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MALHEUR (LAKE-BLITZEN VALLEY) MIGRATORY WATERFOWL REFUGE

The romance of the old West is still much in evidence on one of the nation's greatest wildfowl refuges located at an elevation of about 4000 feet at the west base of the Steins Mountains in eastern Oregon. Some sixty years ago a far-sighted young Californian, Pete French by name, in search of good cattle range wandered into what is now known as the Blitzen Valley, a wide flat plain watered by a fine stream, green with wide meadows of luxuriant grasses, interspersed with thickets of willow, and with great areas of swampy ground and shallow ponds. Mr. French was truly a pioneer builder. His cattle business prospered, he built long fence lines, barns and corrals of juniper wood which still stand in a state of perfect preservation. His cattle numbered thousands and his ranch, well managed, contained ^{OVER} some 132,000 acres.

About half of this area is now included in the Malheur Migratory Waterfowl Refuge, administered by the Biological Survey of the Department of Agriculture. Mr. Stanley Jewett, the best expert in Oregon on wild bird and animal life, has been placed in charge of the project. His sixteen years' experience in the field service of the Biological Survey has well equipped him for handling this large and important refuge. Malheur and Harney Lakes, ^{with the Blitzen valley,} comprise an extensive area, almost an empire in itself, of ~~some~~ 164,000 acres of what is conceded by naturalists, sportsmen, and conservationists as the greatest single wildlife area in the nation.

Within the boundaries of this refuge such favorite water-fowl as Canada Geese, Mallards, Pintails, Gadwalls, Redheads,

Ruddy Ducks and Cinnamon Teal nest and rear their young by the thousands, while during the fall and spring migrations myriads of northern-bred ducks and geese find a haven of refuge on Malheur Lake and in the swamps of the Blitzen Valley where natural food is abundant.

Not only are ducks and geese found here but the great American egret, the White-faced Glossy Ibis and the Black-necked Stilt, common in sub-tropical regions, nest in colonies on this refuge. The Sandhill Crane, formerly common over most of the nation, but now greatly reduced in numbers, still come to breed ~~in large numbers~~ on this refuge. Herons, bitterns, coots, grebes, and great colonies of California and Ring-billed Gulls, Forster's Terns, black Terns, and other marsh-loving birds hold the interest of the visitor.

These are not all, for a great variety of the snipe and plover family live along the lake shores and in the swamps. The stately avocet with its turned-up bill, stalks about the shallows. The Long-billed Curlew combs the salt-grass flats for its diet of beetles and grasshoppers. The western willett, screaming her protests against the intruder, solemnly perches on a fence post to watch the passer-by; and many other voices are heard, the plaintive cry of the Kildeer, the cooing call of the Wilson Phalarope, and the flight song of the Jack Snipe as the sun sinks in the West. All these delight the lover of nature. The crackling song of the Tule Wrens, the witchely-witchely ^{call} song of the Yellowthroats, the ~~innumerable~~ multitude of Yellow-headed and Red-winged Blackbirds all add to the bird chorus.

Of upland game and song birds there is an unusual pop-

ulation. Sage Hens stalk about the sagebrush covered slopes, and the California or Valley Quail scurry under the thickets. The introduced Hungarian Partridge and the Ring-necked Pheasant find the climatic conditions here to their liking.

During a ten-day study of bird life on this refuge in May of 1934, a total of 120 species of birds was recorded, and in the fall and winter months many more may be added to this number.

Although birds, both in number of species and number of individuals, form the greatest of the wildlife population, the visitor can find a large number of beaver along the Blitzen River. Mule Deer in bands frequent the willow thickets and meadows, and the Prong-horned Antelope roam the sagebrush flats.

Malheur and Harney Lakes were first set aside as a federal wildfowl refuge in 1908 by special executive order of President Theodore Roosevelt. Twenty-five years later found this whole lake region dried up and practically destroyed because of the lack of water and the change of conditions. Waterfowl have diminished in numbers so rapidly during the past decade that a year ago last spring funds were allotted to the Biological Survey for restoring, breeding, and feeding areas that had been destroyed. After a study of many regions from the Atlantic to the Pacific, Malheur Lake was chosen as No. 1 on the list.

The Biological Survey has a large force of men at work developing this wildlife refuge. Dykes are being built to better conserve the water of both Malheur Lake and the Blitzen Valley, and canals to carry water to favored feeding grounds. Roads are

being constructed to better patrol the area and combat fire during the late summer, telephone lines for better communication and look-out towers to assist refuge protectors in guarding wildlife. These and other improvements will make this region a super refuge, one of the greatest in the United States.
