The Market in Birds

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Henry M. Reeves, known by all as Milt, researched the connections among migratory birds, hunters, the market, and consumers. He was interested in the Gilded Age, when privileged diners, even at the White House, feasted on canvasback ducks, passenger pigeons, woodcocks, and a whole host of other migratory birds. Untold millions of these wild birds were trapped or shot by hunters and sold to merchants in city markets. Finally, after much avian bloodshed, controversy, and public outcry, Congress passed the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act and other laws to halt the slaughter.

Milt was a wildlife biologist who believed the history of market hunting needed to be known. He began by collecting out-of-print hunting books, like The Shadow of a Gun, by Henry Clay Merritt. Milt wrote introductions for thirty-eight historically valuable out-of-print books and made them available through print on demand from Kessinger Publishing in Montana. He also became interested in the Florentine Codex, which describes the knowledge and use of migratory birds by the Aztec. Milt also assisted with the ultimate publication of the Codex Canadensis (François-Marc Gagnon and Nancy Se- nior, McGill Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2011), which received the prestigious 2012 Sir John A. Macdonald Prize from the Canadian Historical Association and the 2012 Governor General’s History Award for nonfiction scholarly research.

Milt met Merilyn Bronson Reeves, his wife of sixty-two years, at Utah State Agricultural College (now Utah State University) in Logan, Utah, where Merilyn received her bachelor of arts in English and Milt received his master of science in wildlife management. His 1954 thesis, “Muskrat and Waterfowl Production and Harvest on Dingle Marsh, Idaho,” provided the biological
and ecological background that led to the eventual designation of the Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

Later, as a federal game agent for the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in the Rio Grande Valley, Milt helped protect hundreds of thousands of wintering waterfowl along with the then plentiful white-winged doves. In one assignment, Milt joined about fifty agents, led by the undercover agent Tony Stefano, to break up an illegal duck sale operation, resulting in the conviction of fifty-three market hunters and sellers. At that time, this was the largest FWS market-hunting operation in terms of the most violators apprehended over the broadest area. This event is described in the epilogue. Milt noted in his autobiography that his role in the “East Texas Take Down” was “one of the most memorable of many experiences with the Fish and Wildlife Service.”

Merilyn and Milt shared a love of nature and worked together in the field. For several summers, Merilyn joined Milt in Saskatchewan, Canada, where Milt was a crew leader banding fledgling waterfowl. Milt went on to work with respected wildlife management professionals in South Dakota and Minnesota, banding thousands of birds in the Central Flyway. While Milt began work in the Bird Banding Laboratory at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland, Merilyn became involved with the emerging environmental movement. Merilyn participated in a volunteer advisory capacity to promote the protection of the environment and public health. She served as a member of the National Board for the American Lung Association. As vice president of the National League of Women Voters, during the peak of the environmental movement, Merilyn represented and educated more than 125,000 league members in cleanup activities to protect the environment. She was also member of the University of California at Berkeley Natural Resources Advisory Committee, served the National Research Council on the selenium study at the Kesterson National Wildlife Refuge, and, for six years, was the first chair of the Hanford Advisory Board, a federal advisory committee. Merilyn received numerous awards for her work. Governor Harry Hughes of Maryland honored her with the prestigious award of Admiral of the Chesapeake Bay.

In 1983, Milt ended his thirty-year career with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as the branch chief of migratory bird management in Washington, DC. During his career and thirty-year retirement, Milt was a prolific writer, authoring or coauthoring fifty-six published articles, along with several books and book chapters. His book *A Contribution to an Annotated Bibliography of North American Cranes, Rails, Snipe, Doves, and Pigeons* (1975) remains a valu-
able resource. He was coeditor and contributor to *Flyways: Pioneering Waterfowl Management in North America* (Hawkins et al., 1984) and wrote three chapters in *Ecology and Management of the Mourning Dove* (Baskett et al., 1993), which was honored with The Wildlife Society’s wildlife publication award for 1996.

Milt’s papers are in the Utah State University Merrill-Cazier Library Special Collections and Archives and can be requested at https://archives.usu.edu/search.php. His professional obituary was published in *The Wildlife Professional* (Winter 2013), and his autobiographical *Recollections of My Career, My Colleagues, and My Retirement*, published in 2013, is available online.

During his final decade of life, Milt drafted seventeen chapters of a book he longed to see in print, provisionally titled *The Market Hunters*. The research was difficult and extensive: he filled many boxes and file cabinets. He used the historical expertise of many institutions, libraries, and individuals who assisted him, including the Valley Library at Oregon State University; the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley; the law library at Willamette University, Salem, Oregon; the Quinney Library at Utah State University, Logan; the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center Library in Laurel, Maryland; the Department of Agriculture Library in Beltsville, Maryland; the Department of the Interior Library in Washington, DC; Arthur S. Hawkins, FWS (retired); and Illinois Department of Natural Resources wildlife management professionals David Kenney, Larry David, Scott Jacoby, and Scott Simpson.

Merilyn was instrumental in the publication of this book. After Milt’s death in 2013, Merilyn collected and organized his unfinished chapters. She reached out to Milt’s former colleague Richard E. McCabe, who in turn helped to connect the Reeves family with historian Andrea Smalley, author of *Wild by Nature: North American Animals Confront Civilization* (2017). Dr. Smalley used Milt’s manuscript and his abundant compilation of source material as a starting point for her further in-depth research, greatly expanding upon the historical aspects and implications, reorganizing the material, and skillfully developing it into this book.

The Reeves family is most grateful to Dr. Smalley for realizing Milt’s ambition to tell this important, fascinating, and haunting story of the history of market hunting. Milt would have been impressed with this book and with Dr. Smalley’s extensive insights, additions, and expertise. The Reeves family is also grateful to Dr. Clait E. Braun for his detailed review of Dr. Smalley’s manuscript. The Reeves family also thanks Dick McCabe for encouraging
the family’s efforts throughout the process. The other members of the Reeves family appreciate daughter Julie’s efforts in assisting her father in resolving many computer glitches in the early stages of this book and helping with format and organization.

The Henry M. Reeves Family
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