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What must it have been like 125 years ago, when great flocks of birds darkened the Wyoming skies? Back then Frank Bond reported “countless thousands” of Townsend’s solitaires in the North Platte Canyon alone. The birds we observe today are mere remnants of their former glory.

In 1882, when Cheyenne held around 14,000 inhabitants and the entire population of the state was 100,000 residents at most, Frank Bond arrived in the city at age 25, college degree in hand. He had taken a job with the Wyoming surveyor-general’s office where, among other projects, he prepared a site plan for Devil’s Tower. In 1890 he served a term in the state’s first legislature and by 1895, he had taken on the editorship of Cheyenne’s daily newspaper, the “Wyoming Tribune.”

Bond held a lifelong interest in songbirds and raptors. In college he and his twin brother collected and preserved more than 500 bird specimens. After college he joined the American Ornithologists’ Union and determined to see laws enacted for the protection of non-game birds. When he published his first ornithological paper for the Union’s periodical, soon thereafter the group drafted a model statute to protect non-game birds. Then Bond lobbied to have the Union’s model statute adopted in Wyoming.

As editor, “If anyone was in position to proselytize for . . . the bird law,” Chris Madson observes in an article in “Wyoming Wildlife” on the proactive bird aficionado, “Bond was the man.” As the year 1900 dawned, Bond was successfully selling the model bird law to “the handful of people who had settled in Wyoming.”

The governor supported the idea and Senator Guernsey wrote the legislation, which passed early in the session. Thereafter, bird enthusiasts journeyed to other states, urging them to adopt the Wyoming model. When the Audubon Society was formed, Frank Bond was one of its first members; two months later, he initiated Wyoming’s first chapter of the Society in Cheyenne. By then he had acquired a prodigious knowledge of regional wildlife. In particular, he was passionate about Wyoming’s songbird- and raptor populations.

125 years ago, when beavers were trapped by the hundred-thousands for the sake of top hats for men, women’s fashions were no less complicit in out-and-out slaughter . . . of birds. Sometimes their plumes, sometimes their entire carcasses, adorned women’s hats. Countless thousands of birds lost their lives to the millinery industry.

In 1886, William Dutcher of the Ornithologists’ Union reported: “A New York taxidermist informed me that he had in his shop 30,000 bird skins, made up expressly for millinery purposes.” By 1903 he reported that “nearly 80,000 Snow Buntings were found in a cold storage house. Leading department stores in New York offered for sale such

valuable birds as Flickers made up for millinery ornaments.”

Another observer of the feather trade noted, “In 1903 the price of plumes offered to hunters was \$32 an ounce, which makes the plumes worth twice their weight in gold.” A single wholesale house in London sold 1,608 30-ounce heron plumes. “These sales meant 192,960 herons killed at their nests, and from two to three times that number of young or eggs destroyed,” writes Madson.

Birds were also hunted “for the pot,” regardless of season or limits. Farmers often shot raptors and songbirds alike, the former as perceived threat to poultry, the latter because it was believed they ate the grain before it could be harvested. Soon after its formation the Ornithologists’ Union pressed the federal government to undertake research on birds’ benefit to agriculture. The government responded by creating a Bureau of Economic Ornithology, which later morphed into the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Frank Bond eventually left the editorship in Cheyenne for Washington, DC, where he took a post at the General Land Office, forerunner of today’s Bureau of Land Management. When Teddy Roosevelt set aside Pelican Island as a refuge for birds, Bond set out—successfully, as history shows—to persuade the president toward a system of reserves on federal lands. Soon his expertise in cartography made him invaluable in the protection of national parks, monuments, and wildlife refuges.

“It was he who prepared the Executive Orders to the President for the remaining fifty-one reservations,” Madson quotes T. Gilbert Pearson.

Not bad for a newspaper editor at the turn of the twentieth century, who got his start in the capitol of a fly-over state.