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## EVOLUTION OF THE IOWA STATE FISH & GAME DEPARTMENT

GEORGE BENNETT

In these critical and more or less uncertain days, a definitely good and logical word sometimes gets into company that travesties and distorts its meaning, and we shun using it for this reason. We look for some other assemblage of letters to express our thoughts. And in selecting a title for this brief paper, we hesitated at "evolution," but as nothing else seemed so well fitted to meet the claims of our subject, the heading, as announced, was adhered to.

For there is no uncertainty about a scientific evolution, allied to an intelligent and progressive purpose, as it stands for change, steady, gradual and effective, embracing the constant and ever-increasing opportunities it meets, until a vastly different general situation is reached, where all of the past that is worth preserving is retained, but where the constructive and discriminating alignments of the accompanying years have added immeasurably in general character and utility.

This is just what a careful review of the past seven years of the history and records of the State of Iowa Fish & Game Department reveals. On April 1, 1919, this Department found itself with a new directing head, but this new head was faced with a financial deficit that might well have discouraged the average man. So deeply in debt did he find the Department, whose interests he had undertaken to care for, that nearly the entire working staff had to be discharged and those who remained, wait six months for their pay.

It is well to remember here that the Fish & Game Department is unlike every other governmental sphere of effort, in that it is not financed by state appropriation, but receives its working funds from game, fishing and other license fees. Thus the Department runs under its own power, and should there be mismanagement in administration, the only recourse is to fall back on its own resources, and remedy, as best it can, the situation that has arisen. And this was done at this time by calling a new man to the helm, as indicated.

Happily this new executive was not an entire stranger to the

Department, as for a period of fourteen years he had filled a post on its staff, known as Superintendent of the Mississippi River Division, this naturally embracing a knowledge of and insight into matters pertaining to fish and fishing, as related to the great river constituting Iowa's border line.

Through careful and systematic handling of debtor and creditor columns, what had been an adverse amount eventually became its opposite, and the credit balance so secured has been maintained and increased. A balance on the right side once reached, has never been suffered to get away, the rule being that it shall be sufficient to care for any reasonable special demand that may be made on the Department's treasury, while the routine call for every day subsistence is met as occasion arises. In other words, sound financial business procedure having been established, this important advance has been maintained, and those whose duty it is, as auditors to examine these tables, have given them their unanimous and hearty endorsement.

As a specific part of the work of the Department consists in seeing that the law is obeyed in the matter of hunting and fishing, the deputy warden, on whom this work largely devolves, is naturally an important factor in patrolling the district to which he is assigned. But while a man has ever to be on the watch for the law-breaker, occasions arise where considerable tact and discrimination is necessary, in order that severity be not meted out where uncalled for, while the real offender goes free.

It is the declared policy of the Department that the deputy warden, while intelligently supervising his district, and dealing with offences against fish and game as the law provides, be recognized as a man in the community to be trusted rather than feared, and whose advice and friendship will be welcomed at all times in the matter of protection of all bearing on the out-of-doors. Naturally the everyday citizen wishes to preserve that around him which contributes so much to his happiness and welfare, and the wide-awake deputy looks to him for co-operation and support. A result such as this, it is the Department's endeavor to promote at all times.

But the Department stands for much more than the mere policing of the State relative to illegal hunting and fishing. A moment's thought will reveal the necessity for this. In order that Iowa may possess a generous supply of game, from which the hunter can take his toll according to law, there must be food and cover for its sustenance and shelter, and if the State's streams and lakes are to abound in fish, their waters and environment must be

cared for and protected in a manner that will respond to the requirements of the living creatures whose natural habitat is there.

As is generally known, the topographical character of Iowa is such, that its entire area, less a comparatively small per centage, can be brought under cultivation. At first this would seem to be a material advantage, but a study of the situation reveals the reverse of this. Because, while extensive stretches of fruitful soil have their own specific appeal, in order that these may fully function in the matter of crop production, there must be the concomitant of moisture as represented by water in general, of trees which distribute and retard the flow of water, in addition to contributing much else of supreme importance, and of low-lying areas which should never be denuded of their watery contents, as these are necessary as a working part in nature's great machine. And then remembering the magnificent police and protective efforts of our birds, particularly in the spring of the year, how imperative it is that these royal helpers have brush and cover.

The ease in bringing the State of Iowa under cultivation, has resulted in her undoing, and the wild creatures she needs to economically function, robbed of their birthright, have gone, while poisons and insecticides have taken the place of the feathered helpers. And the removal of trees where originally they guarded and held intact the soil, has resulted in the erosion and destruction of fertile spots, and the fouling of transparent streams.

Hence, the Department which is expected to promote a generous supply of game in Iowa, is faced with the problem of restoring areas that have been despoiled and ravaged. And while logical procedure would indicate that the individual farmer retrace his steps, as far as possible, and carry out drastic changes on his farm holding, to effect this needs time and a course of education. Meanwhile a stop-gap policy and a very wise one has been inaugurated in the way of setting aside certain tracts as sanctuaries and refuges, where wild creatures are immune from being slaughtered or interfered with at any time.

The Department has entered into the locating of these cities of refuge for these lowly dwellers with characteristic energy. The Legislature of 1925 formulated a statute giving the Department's chief warden the authority to declare any state park a wild life sanctuary, thus promoting a co-operation with the State Board of Conservation, which enhances the value of the state park movement. In addition to this, the same Legislature empowered the State Warden to set aside as wild life refuges or sanctuaries any land owned by the State of Iowa that is suited to the purpose.

As illustrations of the working of the legislation quoted, attention is drawn to the setting aside of Round Lake in Clay County, Virgin Lake in Palo Alto County and Little Gar Lake in Dickinson County, where waterfowl have a perpetual sanctuary and cannot be shot at any time. Again, take such generous stretches of territory as the Backbone State Park in Delaware County, the Keosauqua and the Dolliver State Parks, etc. Here no interference is allowed with wild creatures the State has decided must have protection, and they cannot be meddled with.

About a year previous to the Department's present administration assuming the reins, the State Game Farm at Clive, near Des Moines, had been leased and preparations made in the erection of buildings and other equipment for the breeding of wild birds in captivity, looking to the stocking of state areas from this source. Very few birds had been bred, however, up to April 1, 1919, but since then, as an illustration of the venture, the ring-neck pheasant was experimented with so successfully, that during three days in the month of October, 1925, an open season was permitted for shooting the birds, and great interest aroused among the sportsmen. Wild turkeys are now being bred at the farm for later distribution in the sanctuaries. And as an evidence of the popular interest in the Game Farm, the number of visitors is large and on the increase.

In all that pertains to the finny tribe, the Department is expected to exert its best efforts that Iowa's waters be well supplied with fish, particularly those species usually designated as game fish, the special choice of the angler, and a review of the years shows no small activity in what has been accomplished. Seven years ago, one hatchery alone existed and that at Spirit Lake, Dickinson County, where the artificial production of pike was carried out.

At the present time, in addition to the Spirit Lake plant, which is producing more than ever it did, another pike hatchery has been located at Clear Lake, Cerro Gordo County, and two trout hatcheries one at Lansing and another in the Backbone State Park, Delaware County. The last named is particularly an inviting piece of constructive work, fed by a very fine stream known as the Richmond Spring. And in connection with this equipment in the Backbone, ponds will be prepared for the breeding of bass, the production of these fish having to be cared for in a different way from either pike or trout.

In the spring of 1925 the State acquired, through the foresight of the Department, an area of land adjoining Big Lake north of Lansing, thus controlling this body of water. Big Lake is a

comparatively shallow stretch of 740 acres, adjacent to and fed by the Mississippi, and the Department has by raising the land boundaries a little and sinking a deep artesian well, brought into active operation what is considered one of the finest natural bass hatcheries in the country, thus further increasing the sum total of effective fish-producing resources.

The question may be asked, "Why these artificial arrangements for maintaining the supply of Iowa's fish?" With all the State's excellent rivers and lakes, will not an abundance be forthcoming in the natural order of things?

We may answer, that when we have brought back the legitimate functioning of Iowa's natural conditions, through the re-forestation of what were wooded areas, the cultivation of undergrowth, the returning of her straightened streams to their previous winding course with their tree-lined banks, the checking of indiscriminate drainage, and the deliverance of her waters from the poisonous injection of pollution, when this has taken place, we shall not need fish hatcheries, but until then we shall. As the situation stands, we are dealing with un-natural conditions, and artificial plans have to be formulated to compete with these.

Another avenue of effort the present administration has fostered and materially extended is what is known as "fish-rescue work," mainly connected with the Mississippi river. Through the rise of the waters of the river in the early year, hollow places along its banks become flooded, and inevitably stocked with fish. As the water level subsides, these hollows cut off from the main channel, become detached ponds, where through evaporation of the water the fish will die if not removed. And so crews of men, furnished with the necessary equipment, are assigned to the work of rescuing the imprisoned fish, through seining the ponds and then setting them free, either in the main channel or conveying them to stations specially constructed to receive them, ere these fish are transported to inland waters of the State, to replenish streams and lakes badly needing them.

The volume of this rescue work has been much increased and two crews are now engaged all the time, from June to November, operating between the stations of Lansing and Sabula, from which the fish destined for the inland waters are distributed, in addition to those set free in the main channels of the river.

Several years since, the progressive spirit of the Department was demonstrated at the State Fair, Des Moines, where some exhibits of its activities were displayed. At first, these consisted wholly of specimens of game and ornamental birds, but it being

evident that the interest manifested by visitors to the cages called for a more extended display, such was carried into effect.

And so a consignment of living fish was brought to the Fair Grounds, fish from Iowa's waters, and though at first this exhibit was confined to placing a limited number in two long cattle troughs, the experiment achieved such popularity, that, following in the wake of this, attractively built aquariums appeared with native fish of many species swimming at ease, so placed that visitors could enjoy watching them at close range. This fish exhibit, to use a little slang, has proved the best "drawing card" at the Department's station, if not in the complete outfit of the fair.

In addition to the display of birds, cages are also now occupied by certain species of native mammals, such as the fox, the raccoon, opossum, skunk, etc., all serving to feature and illustrate what the Department specifically stands for, and to minister to that natural, innate love for creatures of the wild, possessed by so many who crowd where there is an opportunity of satisfying this desire. Again, varied collections of birds' eggs have been placed on view, as also mussel shells in great variety, these not only valuable from the standpoint of the naturalist, but representing an important commercial output of Iowa, the pearl button industry.

Of recent years, an addition has been made to the Department's annual program at the State Fair, by the presentation of its work and the claims of the out-of-doors through a series of addresses, illustrated by still and moving pictures. Though this has been carried out under a great handicap, because of the necessity of the company being assembled in a close, dark tent, with the sun's rays beating down on the roof, thus inducing extreme heat, the step has been a successful one, and with future improvements for the comfort of the audience in contemplation, the Department's lecture auditorium promises to be one of the popular rallying-places on the grounds.

Furthermore, the Department has co-operated with the Macbride Lakeside Laboratory at the Okoboji Lakes, in engaging an expert to make a survey of the plant life of these lakes in its relationship to the needs and welfare of their fish. Allusion is made to this in an interesting article by Dr. Robert Wylie, at that time director of the laboratory, which appeared in the July-September issue of "Iowa Conservation" for 1923. Also plans are now under consideration for co-operating with the Iowa Academy of Science in problems bearing on its Zoology Section. And in this connection it may be stated that the Department is preparing for an expert and scientific investigation into the food habits of the ring-neck pheas-

ant, an enquiry which has both for Department and Academy, a direct and mutual appeal.

This brief review reveals much that will be of interest to the Iowa Academy of Science, especially its biological section, showing as it does a systematic effort to expand opportunity in a rational and thorough way. While the Fish & Game Department of the State is, as never before, the intelligent and warm friend of the loyal sportsman, it is steadily developing and logically, too, as the State's great operating factor in the compelling field of wild life conservation. This has been brought about by the persistent and wide-awake activities of a man of vision, William Ebin Albert, its chief warden. This capable state executive is a well-known and justly esteemed dweller of Lansing, Iowa, where he has lived practically from birth. Let us accord him our hearty support, and thus promote the efficiency and welfare of a great cause!

IOWA CITY, IOWA.