

settlement. The Indians and Eskimos became willing participants in the trade and, with the more efficient weapons obtained in barter for their furs, they began to destroy wildlife almost as effectively as the white men with whom they dealt.

While the trade had a great effect on exploration and on economic and social development, its influence on the country's wildlife was far from salutary. Although over-trapping was the characteristic vice of the fur-trade and its effect first became evident in a large decline in the beaver population, there were other human activities that caused even greater destruction.

Nineteenth-century
destruction Agriculture, developing after the fur-trade, often upset the soil cover and the natural plant growth on which wild animals depended, and destroyed the specialized ranges and habitats of many mammals and birds. An attitude that justified the extermination of wildlife on economic grounds alone dominated the continent during the first half of the nineteenth century. At least the fur-traders were practical businessmen, who realized that there were limits to the fur-bearing crop they harvested. No considerations of economics and common sense restricted those who shot buffalo for hides and tongues, wildfowl for the food market and birds with bright feathers for the milliners. The exploitation of wildlife that began with the fur-trade reached its climax in the slaughter of the last herds of plains bison late in the nineteenth century.

Earliest conservationists Appalled by the record of wildlife destruction, the first handful of conservationists enunciated the principle that the renewable natural resources of wildlife, forests, water and land should be protected and their use should, in some degree, be regulated. Land and water, with their plants and wildlife, were recognized by these pioneers as resources that were not unlimited -- and as elements that should be dealt with not simply for the benefit and appetite of the current generation but to preserve them for future generations.

Public opinion was slow to recognize the basic importance of this principle. The doctrines of the *laissez-faire* economists, the interests of the industrialists, and the illusion of unlimited natural resources constituted too strong an opposition. It was not until late in the last century that the people, and hence their governments, began, however grudgingly, to accept the need to conserve renewable resources and protect wildlife.

Establishment of
national parks This more enlightened attitude was demonstrated by the passage of the first provincial game acts and the establishment of national parks. The first such park, now Banff National Park, was