

Wildlife in Canada

A priceless asset

Quote by Canadian
Richard Bocking in 1972

It is no coincidence that our national emblem is not a rising sun, a star, a hammer, a sickle or a dragon, but a beaver and a maple leaf. Nor is it a coincidence that there are more paintings of wilderness lakes, spruce bogs, and pine trees on more Canadian living room walls than in any other nation on earth. We may scoff, we may deny, but the wilderness mystique is still a strong element of the Canadian ethos.

Dept. of External Affairs
Min. des Affaires extérieures
OTTAWA

JAN 27 1988

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Mountain Goat found in western Canada

Photo: M. Beedell

today there are many Federal and Provincial enlightened and far reaching policies in place, to ensure the preservation of both wildlife and their habitats.

As a result, the extinction of many rare species has been averted, and the country can now claim to be home to 500 species of bird, 33 species of whale, and 163 species of land mammal.

Two-hundred-year tradition of wildlife conservation
The first effort at conservation in Canada was made nearly two centuries ago. In 1794, Nova Scotia introduced legislation to protect grouse and black ducks. Ontario was next to act, introducing its first game laws in 1821. The 1820s were also marked by a growing interest in the natural environment for its own sake, with the foundation of naturalist societies in Quebec City and Montreal. It is interesting to note that Canada did not become a Sovereign country until 1867.

The closing years of the nineteenth century saw the establishment of Canada's first great national parks, beginning with the Banff National Park in Western Alberta, opened in 1887. In the same year, Canada's first bird sanctuary was created at Lost Mountain Lake on the Canadian Prairies.

From modest beginnings the national park concept has grown, and today national parks account for about 50 000 square miles of the country — an area roughly the size of England.

In addition to the national parks, there are provincial parks which also afford protection to wildlife. Lord Tweedsmuir Park in British Columbia, for example, covers an area of 2.3 million acres; while 140 miles north of Toronto, there is the 1.75 million acre Algonquin Park.

Wildlife outside the park system is safeguarded by provincial and territorial governments, which enact, administer and enforce legislation with respect to hunting, trapping and other activities that affect wild animals and birds.

There is also cross-border co-operation with the United States. As long ago as 1916, the two countries signed the Migratory Birds Treaty whereby non-game and insect-eating birds are afforded complete protection, and restrictions have been placed on the hunting of game birds.

That quote highlights the strong bond between man and nature which exists in Canada today. Yet, this has not always been the case. The first European settlers regarded wildlife as an inexhaustible resource to be exploited rather than preserved. Animals were hunted for their furs and for food, and the widespread destruction of many mammals and birds took place.

Fortunately, the early Canadians realised very quickly the value of the wildlife that surrounded them. There has always been a strong conservationist element in Canadian attitudes, so that