

Notes on Grebe-skin traffic

Since the wearing of grebe skins became fashionable, untold numbers of western grebes have been slaughtered in the lake region of southern Oregon to supply the millinery market. Scores of professional hunters have been busy shooting these birds and shipping out bales of skins, until now there are comparatively few grebes in this locality.

Because fashion defreed it, the snowy herons are on the border of extermination. In many places where the terns lived, the colonies have been annihilated. The story of the tern is similar to the heron. Wherever it has been found on seashore or inland lakes, it has been sought by the plume hunter. The long, pointed wings and deeply-forked tail of <sup>the tern</sup> ~~this~~ ~~bird~~ were needed for hat trimmings. The peculiar sympathetic habit of this <sup>bird</sup> led to its extinction in some places. Whenever a hunter winged one of them and it fell fluttering to the water instead of the other terns flying away, they hovered about the fallen comrade and were shot down as fast as the hunter could load. The dead bodies were tossed aside after the wings and tail were cut off, and this plumage netted the hunter about forty cents a <sup>piece</sup> dozen.

The western grebe now seems to be the greatest sufferer at the hands of the market hunter. This diver of the glistening-white breast and silver-gray back is sought not without reason. The grebe hunters call the skin of this bird fur rather than feathers, because it is so tough it can be scraped and handled like a hide, and because of the thick warm plumage that seems more like the fur of an animal than the skin of a bird. These skins, when prepared and placed on the market in the form of coats and capes, bring the prices of the most expensive furs.

When the first grebe skins were sold a number of years

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ago, they netted the hunter about seventy-five cents each. This started the traffic all through the lake region of southern Oregon, where the birds have extensive breeding grounds. It was no trouble at all for a hunter to go out and make twenty or thirty dollars before breakfast. Many men started in the business, and at one time there were over a dozen grebe hunters stationed along the north end of Tule Lake only. Not only the professional hunters were at work, but the ranchers of the country turned out to shoot grebes, for they could make as much in one day shooting as in two or three weeks at farming.

*very good*

After two years of constant shooting, the professional hunters realized that the grebes were diminishing in numbers and they themselves would have to seek other means of making money unless the birds were protected in breeding season. They held a meeting and decided not to shoot the grebes on their breeding grounds. But the farmers would not agree to this, as they were determined to shoot them wherever they could make the most money. So after that the grebes had no protection at all, for the hunters went right among the nesting birds and killed wherever they had a chance.

One of these hunters told us he shot a hundred <sup>and</sup> ~~birds~~ thirty-five grebes at one sitting. Another hunter told us of an experience at Clear Lake where the birds were accustomed to swim up a narrow slough to the feeding grounds. He made a blind at the mouth and as the birds were coming out, he shot eighty-four in rapid succession. Then as he was out of ammunition, he said he tied the bodies of the dead grebes together till he had a rope reaching across the channel, so as to keep the rest of the birds from coming out till he returned to camp for more shells. That morning alone he killed about two hundred grebes.