

SPORT IN FLORIDA.



EAR after year marks the rapid decrease of game. Our laws for its protection are but little observed in any section of the country, and so great has been the slaughter that there is little left for this generation of sportsmen. The vast extent of our domain has so far been the principal protection our game has enjoyed, but notwithstanding our boundless preserve many species of game have been practically exterminated. It is a singular fact that the vast plains of the West have been almost entirely depleted of game, while in the older settlements of the East many species are still abundant. It is safe to say that not 1,000 buffaloes are left on the continent. Their beaten trails are still to be seen on the plains and thousands of tons of their bleached bones are yearly gathered, but the buffalo is a thing of the past. The antelope and the elk have shared almost the same fate. The Indian was the best protector our game could have had, and it must be a sad reflection for him to know that its destruction did more to subdue him than our army.

Fortunately there are left to us a few spots where game may yet be had, and to those in search of it Florida offers attractions to be found in no other section of the country. During the winter months her climate is well suited to outdoor life and especially to camping out. In the northern part of the State it rarely gets hot enough to destroy that energy which is so necessary to the successful sportsman. Though this State was settled earlier than any other portion of our country, its population has never increased very much until within the past few years, and even now there is not a county in the State which may be called thickly settled. There are millions of acres of virgin forest and millions of acres of swamp. Nature has nowhere produced on our continent a finer game preserve than here. The vast forests mostly contain a heavy undergrowth of palmetto scrub which makes an excellent cover for game.

In addition to these are immense cane-brakes, miles in length, and vast swamps which are almost impenetrable to man. As might be expected in such a wilderness as this, game abounds in great quantities. The only portion of the State in which the game has been killed out is immediately around the towns, an area which is exceedingly small, for within a few miles of any town in the State game may yet be found. Deer are more abundant than in any other section of the country and afford excellent sport. They are smaller than the Virginia deer found further north, though exactly like them in every other respect. Their flesh is exceedingly palatable, being of more delicate flavor than that of the Northern deer. They were formerly killed in great numbers by fire-hunting, a method which is altogether unsportsmanlike. The hunter went out at night bearing a lighted pine torch in his hand, or paddled along the shore of some lake with a torch in the bow of his boat. Deer are attracted by such a light and allow the hunter to approach near enough to see their eyes by the reflection. It is a difficult matter to distinguish the eyes of a deer from those of any other animal



under such circumstances and as a consequence a great many horses and cows were killed in mistake. Fortunately this led to the passage of a law prohibiting fire-hunting altogether. The cover for deer in this country is so thick that still-hunting is out of the question, and they are hunted entirely with dogs, being driven to water or shot as they break cover. Black bears are quite numerous in Florida forests, and are usually hunted

with dogs. The most dangerous game to be found is the panther or the American puma. While it is quite bold in committing theft, it is usually regarded as a coward. There have, nevertheless, been instances of this animal showing desperate fight when wounded, and even attacking man without provocation. Florida is the home of the wild turkey, and they are very abundant all over the State. They get to be very large, and when in prime condition are a fine table bird. The lakes and rivers of this region afford excellent duck shooting in winter. The principal varieties of ducks visiting Florida waters are the blue and green-wing teal, the mallard, canvas-back, red-head, wood duck and many others which do not rank so high among epicures. Of the snipe family, there are the jack-snipe, golden plover, piping plover, wood cock and yellow-leg.

There are a large number of birds in Florida which cannot be classed as game, but which are being rapidly killed off for their beautiful plumage. Along the more frequented routes of travel these birds have almost entirely disappeared. Formerly tourists were permitted to shoot them from the steamers, and every would-be sportsman who could muster a gun had his fill of slaughter. All this has been stopped now, but of course it is too late to do any good. These beautiful plumage birds are still quite plenti-



ful along the Gulf coast and on the southern part of the peninsula. The pink curlew, red ibis and roseate spoon-bill are the most famous. The white heron is also a beautiful bird. To see them flying in circles, one above another, in pyramid shape, with the sunlight glistening on their silvery plumage, is a sight long to be remembered.

An article on Florida sport would be incomplete without a word in regard to the alligator, though the hideous creatures are by no means entitled to be called game. Everyone who visits Florida wants to see an alligator and every sportsman desires to add one to his bag. Alligators have become quite scarce on the principal routes of steamboat travel; so scarce, in fact, that the captains on the St. John's steamers have every one on the river marked down, and can tell you just where to look for each one long before you arrive at his accustomed spot for a sun-bath on the river bank. In the southern part of the State they are still abundant, and thousands are killed for their skins and teeth—the latter worth \$6 per pound. One hunter is said to have gathered a hundred pounds of teeth the past winter at Lake Worth. He shot the gators at night by torchlight, returning in the morning to cut off and bury their heads, which were left under ground until the teeth became loose. In the northern part of the State the alligators hibernate, burying themselves in the mud at the bottom of the lakes and rivers. These saurian monsters attain enormous size, some of them reaching a length of eighteen feet. There is, however, but little sport in shooting them, for they are very sluggish and easily approached.

Perhaps the finest sport to be had in this State is that of quail shooting. These birds are more abundant here than anywhere else on our continent. They

are fully as large as their northern congeners and quite as game in every respect.

While good shooting may be had in almost any part of the State, the northern section possesses the most attractions for use of gun and dog. The land is there high and rolling and much of it under cultivation. Before the war, this section was the seat of the wealth and aristocracy of the State. Though many of the old plantations have been allowed to go to wreck, there are still thousands of acres annually cropped with cotton and corn. Almost every plantation is surrounded by magnificent forests of timber. The pine, the live oak and magnolia grow to enormous size and are gaily decked out with long streamers of Spanish moss. Beneath their spreading branches the ground is carpeted with the most exquisite wild flowers. Most noticeable among these is the yellow jessamine, a vine which literally covers the bushes and smaller trees with a mass of beautiful bloom and makes the air fragrant with its delicious odor. All through this charming country there are excellent roads running in every direction, so that the hunter can drive for miles through field and forest, letting his dogs work ahead of him. After the crops have been removed from the fields a rank growth of beggar-weed springs up, affording excellent cover for the birds through the winter. In the month of February the farmers burn off the weeds

and commence plowing the ground, so that the birds are then compelled to seek shelter in the adjoining woods and thickets. They feed in the open during the morning and afternoon, seeking water and shade along the little streams in the middle of the day. While in such places they are very difficult to find, and even more difficult to bag owing to the thickness of the brush and trees. The pine woods of this country are very open and free from underbrush, and a covey of birds scattered in such cover affords fine sport.

The proper way to hunt here is to go horseback, for it is really the perfection of sport to ride all day through this picturesque country behind a couple of good dogs, dismounting only when the game has been marked. Almost every field and copse will offer game to try the hunter's skill. The sun is bright, the air balmy and bracing, and as you ride along in your shirt-sleeves, ever surrounded by charming scenes, you wonder whether you can ever again attempt quail shooting amidst the ice and snows of the bleak North. When the middle of the day arrives and the sun has grown too warm, you stop upon the bank of some pretty little lake for lunch. The dogs take a bath in the cooling waters and get a rest which fits them for the afternoon work. If you are not an ardent sportsman you will probably continue shooting until the dusk of evening renders it no longer possible to hold on the swift-flying birds. The dogs are brought to heel, you put on your heavy coat to keep off the cool night air, and turn your horse's head for home. Perhaps the moon is up, and as you ride along through wood and field, the whole scene, bathed in silvery light, save where the dark shadows of the forest fall, you feel an exhilaration which is known only to those who commune with nature.

Not only does Florida offer shooting unsurpassed, but she has equal attractions for the fisherman. Her lakes and rivers abound in fish of great variety.



and all along her extensive coast sea-fishing is of the finest. A. R. HACK.

Babies for Weapons.

When in a passion all weapons are good that come to the Transylvania gypsy's hand, and, for lack of better, unfortunate infants are sometimes banded backward and forward as improvised cannon balls. A German writer mentions having been an eye witness of a quarrel between a gypsy man and woman, the latter having a baby on her breast. Passing from words to blows, the man, seeing neither stick nor stone within handy reach, seized the baby by the feet, and with it belabored her so violently that, when the bystanders at last were able to interpose, the wretched infant had already given up the ghost.

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