

Report of the Committee, consisting of H.F. Barnes ... [et al.] appointed for the purpose of enquiring into the possibility of establishing a close time for the protection of indigenous animals.

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There is no symptom of the diminution of the interest which the Sea-birds Preservation Act (1869) has always excited; and within the past twelve months application for the extension of the Close Time has been made, according to the provisions of that Act, by the Justices in Quarter-Sessions of Northumberland, Lancashire, and the North Riding of Yorkshire—facts which sufficiently speak for the general appreciation of the measure.

The Wild-Birds Protection Act (1872) is possibly viewed by the public with greater favour than either of the others; but your Committee sees little reason to modify the opinion of it expressed in former Reports. Nevertheless a conviction under it, presenting some rather important features, in May last, indicates that it is not so entirely useless as had been thought.

The Wild-Fowl Preservation Act (1876) came into operation this year, and at first undoubtedly caused some discontent in many quarters, a warm discussion of its principle and provisions being raised by a portion of the public press. Your Committee, however, has noticed with much satisfaction that virtually no objection was taken to its principle, while the necessity of some enactment of the kind was conceded on almost every side. Furthermore, very nearly the sole cause of complaint lay in regard to the limits of the Close Time therein imposed, on which point no blame attaches to your Committee. The limits of the Close Time proposed in the Bill, as draughted by your Committee and introduced into Parliament, were, as stated in last year's Report, altered in its passage through the House of Commons; the change being such as your Committee then declared did not meet with its approval. Your Committee is therefore in no way responsible for the unseasonableness of the Close Time which was enacted, and believes that the soundness of its views on the subject is now generally admitted. In confirmation of this belief, it may be stated that the Justices in Quarter-Sessions of the counties of Dorset, Norfolk, Kent, Somerset, Southampton, Wigtown, and Essex have severally made application to the Home Office for such an alteration of the Close Time as will bring it more or less nearly in accordance with that originally proposed by your Committee.

Another charge was brought against this Act. It was alleged to be imperfect in that it did not expressly prohibit the possession or sale during the Close Time of birds of the kinds professedly protected, which had been imported into this country from abroad. This charge was supported by the dismissal (on the latter ground) by two magistrates of informations laid against certain poultrymen or game-dealers in London, and if it could have been sustained would undoubtedly have proved the Act to be defective. But the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals appealed against one of these decisions; and on the 15th of June judgment was given in the Common Pleas Division of Her Majesty's Court of Appeal against the defendants in the case, thus proving that the legal interpretation of the Act agreed with the intention of its promoters.

Your Committee has satisfaction in finding that the Fisheries (Oysters, Crabs and Lobsters) Bill passed the House of Commons on the 2nd of August, and it has now doubtless become law. It appears curious that no Close Time had hitherto been provided by the legislature for these important and favourite articles of food.

Having regard to the applications made from time to time to different members of your Committee, by various persons interested in seeing the Close Time principle more widely applied, your Committee respectfully solicits its reappointment.