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WILDLIFE IN CANADA

(Based on a paper prepared by the Canadian Wildlife Service)

When the first Europeans came to colonize the new lands of North America they found wild resources beyond their experience. Dense forests stretched back from the shoreline pierced by rivers rich in fish. Deer, bear, elk, wild turkeys and buffalo were plentiful, and overhead great flights of ducks, geese, passenger pigeons and other edible birds cleaved the air. We know now - human tendencies toward exaggeration and unscientific observation being what they are - that the first settlers overestimated the quantity of wildlife. But game and fish were certainly available in large numbers to people who had never had an opportunity to hunt and fish legally before.

Necessity forced the colonists to clear and break the land and sow crops. Wildlife, like the forests and the Indians, was in part an impediment, if not a threat, to the establishment of stable, peaceful settlements. But strange and disturbing as this new North American environment was to the new immigrant, he could not fail to realize that here were new liberties that his former life had not offered. Here wildlife was free to anyone. No royal prerogatives or social distinctions restricted a man's right to hunt and fish as he pleased. This conception of wildlife as a resource for all people to use and enjoy remains today as a tradition in the public attitude to fish and game.

The impact of settlement on North America's wildlife was apparent from the early seventeenth century. The advance of agriculture inland from the eastern coasts reduced the wildlife in many regions. Species that endangered human life or crops were slaughtered, while others were dispossessed of their habitats; fur-bearing animals were trapped relentlessly to supply the large market in furs that had been established by European fashion.

Growth of the Fur-Trade

The fur-trade was of far-reaching significance in the uneasy relation between wildlife and man on the North American continent. It placed the continent's fur-bearing animals at the mercy of voracious commercial demands. The beaver, the most eagerly sought animal, was trapped relentlessly so that the gentlemen of Europe might be properly hatted. Even in the early 1600s, the de Caens were

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