Eastern Australia. Mistletoe slowly strangles tree life; at first it merely decreases the wood increment of the tree, but if allowed to prosper it invariably kills its own host. Authorities agree that if the pest is allowed to continue unchecked it will mean an annual loss of millions of dollars to the Australian timber industry.

In view of this, forestry experts have been frantically trying various artificial methods of controlling the pest, but no satisfactory results have been obtained.

The pest is definitely attributed to the slaughter of the possums and bears. We are now paying the penalty for years of indiscriminate slaughter of these bush friends—the possum and the native bear.

It is now realized that the only satisfactory results in controlling the pest will be secured by adjusting the "balance of Nature." Experiments with bears and possums in sanctuaries have proved that the animals eat the mistletoe with relish, and numbers of these marsupials are to be released in the forest to combat the pest.

(From *Our Dumb Animals*.)