William L. Finley

By William L. Finley

The Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges, which include the Upper Klamath, Klamath Marsh, and Bear Valley Refuges in Oregon and the Lower Klamath, Tule Lake, and Clear Lake Refuges in California, are host to more than 250 different bird species. In 1905, wildlife conservationist William L. Finley and his life-long friend Herman T. Bohlman camped for more than a month in the Klamath Basin and photographed waterfowl for the Audubon Society and for their own personal collections. Finley and Bohlman photographed Caspian terns, cormorants, and pelicans, all seen above, and other bird species at Klamath Marsh, Klamath Lake, and Tule Lake. This photo is from Finley’s extensive collection.

While in the Basin, Finley and Bohlman learned that, given the area’s convenient railroad service, local hunters were able to send wild game quickly to markets in San Francisco. In 1903, plume (feather) hunters collected at least $30,000 in feathers from the Klamath Basin, and in the fall of 1904, more than 120 tons of waterfowl were sent by railroad from the Basin to West Coast markets. Consequently, Finley and Bohlman started a campaign to preserve wildlife populations. Finley’s American Birds, published in 1907, and subsequent books and illustrated newspaper and magazine articles, highlighted their photographs of the region’s endangered birds. Finley was elected president of the Oregon Audubon Society in 1906, and with Bohlman as treasurer, the two directed the society’s resources to publicize the state’s need for wildlife conservation. They helped establish Oregon’s Fish and Game Commission in 1911. Finley was appointed Oregon State Game Warden in the 1910s, and in 1913, he ordered a deputy to confiscate a headdress of 46 egret plumes from opera singer Lillian Herlein at Portland’s Orpheum Theatre. Although recognized locally, Finley and wife Irene gained national recognition in the 1920s and 1930s for making wildlife movies for the American Nature Association.


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