

*Marjory Stoneman Douglas talks about when Poachers destroyed a Rookery during a Houseboat Tour*

Marjory Stoneman Douglas: But then, we had been waiting in the houseboat, I think now, let me see, I have to remember whether it was before that or after that... Oh yes, and then we went back to the houseboat, and that was the night when Dr. Bumpus has been dried off and we'd all been sitting in the big open cabin upstairs; like a big room. And Dr. Gilbert Pearson, who was along, who is the president of the Federation of Audubon societies, one of the funniest men in the world, the man who had done so much to have the bird plumage protection laws put on, both in New York State against the milliner's business and in the federal government. So we were up there, and Dr. Pearson was telling stories, and I remember laughing so hard, and I was sitting on the floor with a man named Arno Cammerer, who was the assistant of the National Park Service, and he and I we were in tears, and it was he and I we were sitting on the floor and we cried, we laughed so hard we cried and we just laid down on the floor and cried, 'cause it was so funny. But it was during that time, that a man on a boat came along and told somebody below who came and told Dr. Pearson and some of the others who went down and saw him, that a bunch of poachers were waiting over in the next stream and it was in the mangroves and there were streams here and there over in the next... they were camped out over in the mangroves just a little way down, waiting for us to get out of the way, cause they were going to go and shoot up that rookery of birds that we'd just been seeing. So several of the people, Dr. Grosvenor and Dr. Pearson, got into the boat and went over to talk to them, and the men, the poachers, were perfectly affable and they had them come and sit around the fire and they talked. But I don't know why our men didn't make any protest against the shooting; I don't know why they didn't. I don't know what they expected to gain by just talking in general to the people, but at any rate, they came back and the poachers were still there and we left in the houseboat and went up farther up the coast and, indeed, they went up and shot up the entire rookery. So many of those birds were killed that we had seen, and the young, they killed the young for the nuptial plumes, they killed the older birds, I mean, for the nuptial plumes, and the nestlings that had just been hatched died in the hot sun, with the crows and the predators coming and eating them. So, we saw the destruction of that rookery; thousands of birds were killed. Why our people didn't protest against that, I don't know, I suppose they felt the men would say, "Well, we're not going to hit them." They would have denied it, I suppose. But they were completely illegal but it was very difficult to

prevent them because the State of Florida was not exerting itself very much to prevent them, and before then when we tried to and had poachers arrested, with the dead birds, and we had somebody that would turn a witness, would become a witness, to the shooting, we would take that to the court in Key West and the judge would blandly release them, and say, "Well, we don't know that they were poaching," and they'd let them off. We couldn't get justice done in Monroe County. And that's the thing, among the other things, that I've held against Monroe County, was the complete disregard of that sort of thing. Because they'd had so many years, and people, the poachers, lived in Key West, and they lived up and down the Ten Thousand Islands and nobody bothered them. So it was an eye-opener as to what was happening. That is why you don't see so many birds as you used to, partly because of the poaching and partly because of the pesticides and herbicides and the lack of water proper in the seasons when they are nesting, and too much water when they are nesting let out by the Water Management District from the second and third conservation basins, they let out at the wrong time masses of water that would go down and cover up all the feeding grounds for all the nesting birds, so they couldn't find any food for the young nestlings and nestling would die. In the natural state there might have been times when there would naturally be too much high water, but that would not kill off as many birds as the poachers and the presence of mankind and in the cities and the encroaching areas. They would have never killed off the birds; the birds lived through normal up and down conditions. That is why you don't see so many today, and I've seen thousands and thousands of birds going overhead. Forty thousand in one sunset period, going from their rookies, perhaps, or going from the Everglades out to a place like Duck Rock, which is below the town of Everglades. Going out there to spend the night where there were no predators that could get at them. Where there were no, you know, the kind of predators that would get after the birds, the, I suppose...

Interviewer: Raccoons?

MSD: ...animals and the snakes and all that. But anyway, they'd be safer. But forty thousand birds on one little mangrove island at once like a great bouquet of birds.