



Collier Soil and Water Conservation District

Gazetteer

January 2013

Bambi

- In the 1920s, filmmakers promoting conservation not only gave wild animals names but also portrayed them as adorable pets.
- In William Finley's 1929 movie-lecture, *Camera Hunting on the Continental Divide*, about an expedition to Glacier National Park and the Rocky Mountains, the filmmakers befriended moose, elk, bears, marmots and bighorn sheep.
- A grouse was tame enough to pet, as were Emma the mule deer and Chippie the chipmunk. This film and others did wonders to promote conservation and in them man played the role of both despoiler and savior.
- Soon, however, films took to portraying man as the natural world's enemy.
- In *Bambi*, Walt Disney's 1942 animated classic, no humans appear, but the destructiveness of humans is powerfully portrayed in man's dogs chasing the young deer, the forest carelessly set ablaze, and, of course, the shooting of Bambi's mother—evoking a young child's worst nightmare, losing a parent.
- "It has become perhaps the single most successful and enduring statement in American popular culture against hunting," wrote Ralph H. Lutts.

Where we live matters

This Gazetteer is about the incredible story of how wildlife comebacks have turned suburban backyards into wildlife battlegrounds. Our story begins with draining the Everglades first suggested in 1848, but not attempted until 1882.

The manufacturing revolution that took off in the 1880s put more people to work in factories than in fields. Big farms got bigger. Small farms became obsolete; rural labor, superfluous. Hands-on farm families made up 38 percent of the American population in 1900, but they shrank to just 1 percent in the course of the next century as people traded dawn-to-dusk toil and dirty fingernails for a modern world of unprecedented affluence and convenience—and detachment from the land.

Much of the natural landscape has gone from something exploited for fur, feathers, food, lumber and minerals to something exploited for scenery and recreation. In the nineteenth century, what was left of untamed land came to be seen as unspoiled beauty worth saving, enjoying, and even paying to visit.



In the twentieth century, Americans became fascinated by distant wilderness and the wild creatures that inhabited it and writers found an eager market among members of a growing urban middle class for realistic stories about animals in the wild. The writers, among them Jack London, Ernest Thompson Seton, Charles D. Roberts, and William J. Long, crafted bestsellers that they maintained were largely faithful to the natural world.

But for the sake of narrative drive and sales, they took certain liberties: A crafty fox leads a pack of hounds into the path of an oncoming train; a porcupine rolls down a hill for fun; a bird breaks a leg and fashions its own splint; a wolf kills a caribou with a single bite through its chest into its heart. These writers imbued wild creatures with humanlike talents. They wrote stories about animal heroes and told them from the animal's point of view, describing its experiences and even its thoughts.

To John Burroughs, they were "sham naturalists," and in the March 1903 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, this self-taught naturalist, writer, and friend of the conservationist president Theodore Roosevelt called them on it.

These writers were out to make a buck at the expense of scientific reality, he wrote. Four years later, in a magazine interview, President Roosevelt called them "nature fakers."

- "It was targeted at children in their most impressionable, formative years."
- The memory of the incident remains with them even into adulthood."
- Bambi cost \$1 million more than it earned during its first run, but it was rereleased each subsequent decade, made lots of money—\$267.5 million by 2010—and distressed each new generation of children with the prospect of parental loss.
- "While Disney's True-Life Adventures revealed the purity of nature through a wide-angle lens, they simultaneously purified nature through anthropomorphic conventions that introduced familiar portraits of animal life," wrote Mitman.
- Female seals arrive to the tune of "Here Comes the Bride." Variety magazine joked that Disney was turning the audience into "peeping tom naturalists."
- Violence was muted to present "a sentimental version of animals in the wild that sanctified the universal 'natural' family as a cornerstone of the American way of life," wrote Mitman.
- Footage of baby seals being trampled to death by bulls on Seal Island was edited out.

Contact Us:

Collier Soil and Water
Conservation District
14700 Immokalee RD
Naples FL 34120-1468
Phone: (239) 455-4100
FAX: (239) 455-2693
www.collierswcd.org

He saw in nature ruthless competition, instinct and survival of the fittest. "If the child mind is fed with stories that are false to nature," he said, "the children will go to the haunts of the animal only to meet with disappointment...disbelief and the death of interest." Nevertheless, as people removed themselves from direct contact with wild animals, the genre of anthropomorphism grew.

In addition to books, one late-nineteenth-century substitute for real nature was film. Beginning with the invention of the motion picture camera in the 1880s, the camera supplied views of nature that could be staged and cropped to produce salable celluloid products. "Poised at the intersection of art, science, and entertainment, natural history film would transform American perceptions of and interactions with wildlife over the course of the twentieth century," wrote Gregg Mitman in *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film*.

"There's a sucker born every minute" is a phrase often credited to P. T. Barnum (1810–1891) but it applies to those who contribute their money to save some species or another while ignoring the reality that some things can't survive in this area because their food sources are gone and will do great damage to survive.

Why? Among our problems is the absolute demand for an efficient personal and commercial network connecting everywhere to everywhere. Growth in the size, quality, maintenance and use of our road network is astonishing to contemplate.

The designers and engineers of this network gave little if any thought to the effects of its hard surfaces on nature—except, perhaps, their positive effects in cutting down on dust. Although drivers can see dead animals beside the roads they drive, few of them in my experience are aware of the extent to which hard-surface roads, local or long distance, are wildlife magnets.

These surfaces, especially asphalt, absorb heat during the day. Crickets, grasshoppers, and other insects, at home in grassy mowed roadsides, crawl onto the warm surfaces and stay active at night. So do slugs and worms on wet nights.

Asphalt warms cold-blooded reptiles and amphibians too. Insect-eating animals such as skunks and foxes come onto the roadway to eat. Small mammals such as mice and voles appear and they attract owls and other avian predators. Once they're run over, other protein eaters, including vultures and coyotes, come along to eat them. Deer, moose, and other ungulates eat freshly mowed roadside grass in summer. Birds flock in to eat bugs and swallow gullet stones. Other birds such as gulls and crows land to feast on leftover fries casually tossed out car windows. In the spring, skunks come out of hibernation and hungrily head for food sources in backyards and along roads. Squirrels and raccoons get out and about. Snakes and frogs wake up and begin moving. Turtles lumber across asphalt on seasonal migrations. Bears and Panthers dig through trash cans and dumpster dive.

Highways with wide and frequently mowed aprons and medians allow both drivers and animals greater visibility, but the higher speeds vehicles travel on them reduce safety for both, especially at night. In the past, some misguided maintenance departments, in the name of highway beautification, planted flowering bushes close to highways. They both cut visibility and attracted wildlife. Roadkill numbers are consistently higher on local roads than on most highways and the reasons are obvious: These roads are narrower, and the roadsides are usually lined with trees, ditches, brush and weeds that serve as both hiding places and travel corridors for wildlife.

Once you acknowledge just how expensive non-natural landscaping is, you can begin to see why, economically speaking, you might demand that native landscape plantings carry across our roadways to foster native plants and to protect food sources for Florida species.