Birds of a Feather: The Coconut Grove Audubon Society, 1915-1917

By Emily Perry Dieterich

Three Things to Remember

A robin redbreast in a cage
Puts all Heaven in a rage.
A skylark wounded on the wing
Doth make a cherub cease to sing.
He who shall hurt the little wren
Shall never be beloved by men.

William Blake

Organized bird protection in the United States began with the formation of the American Ornithological Union (AOU) in 1883. Addressing this specific concern, member William Brewster, curator of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard, moved to form a "Committee for the Protection of North American Birds" at the Union's annual meeting in 1884 (Robin Doughty, *Feather Fashions and Bird Preservations:* 157-58).

The original Audubon Society was born several years later, the brainchild of the noted naturalist and outdoorsman, George Bird Grinnell, editor of *Field and Stream*, the leading sportsmen's magazine of the time. Although a big game hunter himself, Grinnell was appalled by the slaughter of both game and non-game birds. "Gunners shot them for sport," he wrote, "small boys killed them for fun, and egg collectors robbed their nests." (Carl Buchheister and Frank Graham, "From the Swamps and Back:" 7).

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In February 1886 Grinnell suggested in a front page editorial of his magazine that "concerned men and women create an organization for the protection of wild birds and their eggs, its administration to be undertaken by the magazine's staff." Grinnell had grown up near the home of Audubon and even attended a school for young boys conducted by Lucy Audubon. The obvious name for his new organization was the Audubon Society.

The public response to the Audubon Society was amazing. "Within a year nearly 39,000 men, women, and children had joined the society, signing pledges that they would not molest birds." (Buchheister and Graham: 7) After two years, however, the responsibility of running the society became too much for a magazine whose primary purpose was to entertain hunters and fishermen. Reluctantly, Grinnell abandoned the project.

The AOU guided the bird protection movement for the next few years until February 1896 when Mrs. Augustus Hemenway of Boston called a meeting to form a Massachusetts Audubon Society. This group, which has been called "the ancestor of all of today's Audubon Societies" stated its purpose in its bylaws: "to discourage the buying and wearing, for ornamental purposes, of the feathers of any wild birds except ducks and gamebirds, and to otherwise further the protection of native birds." Several months later the qualifying phrase "except ducks and gamebirds" was stricken from the bylaws.

The society's first president was William Brewster, the same man who had urged formation of the AOU's bird protection committee twelve years earlier. By the end of its first year, the Massachusetts Audubon Society had 1,284 members, 358 of whom were school children (Buchheister and Graham:10).

Audubon Societies were formed in other states almost immediately. The Pennsylvania Audubon Society was established later in the same year and by 1897 Audubon Societies were present in New York, New Hampshire, Illinois, Maine, Wisconsin, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and the District of Columbia. In 1898, Indiana, Ohio, Minnesota, Texas, California, and Tennessee formed societies making a total of seventeen by the end of 1898.

In 1899 Frank M. Chapman, author and ornithologist in the American Museum of Natural History, founded the magazine *Bird Lore*, which would one day evolve into the popular *Audubon Magazine*. This publication was accepted as the official organ of the various state Audubon societies. Some twelve years earlier Chapman had

spent time in Florida, near Gainesville, exploring the Indian and Sebastian Rivers and writing a description of birds on Pelican Island.

"Save the wild birds of Florida" was the call of the pioneers who formed the Florida Audubon Society (FAS) in 1900. Fifteen people were present at the first meeting held at the winter home of Louis F. Dommerich, a wealthy textile manufacturer from New York. Dues for the FAS were $1 for regular members, $5 for sustaining members, and $25 for patrons. No membership dues were required of teachers, and junior members paid 25 cents a year. The first president of the FAS was Reverend H.B. Whipple, a retired Episcopal Bishop from Minnesota, who served for one year and was succeeded by Dommerich who presided from 1901 to 1912.

Distinguished members and patrons of the FAS included Henry M. Flagler, Mrs. Edward Bok, and Thomas A. Edison. Among the honorary vice presidents were President Theodore Roosevelt, former President Grover Cleveland, former Governor W.D. Bloxham, Governor W.S. Jennings and Kirk Munroe. Munroe was a well-known author of boys' adventure stories and was once voted the most popular author of children's stories in America. He was active in the Boy Scouts and had traveled extensively throughout Florida and the world. Munroe had lived with his wife, Mary Barr Munroe, daughter of the famous novelist Amelia Barr, in Coconut Grove since 1885.

Bird protection received an important lift on the national level with the passage on May 25, 1900, of the Lacey Act, sponsored by Representative John F. Lacey of Iowa. The law "prohibited the interstate traffic in birds and animals killed in violation of state laws, as well as the importation of alien species (such as the starling and the English sparrow), without government permits" (Buchheister and Graham:13). The Lacey Act was just a beginning, however, as it applied only to the five states which had protective laws of their own.

Florida passed its law in 1901 with the help of the FAS. Entitled "An act for the protection of birds and their nests and eggs and prescribing a penalty for any violation thereof," it was the first law Florida had ever considered concerning the protection of non-game birds. The legislature passed the bill "with reservations," meaning that hawks, crows, owls, shore birds, ducks, pigeons, butcher birds (shrikes), meadow larks, robins, and rice birds (bob-o-links) were still on the game list. Anyone violating the law was guilty of a misdemeanor and was "liable to a fine of five dollars for each offense, and an additional fine of five dollars for each bird, living or dead, or part

of a bird, or nest or eggs possessed in violation of this act, or to imprisonment for ten days, or both at the discretion of the court" (*Laws of Florida* 1901:102).

Of interest is Section 8 of the act which read:

> Nothing in this act shall prevent any citizen of the State of Florida from destroying birds which are found injuring grapes, fruits, garden or farm products on his premises, or from taking or keeping in a cage any cardinal, redbird or mocking bird for his own pleasure or amusement: Provided, that the same shall not be sold or shipped out of the State. (*Laws of Florida* 1901:103).

Another law as passed in 1901, specifically referring to Dade County, which was called, "An Act prohibiting killing, capturing or shooting any deer, crocodile, water-fowl or any wild bird (except crows), within one mile of the incorporated town of West Palm Beach, Florida." Punishment for violation of this law was a fine "not exceeding one hundred dollars nor less than ten dollars, or by imprisonment not exceeding ninety days nor less than ten days" (*Laws of Florida* 1901:101).

The Lacey Act spurred the movement of a national orientation for the various state Audubon Societies. In November 1901, the representatives of the existing societies met in New York City and agreed to create a loose federation called the National Committee of Audubon Societies. Each state society retained its individual identity rather than merging into a national organization. New York City was designated as the committee's headquarters and William Dutcher, former chairman of the AOU's Bird Protection Committee, was elected chairman. Dutcher recruited T. Gilbert Pearson, who had grown up in Florida, had formed the North Carolina Audubon Society, and was known as a zealous bird protector. Together they worked for passage of more individual state laws and the creation of a game warden system.

The FAS incorporated soon after this in June 1902, with its stated purpose to:

> disseminate information respecting the economic value of birds to agriculture, and their importance to the welfare of man, thereby preventing the wanton destruction of wild birds and their eggs. As many birds emigrate from the north to the south in the winter months, the Florida Audubon Society is of particular importance. To discourage the purchase or use of the feathers of any birds for ornamentation, except those of the ostrich and domesticated fowls. To establish Bird Day

> exercises and to encourage the introduction of bird study in the schools of the State (Lucy W. Blackman, "The Florida Audubon Society:"11).

In the past, as in the present, the national organization of Audubon societies was interested in Florida because of the many nesting grounds for plumage birds. As early as the turn of the century, William Dutcher tried to buy Florida's Pelican Island in the Indian River from the federal government to protect an important breeding rookery of brown pelicans. The project became bogged down in bureaucratic red tape, but President Theodore Roosevelt was so impressed by Dutcher's scheme that he took matters into his own hands and set the island aside as the first National Wildlife Refuge. The Executive Order was signed March 14, 1903. The fact that President Roosevelt was a charter member of the FAS undoubtedly helped the situation.

The FAS was active in the business of educating school children about birds. One of the ten leaflets written for the society between 1901 and 1909 was by Kirk Munroe, entitled *Florida Birds Worth Their Weight in Gold.* Mr. Munroe described the economic importance of birds in Florida with respect to the eating of insects which damaged the state's crops and fruit groves. He also mentioned the novel idea of birds as a tourist attraction. In his concluding paragraph he wrote,

> We take every precaution to prevent a thief from stealing even the most trifling of our possessions, and at the same time make no effort to dissuade the gunner from shooting the birds upon whose existence depends our very livelihood. Queer, isn't it?

The Thayer Fund, which was organized by the prominent landscape and portrait painter, Abbot H. Thayer, had been established in 1900 to protect bird colonies. The fund also provided financial support for the warden system. By 1904 the fund was paying for thirty-four wardens in ten states, including Florida (Buchheister and Graham:13). Four of these wardens were working in Florida and one may have been Guy Bradley, who patrolled the South Florida coast and mangrove jungles.

Bradley was recommended by Kirk Munroe who said that he was "fearless and brave and had an extensive knowledge of the country and the birds that lived there . . . always alert and faithful in the performance of his duty, and was willing to undergo any hardship to protect the birds." Tragically, Bradley was killed while making an arrest at a rookery on Oyster Key. The National Committee received hundreds of contributions to pay for a new home for Bradley's

widow and children in Key West. William Dutcher wrote, "Every great movement must have its martyrs, and Guy Bradley is the first martyr in the cause of bird protection."

In January 1905 thirty-five state Audubon societies filed incorporation papers in New York under a new name, the National Association of Audubon Societies for the Protection of Wild Birds and Animals. (The name was not changed to the current National Audubon Society until 1940). Dutcher was elected president and Pearson was elected secretary of the association.

The bird protection movement actually began in Dade County as early as 1906 when Mary Barr Munroe organized "a little club of boys whom she called the Bird Defenders, and who loyally rallied to her support in the protection of their little feathered friends" (Lucy w. Blackman, *The Women of Florida:* 145). Blackman may be referring to "The Coconut Grove Rangers," as described and pictured in the May 1915 issue of *Tropic Magazine* which reported that it was a "bird club founded in 1906 that did good work in bird protection for four years."

By 1912 the FAS had 1,500 members and in 1913 Mary Barr Munroe was elected to the executive committee. Also in 1913 two important state laws were passed: "An act to protect game and birds in the state of Florida" and "An act creating a Department of Game and Fish of the state of Florida and creating the Office of State Game and Fish Commissioner." The former defined game birds identical to the 1901 law but omitted pigeons and robins from the list. It also prohibited certain methods of capture, outlawed night hunting, and established hunting seasons and licenses. The latter law was created to enforce the former one and to prosecute its violators, issue licenses and collect fees.

The year 1913 saw much progress at the national level as well. According to Blackman, "In Washington the greatest campaign on behalf of bird protection ever put on in any country was in full force in the Congress." The Federal Migratory Bird Law was signed by President Taft in March and was designed to put all game birds that do not remain permanently within the borders of any state or territory under the jurisdiction of the federal government. Another important law was actually a clause, tacked onto a tariff bill, which halted the importation of wild bird plumage into the United States.

Between 1913 and 1915 bird protection claimed a significant victory. According to Todd Persons, "The bottom dropped out of the

international plumage market. Feather merchants had been plucked by their own greed and by fickle dame fashion." Unfortunately, before the FAS even had time to celebrate, "the Florida legislature, satisfied that state legislation was no longer needed, repealed the plumage laws and a number of valuable hunting laws with them. The slaughter was renewed . . . "(Todd Persons, *The First One Hundred Years*:6). It was amid these problems that the first official Audubon Society was established in Dade County in 1915.

The first meeting of the Coconut Grove Audubon Society (CGAS) was held on April 16, 1915 in the public school auditorium of Coconut Grove. "By reason of his authority as one of the state vice presidents, Mr. Kirk Munroe called the meeting to order and made a few remarks about the need of such a society in Coconut Grove" (CGAS Minutes, 4/16/1915). Given the active involvement of the Munroes in the FAS, it is somewhat surprising that such an organization was not formed sooner than fifteen years after the FAS had been established. Nonetheless, the society was soon to become one of the most vocal and active in the state. Mary Barr Munroe was elected to the office of president, Mrs. Schober was vice president, Mrs. Florence P. Haden was secretary, and Mrs. H.K.B. Davis served as treasurer.

Mrs. Haden was the wife of Captain John M. Haden, a Civil War veteran, who retired and moved to Coconut Grove in 1896. He purchased thirteen acres near Douglas Road and Ingraham Highway. The property soon became known as "Haden's Corner." It was also often referred to as "Mango Lodge," as Captain Haden became very interested in growing mangoes. He planted a Mulgoba mango in 1898, and in 1910 one tree bore the distinctive large yellow and red mango known today as the Haden mango. Although Captain Haden died shortly thereafter, Mrs. Haden marketed the mango, and groves were planted all over the area. This variety of mango was very important in the development of a marketable mango (Arva Moore Parks, *The History of Coconut Grove, Florida, 1821-1925*:47). Mrs. Haden was also involved with the Housekeepers Club, a womens' club established in 1891. Her contribution to the club's cookbook was appropriately a recipe for mango chutney.

Membership dues for the CGAS were 50 cents a year plus a 10 cents initiation fee to cover the cost of an Audubon button. Kirk Munroe is recorded as the first person to pay his dues. A life membership cost $25. Mrs. Munroe announced at the first meeting that she had secured two life members: Charles Deering and W.J. Matheson. Charles

Deering was the son of William Deering of International Harvester fame who settled in Coconut Grove in 1902. Charles lived on an estate in the Buena Vista area and raised water birds. He bought lots in Cutler and in 1916 bought the Richmond Cottage on the old Perrine Grant. (The property is now known as the Deering Estate and was recently acquired by Dade County and the State of Florida.) Charles's brother, James, also a member of CGAS, built the exquisite mansion, Vizcaya, on Biscayne Bay in 1916.

Mr. Matheson was one of the first millionaires to build a home in Coconut Grove and, together with his sons Hugh and Malcolm, built three houses on the bayfront, the first being "Four Way Lodge" on present-day Poinciana Avenue (Parks:53). Hugh later served two terms as mayor of Coconut Grove from 1921-1923.

Teachers, it was announced at the first meeting, would be associate members and were exempt from dues. Apparently this didn't apply to school administrators, however, as the minutes indicate Mr. J.W. Asbury, principal of the Coconut Grove School, and his wife paid their dues at the second meeting of the society, making them charter members.

At the fourth meeting of the society Mrs. Munroe explained that the first thirty people who had joined would be referred to as "founders" and would have Audubon buttons presented to them by a "friend of the society." The following is a list of the founders of the CGAS:

Mr. and Mrs. Kirk Munroe
Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Matheson
Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Matheson
Mr. Charles Deering
Mr. and Mrs. Asbury
Mr. and Mrs. Mather
Mrs. John Gifford
Mrs. Florence Haden
Mrs. H.K.B. Davis
Mrs. Schober
Mrs. Woolley
Mrs. Kilbourne
Mr. and Mrs. Little
Miss Olive Callahan
Miss Wallin
Miss Dunham
Mrs. Church
Mrs. Stewart
Mrs. Moore
Miss Dock
Mrs. Charles T. Simpson
Miss Hart
Miss Root
Miss Mary Callahan
Mrs. Richardson

A problem concerning men being members arose when the society decided to join the National Federation of Womens Clubs. Since men

could not belong to the federation, the alternative of making them honorary members was discussed. At a meeting in November 1915 the president announced that the CGAS had become a member of the state Audubon Society but it had not joined the National Federation which would have disbarred the men members. The society also decided to join the National Association of Audubon Societies at the same meeting.

Mrs. Arthur Curtis James became the third life member of the society, paying her $25 dues at the November 1, 1915 meeting. Her husband, reported to be the second richest man in America at the time, later purchased "Four Way Lodge" and contributed the major portion of money to finance the building of Plymouth Church (Parks:54).

At the August 7, 1916 meeting, Mrs. Munroe proposed that William Dutcher, past president of the National Association of Audubon Societies, be made an honorary life member of the CGAS. A letter from Dutcher was read at the September meeting accepting this kind offer.

The treasurer's ledger indicates forty-one members for the year 1915-1916, classified as seven men, twenty-three married women, and eleven single women. Ninety-eight members were recorded for 1916-1917, which included separate entries for husbands and wives.

The society held seven meetings during 1915, the first board meeting being on August 28, 1915. The first two meetings were held in the public school auditorium of Coconut Grove. Thereafter, most meetings were held at members' residences. Throughout the years the secretaries provided colorful accounts of the various meeting places, consistently noting the name, place and sometimes even the hour and minute of the meeting. Five meetings were held at Mrs. Munroe's house, "The Scrububs," and one at Mrs. Haden's "Mango Lodge." One meeting took place at the "beautiful home of Mrs. Thomas Wyatt in 'Ye Little Woods'," one at the "pleasant home of Mrs. J. Edward Howard," and yet another at "the beautiful home of Mrs. N.L. Stevenson on Coconut Grove Ridge." The March, 1916 meeting was held at,

> the beautiful home of Mrs. Hugh Matheson . . . It would be hard to do justice to a description of the terrace with its setting of plants, the tall pines on the lawn with the water in the distance showing through the oleanders. The weather was perfect for an out of door party and those present will not soon forget the charming picture the large number of visitors and members made (CGAS minutes, 3/6/1916).

The society went to Little River in April 1916 where a meeting was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Charles T. Simpson, he the noted naturalist and botanist:

> After the meeting the party was asked to visit Professor Simpson's wonderful hammock, 'Simpson's Tangle,' which proved most interesting. The Tangle is located on the shore of Biscayne Bay, in a dense hammock. Professor Simpson has carefully guarded the native trees, built walks and placed seats . . . also introduced many very rare shrubs and plants, many of which were in full bloom. Among the rare plants there are none more rare than the orchids. Of these Professor Simpson has a great number of the choicest and most rare orchids grown in any part of the world. The visit to the Tangle added much pleasure to the meeting (CGAS minutes, 4/9/1916).

With few exceptions every meeting was opened with a bird poem, "a special one chosen for the day," read by Mrs. Kilbourne, who was officially appointed as "Society Poet" in June 1915. Many well known poems by famous authors were read including Wordsworth's "Ode to the Skylark," Vandyke's "The Goodluck Bird," and William Cullen Bryant's "To a Waterfowl." The poetry reading was billed as a "feature of the meetings" and a newspaper article dated January 13, 1916, gives the following account: "Of course the meeting was opened with the reading of a bird poem by Mrs. Kilbourne and this time it was a lovely bit of bluebird verse. That made us all rejoice."

The treasurer's report was read at every meeting but rarely included actual dollar figures. The minutes of the November 1915 meeting indicate a balance of $87.47 in the treasury. The treasurer's ledger reflects $57.40 as of March 1916, which grew to $174.09 by May 1916.

The society was primarily financed by members' dues. Of note, however, is a series of contributions by Charles Deering totaling $300 in donations, over a six-year period. This amount was in addition to the initial $25 fee for his life membership. The only mention of any of these donations occurred at the February 5, 1917 meeting when Mrs. Munroe "reported several gifts, one of which was a check from Mr. Charles Deering for $50 which he called his modest contribution to the society."

Other less substantial monetary donations to the society included one from the Coconut Grove Rangers:

> . . . at the last meeting of the Rangers it was decided to give the money belonging to the organization to Mrs. Kirk Munroe, to use in some way for the birds. This money was only a part of the original sum of eleven dollars left after the Miami Bank failure, from which every society in the county suffered loss. So now after five years it has been decided to give this

> money in cash prizes to the Coconut Grove school children for bird work (*Tropic*, 1915:33).

Another children's club also made a donation to the society:

> Mrs. Archer announced that her girls' club, "The Jenny Wrens" which disbanded three years ago had voted to donate the money left in the treasury, nearly $1.00, to the Audubon Society. Same was accepted with thanks to Mrs. Archer (CGAS Minutes, 10/4/1915).

Many donataions of a non-monetary nature were made to the society including books, bird charts, and the Audubon buttons from an anonymous donor. Mrs. Charles Boyd of East Walpole, Massachusetts, donated three bird charts and a book on water birds to the society at the June 7, 1915 meeting. Mrs. Bancroft Davis of Boston donated a Brownie camera to be given as a prize to school children, and Mrs. Gifford donated two books and a calendar. Mr. Deering sent another donation for supplies and "a vote of thanks was given Mr. Deering for the many helps to the society, including stationary printed, stamps, etc."

The minutes and ledger indicate that regular expenditures were made on printing and stationary, ($19.15), postal cards, ($2), and stamps, (10 cents). Payment of $5 in dues to the FAS and to the National Association is also recorded in the ledger.

The society made contributions to other organizations such as $5 to the Red Cross. When the society gave $5 to the Humane Society it asked "that the officer do what he could for the protection of birds and send a report of what he had done" (CGAS Minutes, 6/7/1915).

The meetings did not regularly include any program, in the entertainment sense of the word, such as guest speakers or slide shows. Several special programs are worth mentioning however. The May 1916 meeting "was brought to a close by a very clever recitation in French about birds given by Miss Alice Crawford." Miss Crawford also performed at the December 6, 1916 meeting with "a whistling tune" and again at the April 2, 1917 meeting at which time she "very cleverly imitated the notes of the wren, bob white, and the cardinal."

Another "entertainer" was Miss Isabell Goodhue who attended the first annual meeting of the CGAS. According to a news article from March 1916,

> . . . a little lady stepped out from behind the palms dressed in a gown of greens and browns made especially for out of door walking and which she calls her field dress and was introduced by Kirk Munroe . . . as the Florida Audubon's field agent. Miss Goodhue gave a charming talk on birds and delighted everyone by her clever imitation of bird notes and calls.

Miss Goodhue performed again at the second annual meeting when she read "her stirring appeal for the birds, describing her trip across the continent lecturing on the importance of conserving bird life. Her imitation of bird notes and songs are truly wonderful" (CGAS minutes, 3/3/1917). The treasurer's ledger indicates a payment of $15 to Miss Goodhue on March 5, 1917.

A "special bird musical meeting" was held on June 21, 1915:

> . . . the members of the CGAS were invited to gather at Mrs. John Gifford's and enjoy listening to a set of bird music records, given by Kellogg the bird song man . . . After the records were finished Mrs. Gifford and Miss Andrus played the first two parts of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony . . . in which occur the notes of the Wren, Yellow Hammer, Lark, Dove, and Cuckoo. It is needless to say how delightful it all was (*Tropic*, 1915:28).

The majority of the meetings were business-oriented, however, with many discussions, letter readings and papers. The following is a list of the papers for the year 1915-1916:

Mrs. Charles T. Simpson, "Historical Sketch of Audubon Societies"
Mrs. Wyatt, "Bird Reservations of the United States"
Mrs. H.K.B. Davis, "Bird Sanctuaries and How to Make Them"
Mrs. R.L. Stewart, "Land Birds of Florida"
Mrs. Florence P. Haden, "Economic Value of Birds"

A March 1916 news article reported that "these papers are so interesting and full of valuable material that they have been entered among the papers of the Florida Federation of Womens Club Bureau of Information, so that club women of the state may have the benefit of the knowledge they contain."

The meetings always concluded with a social hour. Here again the secretaries chose to record for posterity every detail of the hostesses' house and refreshments. The January 3, 1916 meeting adjourned and "all enjoyed the tea and cake served by Mrs. Munroe in her usual gracious manner." At the May meeting of the same year, Mrs. Kilbourne, "the hostess of the day," served "dainty refreshments she had prepared for her guests." As a special treat in January 1917, "the guests were given the very charming little bird cards painted in watercolors by Mrs. Wade, and Mrs. Munroe served tea, chocolate and much delicious cake."

Education has always been a primary concern of Audubon Societies at the national, state, and local levels. At the very first meeting of the CGAS, Kirk Munroe stated, "the school children have been

pretty well instructed in bird lore, but . . . there is need of instruction about the value of birds in the community" (CGAS minutes, 4/16/1915).

The society wasted no time in beginning their work. At the second meeting Mrs. Davis reported a plan for work in "colored town and she suggested that we form a bird society for the colored boys and have them pay a small fee of 10 cents and pledge themselves not to kill birds but to protect them and that they be given some sort of badge"(CGAS minutes, 5/3/1915). At the meeting in June, Mrs. Munroe outlined the work the society proposed to do in schools that season, "not only in our public schools but in the colored public schools as well." Mrs. Munroe called for volunteers for the "school work" and Mrs. Gifford, Mrs. Schober, Mrs. Haden, Mrs. Heso and Mrs. Hugh Matheson "responded cheerfully."

A board meeting was called by the president on August 28, 1915 specifically to plan the work in schools for the fall:

> It was decided to begin work at St. Albans and the colored school on the 15th of October by addressing the schools and presenting the materials to work with. A prize will be given to both schools. The St. Albans school children will be allowed to wear the robin button, the children to pay for them. Two prizes will be offered, one to the girls and one to the boys for the best poem written about the mocking bird. One prize will be offered to the boys for the best imitation made of the mocking bird whistle or call. Both prizes will be worth working for and will be awarded at the annual meeting of the CGAS (CGAS minutes, 8/28/1915).

The ladies began their work that fall and at the November 1915 meeting,

> Full and interesting reports were read concerning the visits to St. Albans school and the Coconut Grove colored school. Mrs. Munroe said the St. Albans class was called the robin class and the class in the colored public school the red-headed woodpecker class. She reported great enthusiasm on the part of the pupils and trusted that the work would be of lasting benefit . . . the last day of each month in both schools was to be designated as Audubon Day (CGAS Minutes, 11/1/1915).

Special thanks were given to Mr. J.W. Asbury, the principal of the Coconut Grove school and a charter member of the society,

> for his interest shown in the work, and the thoughtful arrangements made for doing it. In fact, Nature Study in the Coconut Grove School is one of the taking features, and makes study of all kinds more pleasant for Mr. Asbury's pupils (*Tropic*, 1915:33).

The treasurer's ledger indicates many expenditures for education-related items including "book for school teacher, $2.00", "colored plates

for public school children, 70¢", "6 prizes for schools, $5.10", "1 dozen bird primers, $1.50", and "Bird Notebooks, $8.00."

The society received good press coverage in the two newspapers which were being published at the time, *The Miami Metropolis* and *The Miami Herald.* Almost every month articles appeared in one or both papers. The articles are quite detailed and descriptive and contain many personal observations of the various reporters.

At its first meeting in April 1915, the society voted to have *Tropic Magazine* as its organ. Established by Deloss LeBaron Perrine of Buena Vista, *Tropic Magazine* was first published in April 1914. It sold for 10 cents and had thirty pages with a black and white cover photo. The first issue contained articles by the naturalist, Charles T. Simpson, and a poem by Kirk Munroe. In its third issue an announcement was made:

> A treat is in store for readers of the *Tropic Magazine* in the 'Bird Gossip' series, by Mrs. Kirk Munroe, which begins in this issue and will continue through the year. While not claiming the technical knowledge of the ornithologist, Mrs. Munroe, who has been an active member of the Audubon Society for years, is a lover of birds and a keen observer of bird-life, which makes her articles of the more interest to the general reader (*Tropic*, June, 1914:7).

The first article was entitled "Listen to the Mocking Bird" and at the end of it another editorial appeared,

> To help interest more of the Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls in our birds, and to aid in illustrating Mrs. Munroe's 'Bird Gossip' series . . . we offer One Dollar in cash each month for the best photograph, taken afield, of any of our native birds. The subjects must be large enough to reproduce in . . . *The Tropic Magazine.*

The bird life sketches ran for three more months and included "The Nighthawk, Whip-poor-will, and Chuck-will's widow", "Everglades Birds" and "Autumn Birds of Southern Florida." In May 1915, several months after the first meeting of the CGAS, Mrs. Munroe began to report on the monthly activities of the society in *Tropic*. The first article in this series included a photograph of the original Coconut Grove Rangers.

The society published several brochures of its own including a leaflet, *How to Study the Birds,* which was distributed free. Charles T. Simpson wrote a leaflet especially for the society entitled, *A List of Trees, Shrubs and Plants Whose Fruits are Eaten by the Birds;* included were lists of native as well as cultivated plants to which birds are attracted. It is interesting to note that Fairchild Tropical Garden in Miami offers classes in this very subject in 1985.

The members of the CGAS were concerned about all aspects of birds, from sightings in their own backyards to lobbying state legislators for passage of game and plumage laws. The members talked continuously about birds; they laughed about their peculiar habits, wrote about them in poems and papers, and imitated their songs.

At the July 1916 meeting,

> Mrs. Schober asked the ladies to give their personal experiences as to when they first became interested in birds as a study. It was interesting to find that while most of those present had taken some interest in birds as younger women and children their interest seems to have intensified in some way about nine or ten years ago (CGAS Minutes, 7/1916).

The members kept abreast of current legislation and were proud of their knowledge about birds. When Mrs. Stevenson read a paper on "men and women who worked for birds," the secretary noted,

> The paper was a beautiful one and full of interesting facts, and it is a great comfort to know that we are familiar with the works of most of the men and women that she mentioned (CGAS minutes, 2/5/1917).

Despite the bittersweet battles and continual conflicts involved in the bird protection movement, the members were able to maintain a sense of humor. The secretary noted that a man had sent some corn and asked what he could do to protect his crops besides killing the birds. The society decided to simply offer him a vote of thanks for feeding the birds.

At the very first meeting of the society Mrs. Munroe "spoke of the need of a more intelligent study of birds and bird protection." Thus the following committees were formed and their respective chairmen assigned:

> Bird Laws — Mrs. Munroe, Bird Sanctuaries — Mrs. Davis, Some Experiences with Birds — Mrs. Schober, Bird Nests — Mrs. Spaulding, Economic Value of Birds — Mrs. Haden, Bird Reservations — Mrs. Wyatt, and Bird Music — Mrs. Church and Mrs. Richardson.

One particular bird was selected for study and observation at each meeting. Some technical and factual information was provided, but mostly amusing stories were told by members. The subject of the June 7, 1915 meeting was the Florida jay. It was reported that the bird had "been seen as far south as Little River this being the farthest south yet recorded." The jays were discussed as being of four different types: the Northern, Southern, California and Florida. Mrs. Gifford "gave a graphic account of seeing blue jays dancing on the pine tree limbs."

The Florida grackle was the subject of the January 3, 1916 meet-

ing. "The president asked for incidents of interest relative to the Florida grackle, which had been seen in great numbers around Coconut Grove for about ten days, and various members responded with interesting incidents describing their many peculiarities." Mrs. Ross, wife of Admiral Ross, who was spending the winter at Camp Biscayne, told,

> most delightfully of how at one navy station the birds were driven away on account of the noise and destruction they caused. The method was so simple and effectual that it's worth knowing. Roman candles were fired off in the trees where the birds went to roost, in two days they left and did not return (*The Miami Metropolis*, January 3, 1916).

Other bird anecdotes by members included Mrs. Munroe's story about "night herons which had made themselves very much at home on her lawn bringing their food picnic fashion to eat on the grass and like many picnickers leaving their scraps for others to clean up" (CGAS minutes, 1/3/1916). "Mrs. Simpson told a very pretty story of her splendid and intelligent cat and a wren's nest" (CGAS minutes, 8/7/1916). "Mrs. Gifford asked for an opinion as to the bad habits of the blue jay and the society exonerated him. He received a good many compliments" (CGAS minutes, 6/1916).

A highlight of the CGAS meetings were Mrs. Howard's Bird Notes. In December, 1915: "Mrs. J. Edward Howard was asked to collect each month any stray bits of information about birds that often appear in magazines and newspapers and make a chapter of them in the benefit of the society . . ." (CGAS minutes, 3/6/1916). An August 1916 news article reported that these notes were always interesting because: "Mrs. Howard is especially happy in the selection and arrangement of the notes, so the Bird Chapter is always looked forward to by the members."

Mrs. Howard was *not* happy about cats killing birds and the minutes reflect a long-running battle between Mrs. Howard and the cats of Coconut Grove. She used part of her Bird Notes to preach the evils of the "birds' worst enemies."

> Mrs. Howard's bird notes were full of interesting points about bird life, especially in regard to belling the cat, a new way of preventing the domestic cat from catching birds (CGAS minutes, 7/1916).

> Our chronicler never fails to get in a word in behalf of her beloved birds and seizes upon any help that she finds toward the elimination of their enemies, especially the cats (CGAS minutes, 2/5/1917).

The society voted to adopt John Burrough's birthday, April 3, as "Bird Day." Burroughs was a poet and author affectionately known

as "John O'Birds" who wrote several popular books including *Wake Robin* (1871) and *Birds and Poets* (1877). By his own admission he had caught "bird fever" from Audubon in 1863 and became a "great popularizer of bird study" (Doughty:40). *The Miami Metropolis* reported on May 6, 1915,

> bird day was beautifully observed at the Coconut Grove School. Songs and talks on the feathery tribe were made by Principal Asbury and Kirk Munroe. Mr. Munroe told of the life of Audubon, the great friend of the birds. He showed the children why birds should be protected and by asking a number of questions of the children, made the talk intensely interesting. At the end of his address he received a great ovation.

At the April 2, 1917 meeting the society was reminded, "April 3 is Bird Day and all Audubon members are asked to observe it in some way if only to say a kind word for the birds."

The society was concerned about the wearing of aigrettes, the feathers of the herons and egrets. At the first meeting, Mrs. Munroe "made an appeal for two plume-bearing birds — the egret and snowy heron . . ." At the June 1915 meeting a letter was read from Mr. Stanley Henson, U.S. District Inspector of Migratory Birds, in regard to the aigrettes worn in Miami.

> He said that he had never seen so many anywhere in the U.S. but since Mr. Henson's work they have almost disappeared. The society promised to send literature to any person reported by any members of the society as to wearing egrets. One was reported . . . but she could not secure the wearer's name.

A 1915 news article gave Miami Judge Barco's opinion on the subject: "The women who wear aigrettes in their hats are as much violators of the law as are the men who sneak to the rookeries of the birds and shoot the harmless creatures down for the sake of a few dimes . . ."

Finally, Mrs. Munroe had her own method of dealing with the situation. According to Blackman,

> Wheresoe'er Mrs. Munroe's keen eye saw an aigrette waving, there she followed, cornering the wearer — be it on the street, in the crowded hotel lobby, on the beach, at church or entertainment or party — there compelled her to listen to the story of cruelty and murder of which her vanity was the contributing cause. And Mrs. Munroe was eloquent. It was not unusual for women to be reduced to tears, whether of anger or humiliation or repentance, and several were known to have taken off their hats and destroyed their aigrettes as a result of their encounter with Mrs. Munroe.

Mary Barr Munroe was truly ahead of her time and one of the pioneer conservationists of the twentieth century. In referring to the battle against plume hunters and aigrette wearers, Blackman calls her "probably our most militant power."

The pet conservation project of the society was establishing bird sanctuaries within the town of Coconut Grove, as well as designating the entire town a bird sanctuary. One place of particular interest was the local cemetery. At the first meeting Mrs. Munroe said she "hoped there would be many bird sanctuaries in Coconut Grove, especially at Woodlawn Cemetery." The ladies took her directive and asked the owners of the cemetery "to make it a bird sanctuary by protecting the birds, erecting feeding houses and bath pools for the birds in this sanctuary of the dead" *(Tropic,* 1915:23). At the second meeting of the society a letter was read from the secretary of Woodlawn Cemetery, "saying that they would be glad to establish a bird sanctuary . . . that they would write for a description of the one in Woodlawn Cemetery in New York and copy the plan as far as possible." Two years later at the January 1917 meeting, the Committee on Bird Sanctuaries reported,

> a visit had been made to Woodlawn Cemetery and it was found that the superintendent, Mr. Sutcliffe, was very much interested in both plants and birds. They have a fountain and basin and are planning several other places where birds can get water and have shade, and are going to put up nest boxes.

An interesting issue arose at the February 5, 1917 meeting when a letter was read "from someone in Miami in regard to a caged American eagle." A *Miami Herald* article, dated March 1917 was headlined, "Black Eagle Soared Away to Freedom." The article reported,

> A large eagle held in captivity for the past six weeks by William F. Bruhns, owner of a curio shop at 213 Twelfth Street, was liberated yesterday in Brickell Hammock . . . for the benefit of those who may have thought that because of his name Mr. Bruhns is a German and wished to show his contempt for America by keeping an American eagle in captivity, it may be said that Mr. Bruhns is a loyal American citizen born in Philadelphia and living in the U.S. all his life and is ready and willing to show his patriotism as any other citizen.

At the April 2, 1917 meeting the president made a full explanation of the case of the caged American eagle in Miami. She had investigated its condition and found that while the bird was not badly treated, it was dirty. The man promised to clean it and its cage and he did so. Later the man set the bird free.

The longest running conservation project of the society was Royal Palm State Park. For several years before the society was established, Mrs. W.S. Jennings, wife of Governor Jennings (1901-1905), and president of the Florida Federation of Womens' Clubs (FFWC), led the battle to acquire Royal Palm Hammock, or Paradise Key, as a state park. According to Jennings, however, Mrs. Kirk Munroe, chairman of the Forestry Committee of the FFWC "is due the honor of first suggesting that Royal Palm Hammock be conserved by the Federation." Botanist Dr. John K. Small visited the hammock and published a detailed description in the *Journal of the New York Botanical Garden* in 1919. He recorded 162 native species of flowering plants and thirteen species of ferns. According to Small,

> the most striking feature of the Hammock vegetation — that which makes it unique — is the presence of upwards of a hundred tall and graceful royal palms *(Roystonea regia)* which tower far above the rest of the forest . . . reaching 100 to 120 feet in height (W.E. Safford, *Natural History of Paradise Key*:378).

Charles T. Simpson also compiled a list of native plant species which was submitted with the park bill in 1915. The resolution finally agreed to by the state and the FFWC Board of Directors involved the latter securing an additional 960 acres to match the state's donation of 960 acres. On June 5, 1915, Governor Park Trammell signed the legislative act creating Royal Palm State Park. Soon after the law passed, Mrs. Henry Flagler donated 960 acres as an endowment, which concluded and fully complied with the legislative act, making the grant perpetual.

In November 1915, the FFWC created a park committee and Mrs. John Gifford was appointed as chairman because, according to Mrs. Jennings, "she has proved indefatigable in her efforts for the park." The federation's original proposal to the legislature had included money for care and improvement of the park, but this was not part of the final resolution. Mrs. Gifford was concerned about the safety of the park and felt a caretaker was needed. Thus the ladies embarked on a fundraising campaign to pay the salary of such a person. Mrs. Gifford acted as the liaison between the park and the CGAS and she often gave a report or read a letter about the current status of the park. In May 1916, the society voted to donate $10 for the warden's salary and at another meeting Mrs. Gifford reported that she had received $20 sent to her by a member of the Audubon Society for the park. Charles A. Mosier of Little River was hired as game warden on

March 1, 1916 and was described as a "botanist of no mean ability and a very energetic man." The CGAS again donated $10 in April 1917. According to Tebeau,

> "at the annual meeting in Daytona Beach in 1929, upon the recommendation of Mrs. W.S. Jennings . . . the Federation offered the Park they had maintained since its creation thirteen years earlier to the Everglades National Park if and when it should be created. Appropriately enough, the first visitors' center established in the Park was at Paradise Key." (*They Lived in the Park*:133).

The annual meetings of the CGAS provided an opportunity to review each year's accomplishments. The first annual meeting was held March 6, 1916 and a news article described the scene:

> There never was a more beautiful setting for an airy assemblage especially an Audubon meeting, than the terrace and lawns of Hugh Matheson's home or a more gracious hostess than Mrs. Matheson . . . at the annual meeting of the Coconut Grove Audubon Society. The weather was perfect, even the birds seemed to realize that it was a meeting in honor of them, by singing and calling and doing so just at the proper time.

The president opened the meeting with a "pleasant little speech about the first annual meeting and called upon Mrs. Kilbourne to read the poem she had chosen for the occasion." Mrs. Kilbourne gave a list of poems she had read during the past year and Mrs. Howard reviewed the papers of the year and "made those who had prepared them feel happy." The treasurer's report indicated a balance of $85, with $115 received and $30 expended. Fifty-three people were recorded as paid members and the society was affiliated with the FAS and the National Association of Audubon Societies. A news article dated March 1916 detailed the president's report:

> . . . given six prizes to school children, contributed to the bird exhibit at Deland during the meeting of the FFWC . . . written many letters not only to Tallahassee officials but to others interested in the game laws of the state . . . presented 3 large colored bird charts to the public school, and several bird books and distributed a great deal of Audubon literature . . . also presented Frank Chapman's book on "Birds for Teacher" to the principal of the colored school . . . reported law breakers of the game laws to the proper authorities, sent news notes about birds to the papers . . . given three talks on bird protection to schools and clubs — one special one to the Fort Pierce Womens Club by request . . .

Elections were held and all were re-elected except for a new treasurer, Mrs. Mather. The president of the FAS, W.F. Blackman, was present and highly complimented the society on its work. He gave a short address and was followed by the famous Miss Goodhue and

her amazing bird calls. "Everyone enjoyed the afternoon. There were many distinguished guests present and twenty-nine new members were added to the society" (CGAS minutes, 3/6/1916).

Few details about the second annual meeting could be found. It was held on March 3, 1917, at Mrs. Arthur Curtis James' beautiful mansion, "Four Way Lodge." As usual, Mrs. Kilbourne read a bird poem at the opening of the meeting:

> The president read her report which covered the year's work and showed what a tremendous lot of work the society has accomplished in addition to the twelve delightful and inspiring meetings we have had. Many have become interested in birds who had known almost nothing about them before becoming an Audubon member (CGAS minutes 3/3/1917).

The first death of a member of the society was reported during this second year of operation:

> The president asked the society to stand while she told of the death of one of our members, Miss Eleanor Kirkbride of Philadelphia. A memorial has been gotten up by Mrs. Bancroft Davis and $72 had already been collected. This memorial fund is to be used to buy garden seed for the children of St. Albans school. The CGAS donated one dollar toward this fund.

Another "first" occurred during this year:

> Mrs. Munroe then announced the birth of the first baby among our members, Finlay Matheson, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Matheson, and the secretary was instructed to send the congratulations of the club to the parents of the boy (CGAS minutes, 9/4/1916).

The original birth announcement is included with the minutes on file at the Historical Museum.

Although the activities of the CGAS may be entertaining to the reader, it was a most serious organization. The society's agendas were comparable to any modern environmental organization's agendas, for sheer number of urgent problems. The secretaries wrote innumerable letters, corresponding with top state and national governmental officials. The society sent delegates to Tallahassee, participated in state meetings, and even helped write legislation.

The society was predominately feminine, both in membership and in active involvement. The ladies' concern for "our feathered friends," their tea parties, and their appreciation of the natural environment added a warm feeling to the society. The CGAS was an example of grassroots environmental activism at its finest.

As if Mrs. Munroe didn't have enough to do, she established

another Audubon Society in 1918, this time in the city of Miami. According to the minutes of the first meeting,

> The beginning of a great power for good work along one line of conservation was when Mrs. Kirk Munroe called to order a small gathering of women (13) at the Womens Club Building, Miami, Florida, at 3 pm, January 17, 1918. Mrs. Munroe stated that she acted in her capacity as chairman of the Committee on Bird Protection of the FFWC and that there was a great need of such an organization to help the CGAS exert influence along this important line of bird food conservation (Miami Audubon Society minutes, 1/17/1918).

Minutes for eighteen meetings of the Miami Audubon Society (MAS) are available, 1918-1920. The following officers were elected the first year: Mrs. Jerome Gratigny, president, Mrs. Charles T. Simpson, vice president, Mrs. Caddigan, treasurer, and Mrs. Hiram Byrd, secretary pro-tem. Mrs. Simpson later resigned and Mrs. Munroe assumed the office of vice president. Mrs. Gratigny's husband was the estate manager for Charles Deering who was having poaching problems at his home in Buena Vista.

The MAS was the first "bird society" to join the FFWC which meant men were honorary members of the society. The MAS was also quite involved with Royal Palm State Park, sponsoring a "field day" there and participating in a bird survey of the area. The motto of the society was "a readiness for the duty of the hour."

Other meeting minutes of the CGAS are on file at the Historical Museum dating from 1929 to 1933, but are beyond the scope of this article. Briefly, the officers were Mrs. A.B. Wade, president, Mrs. Jessie Munroe, secretary/treasurer, and Mrs. Harlan Trapp, vice president. Twelve years after the first set of minutes ended, the ladies were still reading bird poems, still swapping bird notes, and continuing to work for the protection of south Florida's unique natural environment.

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