

THE NARROW VIEW

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I was surprised when I read in the "Wood, Field and Stream" column of the New York Times, January 4, 1957, where the writer in describing a duck hunter made the following statement: "He shoots only blacks, mallards and broadbills, passing up buffleheads, old squaws, whistlers and other trash."

It reminded me of a conversation I had with an eminent naturalist. We had talked about our favorite birds. I remembered him saying, "I guess mine is the Bufflehead. I always get a kick out of the striking contrast of that little duck."

I don't know how the duck hunter of that article really felt, but the writer certainly reflected the narrow view that is all too prevalent. Now I don't have any quarrel with the sports-minded hunter. But he is usually the type of fellow who, after a day in the field, can return empty-handed — and is still satisfied.

My quarrel is with the hunter whose vision is no wider than the sight on his rifle. He doesn't have any clear idea of the complex interdependence in nature. He doesn't realize that the prey of which he is in pursuit may depend in large measure for its survival on some forms of life that he calls "trash."

He doesn't have any conception of the esthetic — indeed, of the spiritual values of our wilderness and wildlife resources. These, of course, are intangible values. And when we deal in guns and wars and practical things like that, it is difficult to make these higher values prevail.

Take, for instance, another story that appeared in the same newspaper on January 14, 1957. I don't mean to single out The Times, but these articles just happened to have appeared in it. This story reads in part as follows:

"After a long, see-saw struggle, the United States Navy has successfully seized a four-acre beachhead at Cape Hallett (Antarctica) from an army of 150,000 penguins and begun to build a base there . . .

"The battle with the penguins began when a landing was made . . . The beach is a triangular area that was completely occupied by Adelie penguins that had just completed hatching their eggs. The pot-bellied little balls of gray fuzz that were their chicks were everywhere. But this was the only level ground for the station . . .

"The penguins and their offspring eyed these preparations with interest but did not move. They know no enemies that walk either on two feet or four.

"Then the battle began. Sailors gathered the squawking youngsters into baskets while their shipmates threw nets over the struggling adults. The four acres of ground were a scene of bedlam, the air pierced by sharp, indignant cries until all the birds in the area had been moved outside the enclosure . . .

"When a tractor bulldozed the area later so buildings could be erected,

it was found that the ground was a mixture of gravel and penguin guano to a great depth — the residue of centuries of penguin habitation."

I wonder if another station site could have been found. I wonder whether it was necessary to land during the breeding season. Maybe so. But I really wonder how much thought the Navy gave to these questions.

I suppose one could argue that it doesn't matter too much. After all, there are plenty of Penguins. If their numbers should drop to a few hundred, then that's the time to worry. There was a time, however, when we didn't have to worry about the Passenger Pigeons.

In fact, there was a time when our wilderness and wildlife existed in such great abundance that we never had to worry. Game was shot relentlessly — either for food or sport. And trees were hacked down ruthlessly — either to clear the land or to stoke the fires of the coming civilization. Yet there was always more. Our ancestors didn't worry — as a result we have to worry.

Now we see our precious few resources challenged at every turn — for fishing, for mining, for lumbering, for building, for hunting, for playing. Even when we think we have won a fight to save an area or a species, we find it threatened again.

Two years ago the people of New York State turned back a bid to amend the "Forever Wild" provision of the state constitution. Under this provision the 2,500,000 acre preserve must be maintained in its natural state. Yet on March 18, 1957 the Joint Legislative Committee on Winter Tourists recommended a study of the feasibility of private development of ski facilities on state forest preserve lands. This would mean another battle to change the constitution — a battle which could destroy the "forever wild" principle.

While, once more, this provision is being challenged, a bill has been introduced in Congress which would, in effect, apply to the nation the "forever wild" principle of the New York constitution. The bill would establish a National Wilderness Preservation System under which most of the lands now owned by the government would be preserved in their natural state.

How do you explain our longing to hold on to our wilderness and its resources? Maybe it can't be explained in practical terms. Perhaps the primeval thoughts of Jim Casy in "Grapes of Wrath" best express our deeper sentiments: "There was the hills, an' there was me, an' we wasn't separate no more. We was one thing. An' that one thing was holy."

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NOTES

Least Tern in Central New York State. — Hurricane "Connie", which came inland through the Carolinas and crossed Central New York on August 13, 1955, was responsible for what appears to be the first record of the Least Tern (*Sterna Albifrons*) in the central part of the state. See 1956 Kingbird V (4): 103.

The day following the storm I observed an adult bird in summer plumage flying along a gravel bar at the Branchport end of Keuka Lake. For at least a half hour