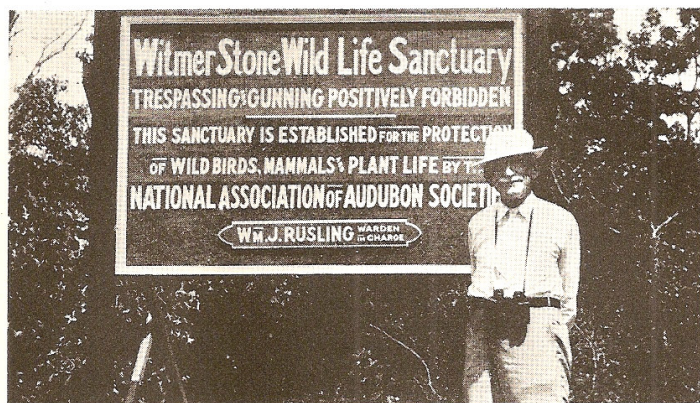


Sanctuary or Slaughter Pen?

Bird concentration areas may be one or the other

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FOR many years it has been the good fortune of naturalists, and especially bird students, to visit the southernmost tip of New Jersey during the autumn months. There are few places on the continent more ideally situated, geographically, for concentrating and harboring great numbers of migratory birds. But, as is usual with such areas, the woods at Cape May Point have attracted a potent enemy of birds; the man with the gun. This is an example of a situation that seems to be inevitable: a natural phenomenon that is of thrilling and breathtaking dimensions to one man inspires his neighbor to run for a shotgun.

The local residents have always claimed, almost as a birthright, the privilege of taking what birds they pleased from the immense flocks that annually visit their county. Robins, thrushes, flickers, woodcock and various hawks were shot and netted almost without restriction. "Flicker poles" were formerly used, devices for wholesale slaughter that are still operated on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and elsewhere. Most of the kill was taken home for the pot, including the smaller hawks, whose rich breast meat is considered very palatable.

Of course a good many non-edible birds—night herons,

crows, vultures and ospreys—were shot down "for the fun of seeing them drop," or for "target practice." Many gunners protested to me, on more than one occasion, that it was a shame that they were not allowed to shoot at any hawk that came along, as it was so convenient to get such practice just before the opening of the hunting season!

Protective laws have not been strong enough medicine, and an habitual disregard for them proved contagious.

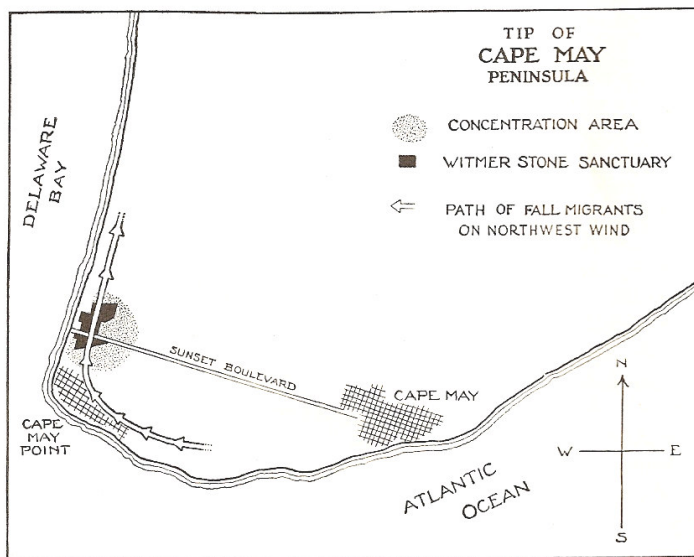
A solution to this problem has been worked out at Cape May Point during the last five years and is nearing perfection in the Witmer Stone Wild Life Sanctuary, established in the fall of 1935 by the National Association of Audubon Societies.

In order that the all-important relationship of the sanctuary to the migratory flights may be understood, the latter should be briefly explained.

The tip of New Jersey may be compared to the mouth of a giant funnel. Under ordinary conditions the fall migrants that journey southward along the coastal strip move towards the bottom of the funnel along its seaward side. Their numbers are large but not overwhelming. More important lanes of travel lie inland in parallel lines along the ridges. A strong wind from the northwest strikes these

lines of flight at right angles. If the blow is heavy, all but the strongest flyers are forced to give way, and, like aerial sailing ships, to "run before it".

When this happens in the region north and northwest of New Jersey, it brings immense flocks pouring into the top of our theoretical funnel. Striking the outer edge—the Atlantic Ocean—they struggle southward into the funnel's mouth, often clinging precariously to the outer strips. Doubtless many are carried out to sea and, on the tail of a



THE LOCATION OF THE SANCTUARY AT CAPE MAY

Above is Dr. Witmer Stone, noted ornithologist and botanist, who started the movement for the protection of bird life here, and in whose honor the sanctuary is named

A SPANISH OAK GLADE
IN WITMER STONE SANCTUARY

This is an area notably suited to its purpose—bird protection in a concentration area

northwester, a few such flocks have actually been observed making their way wearily back to land. It is certain that most of these sea-blown migrants never return to the land.

As these augmented flocks move southward into the neck of the funnel, they are crowded closer and closer together. The farther south they go the greater the density of the flocks. When the jumping-off place is reached, at Cape May Point, this density becomes an amazing concentration of bird life. At this juncture the massed flocks do not pour out of the funnel's mouth to flow serenely onward, fan-wise, across the fifteen-mile width of Delaware Bay. The northwester generally continues to blow throughout the day and an immediate crossing would obviously mean disaster. Instead of making the attempt, the birds round the curve of the Cape and work northward, uncertain as to the next move.

Thus it is that the inviting woods area, which lies directly under this northward flight lane, is so abundantly resorted to by migrants. With its generous cover and food-bearing plants, it is a natural, made-to-order *sanctuary*.

Both legal and illegal gunning have contributed toward making this concentration point a shambles rather than a sanctuary, however. The temptation to shoot more than the limit of woodcock, for example, seems to be irresistible when the birds get up from every available cover. Indeed, the immense numbers of birds appear to have inspired the local nimrods to all sorts of heroic deeds. Close by, in a heavy stand of conifers, migrating barn owls gather. I have seen a flock of more than one hundred of these birds in this thicket. One "sportsman," who must have passed half the previous night reading up on the exploits of Daniel Boone and Kit Carson, went into these sheltering pines and slaughtered enough owls "to make a wagonload," according to indignant local people. This was too much for them; but, after all, owls are not good eating!

From time to time a few local and summer residents protested these outrageous practices, chief among them Dr. Witmer Stone, the well-known ornithologist and editor of *The Auk*. These protests, vehement as they were, seemed lost on indifferent and calloused ears. But this was not the case. Others became interested and, finally, alert members of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, of Philadelphia, laid the whole matter before the National Association of Audubon Societies.

This was in 1930. The following year the Audubon Association inaugurated a cooperative investigation with the New Jersey Board of Fish and Game Commissioners. Illegal shooting was stopped nearly 100 per cent, food habits of hawks in migration were studied, the flight it-



PHOTOGRAPH BY ROGER TORY PETERSON

self was carefully observed and recorded, and local people were educated in identification of raptors and in general conservation matters.

Finally, in the summer of 1935, plans were made by the Audubon Association to set aside as much of the concentration area as possible. Twenty-five acres of the most strategic part of the wooded section were leased. Local opposition among the gunners flared, and then subsided before the wholesome nature of the project. In the first week of August a warden, well qualified as an ornithologist, was placed on the job. The area was posted and its limits indicated for the benefit of possible trespassers. The warden kept a detailed record of migrants, making daily reports to the home office.

No serious difficulties were encountered during the fifteen weeks' season. Bisected by a paved county road, whereon gunning is legal under present laws, the inviolate character of the sanctuary area presents a remarkable contrast. The gunners were made to keep strictly within bounds, and air rights vertically above our leased property were maintained.

The sanctuary is more than merely a "no-shooting area"; it is a Mecca for bird students and for botanists as well. A total of 198 species and an estimated total of 124,000 individual birds were recorded during the 15 weeks of 1935. Two hundred and fifty species have been known to occur in the immediate region. Typical plants include the prevailing Spanish Oak, the pond pine, holly, purple lady-slipper and slender lycopodium.

What has been accomplished by the establishment of the Witmer Stone Wild Life Sanctuary in New Jersey can be done at other concentration points or along heavy flight lines elsewhere. The Emergency Conservation Committee of New York City pioneered in a similar effort at Hawk Mountain in Pennsylvania, with notable success. Investigations are revealing "bird traps" at other points, and every last one of these should be a sanctuary—their natural rôle—instead of the shameful slaughter pens that man's blundering presence has made of them.