



THE BIRTHPLACE OF GOVERNOR JAMES W. GRIMES, ON HIS FATHER'S FARM,
NEAR HILLSBOROUGH BRIDGE (DEERING), N. H.

ANNALS OF IOWA.

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THE RECENTLY EXTINCT AND VANISHING ANIMALS OF IOWA.

BY PROF. HERBERT OSBORN.

Many factors have conspired to drive the larger animals from the area of this State in much shorter time and more completely than has occurred in most adjacent states or possibly than in any other portion of America. Chief among these, I think, is the fact that there is no waste land in the State, no fastnesses of forest, or mountain or desert, in which they could remain unmolested by the crowding of man. I have many times maintained that there is not a single mile square in the State that can be properly termed waste, no single section utterly unfit for tillage or growth of forest or some crop of value to man. What small areas of swamp originally existed have been or are being rapidly put to use, and little, if any, of this apparently poor area will remain unused.

Certain it is that every nook and corner of the State has been brought under scrutiny and the opportunity cut short for the survival of the larger animals that once roamed unhindered over the grassy plains and through the scanty timber skirting the streams.

It is high time, therefore, that if any history of the departure of these former residents is to be preserved, someone should undertake the task, and while I appreciate the limits of my ability to contribute much to this end, the desire that some start should be made has led me to attempt it after urgent and repeated requests from an old and trusted friend, the editor of *THE ANNALS*. Once started doubtless many of the older settlers can add some accurate records as to the

time of disappearance of certain species in particular parts of the State.

It will be unnecessary to attempt any particular order in what follows, but we may note especially such forms as are undoubtedly extinct within the State and then refer briefly to those now disappearing or on the verge of local extinction.

MASTODON.

While the mastodon (*Mastodon americanus*) can hardly be called "recently extinct," unless we speak in the terms of geologic time, it seems proper to mention it here because its remains are so frequently met with in excavations. The enormous size, and in some instances the fine preservation of bones and tusks, makes the discovery of one of the skeletons a matter of wide interest. A number of these skeletons have been unearthed in Iowa, in most cases being found at different levels in the drift or glacial deposits, indicating that they survived well on toward the end of the glacial epoch, if not later.

THE PANTHER.

This animal (*Felis concolor*), one of the most ferocious of the North American mammals, undoubtedly ranged through all the wooded parts of the State. Plenty of accounts of its occurrence in early times are to be found, and even if individually they lack corroboration they show in the aggregate abundant basis for the inclusion of the species. I have no means of locating any approximate date for its extinction in the State. Probably some time between the early settlements and 1860 must have seen the departure of these animals as I have never met with any account of their appearance since that time.

In the early days the settlers suffered from their attacks upon cattle, sheep and hogs, and rarely from some onslaught upon children or unarmed individuals; but the most severe encounters must have been occasioned when the savage nature of the animal had been aroused by attack or wound

from a hunter. Stories vary widely as to the courage or ferocity of the animal all the way from making it a cowardly, timid beast, slinking away from the presence of man, to an aggressive, crafty and undaunted fighter. We can readily credit both sides—if not in the extremes at least for wide difference—since these traits certainly varied with the different individuals, and even in the same individual, under stress of hunger, the demands of its young or the fury engendered by conflict.

Certainly it is one of the species most easily spared from the indigenous fauna. Its slim, light gray body, with long slender tail, its glittering eyes and its peculiar cry—said to simulate that of a child—have all been pictured in history and romance in sufficient detail and often with a high degree of accuracy.

The species is still common in the Rocky Mountain region and ranges southward to Patagonia, under different names, but it has probably left this State forever. We readily grant a permanent farewell to this American prince of the family of cats.

THE LYNX.

Scant reports of this species (*Lynx canadensis* Desmarest) have been noted since the early settlement of the State, but no records of recent occurrences have come to hand. The species, if present in any locality, must be practically extinct throughout the State. Its ungainly form and the tufted ears make it a well marked species, while its ferocity made it one of the dreaded animals in early days. Its near relative the wild cat, or bob cat (*Felis nefus*), may be found at rare intervals, and it also is probably nearly extinct.

THE BUFFALO.

Of the former residents of the State the buffalo (*Bison bison* L.), was undoubtedly the most magnificent and one whose departure from the plains region has caused the most regret. If records were wanting as to its actual occur-

rence within the borders of Iowa, there is abundant evidence in the finding of skulls and other portions of the skeleton to prove its former distribution over this region. These have been discovered at so many different points that it is useless to attempt the record of them all, but instances of their existing in the central part of the State are known to the writer personally.

Just when the last member of the species took its departure across the boundary line of the State for the region further west, or perished in some bog or swamp in the State area, it is impossible to say. In all probability the species was practically extinct within the State some time within the fifties or sixties, but I have been unable to find any record of sufficient definiteness to locate the time within the decade. We know of course that they occurred in large numbers further west in Kansas, Nebraska and in the Dakotas, as late as in the eighties, but they kept well beyond the bounds of permanent settlement. The buffalo represents a family of animals in which it is unique in this country, its nearest relative being the European buffalo or water buffalo of the old world. It is one of the largest of its family, and our species is one of the most magnificent of the group. Some fine specimens are preserved in the National Museum at Washington and in other large collections. A good example of the cow may be seen in the Museum of the State Agricultural college at Ames, Iowa, and numerous heads are exhibited at different places over the State. The species is preserved in a few instances in captivity and it is possible that it may be kept in this condition so as to be available for study in the future. A fine herd may be seen at the New York Zoological Park. A few are still to be seen in their wild state in the National Park and it is to be hoped that their present numbers will be maintained so that the species in the wild state may not be entirely lost. The effort toward crossing this species with the domestic ox has been in some degree successful, and it

is possible that it may be preserved to some extent in this manner as a domestic species.

ELK OR WAPITI.

No doubt every frontier boy became familiar with one part at least of this animal (*Cervus canadensis* Erxleben), for its antlers were so widely scattered that they were to be found on almost every section of land and decorated many a settler's cabin. The "elk horns" were of course more numerous than the bearers since the annual shedding should result in many a cast of antlers for every buck that grew to old age in any locality. They disappeared with the deer if not earlier, and have been known for many years only in the straggling specimens kept in parks. They still occur in the Rocky Mountain region, especially in the Yellowstone Park, and other reserves where an effort is made to preserve them.

THE VIRGINIA DEER.

This animal (*Odocoileus americanus* Erxleben) was the most abundant of the larger game animals in the State at the time of the early settlements and was of great value as a source of food supply. Its range must have been over a large part of Iowa or at least covering all of the wooded portions and evidences of its occurrence were abundant for many years in the antlers, skulls and portions of skeletons to be found in many places. The numbers of the species have been rapidly depleted by the constant inroads made by hunters and early settlers, and its extinction as a wild animal within the State followed pretty rapidly upon its settlement. As early as the middle sixties it was practically unknown in the central and eastern part of the State, at least in those portions which were sought for settlement. The species probably lingered some time longer through the central and western portion but records of the occurrence are too scanty and indefinite for us to name any date for its final extinction either in particular sections of

the State or for Iowa at large. Since the species does fairly well in confinement it is kept in parks and hence is likely to be preserved indefinitely in a semi-domesticated condition.

THE PRAIRIE WOLF.

The peculiar howl of this animal (*Canis latrans* Say) was one of the most familiar sounds around our frontier cabins in the early sixties. The country was settled rapidly and within ten years the animal had practically disappeared from that part of the State. Occasional individuals might have been encountered for some years later, but such few as survived betook themselves to the rough land along the streams, where they were not so frequently molested. A few were taken in the vicinity of Ames in the eighties, one in the year 1887, and a number of young ones captured, I believe, about the year 1890, were reared by a workman on the north farm of the State college. They doubtless occur still in the roughest sections, but must ultimately become extinct within the State unless they adapt themselves like the foxes to the timber belts along the streams.

THE TIMBER WOLF.

This species (*Canis nubilis* Say) is larger, stronger and fiercer than the prairie wolf, but in the early days was practically unknown in the prairie portions of the State. It occurred, however, in the heavier timbered areas and is probably yet to be found in small numbers in specially favored places.

THE BEAVER.

There are probably a few localities in the State where this magnificent rodent (*Castor canadensis* Kuhl) is still to be found. Once one of the most abundant species, the "beaver dams," being located on almost every one of the smaller streams, the value of its fur has been its doom and the persistent trapper has done his work. I fear that very few of the present generation of school children have ever seen the neatly chiseled stumps that marked the range of its

action or the deftly constructed dams that ensured it a constant level of water in the streams of varying depth.

I know of a small family that existed in Linn county, near Fairfax in 1890, also a family near Dysart, in Tama county, at the same time. I saw their work on a stream near Missouri Valley at about the same time (1891, I think), and some beaver skins were then being bought.

Known occurrences should be put on record, as there can be little question that the species will soon be entirely lost to the State, if not already gone.

THE BADGER.

The badger (*Taxidea americana* Bodd), while never an abundant species since the settlement of the State, has apparently grown less and less common till now there are few if any left. I had reports of their occurrence near the central part of Iowa in the early eighties, in very limited numbers, but have had no positive records in later years. In a recent letter Mr. Aldrich says, "The badger is rapidly disappearing." As the animal is of striking appearance its occurrence would pretty surely be noted if common.

THE MINK.

This species (*Lutreola vison* Schreber) used to be one of the valuable fur-bearing animals of the State and was much sought by trappers in the early days. Their numbers were much depleted on this account and the species seems never to have regained its former abundance. Very likely scattering individuals may still be found, and it may survive in specially favored localities, but for the State at large it must be counted as practically gone.

THE OTTER.

Like the mink and beaver this species (*Lutra canadensis* Schreber), highly prized for its fur, was eagerly sought by trappers, and it became rare even earlier than they. The species was represented in Linn county in some of the smaller streams during the seventies, but no occurrences

have come to my knowledge for probably a quarter of a century. Being quite strictly aquatic in its habits its distribution is confined to streams where there is sufficient protection for it to escape the too close attention of man.

THE WILD TURKEY.

This magnificent game bird (*Meleagris gallapavo* L.), a genuine boon to the early settler, was too much prized for immediate use to be allowed any opportunity to survive under ordinary conditions. Possibly there may be some compensation in the thought that we have his lineal descendant preserved for futurity in the domesticated thanksgiving bird. This will however seem rather a poor consolation to the old time hunters who knew the thrill of bringing down a bird of such magnificent proportions. I doubt if any of the wild birds have been found in the State during the last quarter century, as they were swept rapidly out of existence on the advance of settlement. I knew of their occurrence in Linn and Iowa counties in the middle sixties but I think all were gone in that region before 1870. Records of any observations on the species anywhere in this State within the last twenty-five years would be of great interest.*

In this connection it may be noted that a report on the birds of Ohio just issued speaks of this species as still existing but on the verge of extinction; it has been seen in certain points in that state within ten years. This illustrates the more rapid and complete extinction that has occurred in the prairie State of Iowa.

CAROLINA PAROQUET.

This bird (*Conurus carolinensis* L.) is listed as a former resident of Iowa, but here, as in most portions of the United States, it has now become extinct. At just what time this disappearance occurred it is now impossible to say. Its

*Prof. Osborn is evidently mistaken in his belief that the wild turkey is extinct in Iowa. Less than a year ago the Museum of the Historical Department received a fine specimen which was killed in the woods in Monroe county. We understand that a few still remain in that region.—Editor of THE ANNALS.

range was doubtless over the southern part of the State only. Like others of its family it was essentially a tropical or subtropical species and its range into Iowa may have been in the nature of straggling from its normal home further south.

WILD OR PASSENGER PIGEON.

The last great flight of this bird (*Ectopistes migratorius*) in Iowa was probably about the year 1868 or 1869. I remember the enormous clouds of pigeons that swept across the sky for many days during the spring of one year. Often a continuous flock of them would pass, the line extending as far as the eye could see in either direction and the numbers absolutely beyond calculation. A year or two later, I remember there was another flight of less proportion but from that time on their appearance was less and less frequent. I think no such flight has occurred in the last twenty-five years and even single birds have become quite unknown. This is true of much of the Mississippi valley aside from Iowa and the disappearance has been the occasion for much speculation. We must look for causes outside the State, for no conditions within could account for it. Evidently some wholesale interference with the large rookeries where the flocks were wont to gather must be credited with a disappearance so complete and widespread.

Of the lower forms of animal life, it is hard to say when any particular species has become extinct. New invasions attract attention but the silent departure of the native residents goes unheralded. We may be sure, however, that very many species of insects, molluscs and the lower forms of life have given up their struggle for existence under the changed conditions following the general settlement of the State. Some, of course, persist in out of the way places and may survive for a long period if the native food supply continues. Those which have been most rapidly exterminated are probably those that depended on the native prairie grasses and other vegetation for food, and in less degree, so

far, probably the swamp-living species that perish as a result of the drainage now in vogue.

There is still an opportunity to study little patches of the virgin forest, prairie and swamp yet remaining, to learn facts regarding native fauna that will be counted of priceless worth in years to come. Of course, this knowledge may not seem at present to possess more than intellectual value, but a basis of knowledge is the basis of all economic progress, and we have hosts of instances where the advance in material matters has been founded on facts gathered with no immediate thought of their service in economic lines.

Such exhaustive studies of the animal life of a state as have been carried on in New York for more than a half century and in Illinois for nearly as long have resulted in an accumulation of facts that make it possible to follow the main features of faunal shiftings.

WHEN I took an oath that "in all things appertaining to the trial of the impeachment of Andrew Johnson I would render impartial justice according to the Constitution and the laws," I became a judge, acting on my own responsibility and accountable only to my conscience and my Maker; and no power could force me to decide in such a case, contrary to my convictions, to suit the requirements of a party, whether that party were composed of my friends or my enemies.—*James W. Grimes, May 26, 1868.*

WISCONSIN AND IOWA were divorced in June last, and each formed a separate establishment. Wisconsin has 13 counties, and a population of 18,148. Iowa has 16 counties, and a population of 22,859.—*Iowa Sun (Davenport) September 1, 1838.*

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