

The President's Page

by A. O. Aschim, Prince Albert

The late ornithologist, Arthur A. Allen, tells us that the Archaeopteryx is the earliest known bird. A fossilized imprint found in Bavaria is thought to be 130 million years old, some 50 million years older than fossil birds discovered in Kansas representing the *Hesperornis* and the lesser known *Ichthyornis*. Fossil remains indicate that at least 167 species of birds have ceased to exist and are known only as fossils.

Almost within memory, several species of birds have vanished. Among these are the Great Auk, the Labrador Duck, the Passenger Pigeon, the Heath Hen, and the Eskimo Curlew. Money for the purchase of specimens of two of these extinct species—the Great Auk and the Labrador Duck—is now being solicited by the Royal Ontario Museum which does not have them in its fine bird collection. The Great Auk was last seen alive off the southwest point of Iceland on June 3, 1844, and the last specimen of the Labrador Duck was shot at Long Island, New York, in the fall of 1875. Would more intensive study of these species have prolonged their existence?

Probably this question can best be answered through our own patience in the present struggle to save the Whooping Crane, the California Condor and the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Some ornithologists feel that the point of no return has been reached, particularly for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker and the California Condor. We are presently witnessing the greatest international co-operative conservation measure of all time in the last ditch stand for the saving of the Whooping Crane. Probably we are so engrossed with the plight of this now famous bird that we are not heeding the danger signals pointing to the disappearance of other native species right in our own habitat.

As a boy on the prairie, I recall the Prairie Chicken in fairly substantial numbers frequenting the "buck brush coulees." These were not the Sharp-tailed Grouse, although they were plentiful. How long is it since you saw a Prairie Chicken? I recall, too, seeing Whooping Cranes often enough



The Great Auk

that I never dreamed that in my time they might become extinct.

A. A. Allen makes the statement in his book, *Book of Bird Life*, that commercialization of wild life has always been the means of its extermination. Then he cites several examples of extinction or near extinction of certain wild life by the placing of a price upon their heads in the form of bounties, market demands or for feather trade. Today, some of these demands are no longer tolerated but these species may never recover from the effects of commercialization in the past.

Commercialization does not deserve all the blame, however, for the diminishing numbers of such birds as the Prairie Chicken. Lack of natural environment due to agriculture has taken its toll of many of our birds. On the other hand, what does the use of agricultural chemicals do to the birds that have adopted an agricultural habitat? It is as important to give our support to good conservation practice in these matters as it is to urge the setting aside of natural environment for wild life, as is now being done in nearly every faunal zone in North America.