

LOUISIANA REFUGE VISITED BY ROOSEVELT AND COMPANY IN 1915

In all of his travels, Theodore Roosevelt never made it to Pelican Island.

Six years after leaving the Presidency, however, Roosevelt did make a trip to the bird islands of coastal Louisiana, which at that time were a mixture of Federal, State, and private lands. Most are now part of the Breton National Wildlife Refuge, the nation's second oldest. Some have disappeared entirely, victim of shifting tides and tropical storms.

Roosevelt summarized his trip in one of his autobiographies entitled "A Book Lover's Holidays in the Open," selections of which are reprinted below.

In characteristic Rooseveltian grandiloquence, he offered his opinions on the embryonic Federal refuge system, plume and egg hunters, the Biological Survey (forerunner of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), civil servants, cranky motorboats, and mosquitoes.

Along the way he also offered a glimpse into a time and place in our history when a man who had held the most important job in the world might simply walk a beach alone, watch a flight of black skimmers, and dig turtle eggs for breakfast.

—David Klinger, *Public Affairs*

"On June 7, 1915, I was the guest of my friend (*future Governor*) John M. Parker, of New Orleans, at his house at Pass Christian, Mississippi. For many miles west, and especially east, of Pass Christian, there are small towns where the low, comfortable, singularly picturesque and attractive houses are owned, some by Mississippi planters, some by city folk who come hither from the great Southern cities, and more and more in wintertime from the great Northern cities also, to pass a few months.

"At four on the morning of the 8th our party started from the wharf in front of Pass Christian. We



were in two boats. One, good-sized and comfortable, under the command of Captain Lewis Young, was the property of the State Conservation Commission of Louisiana, the commission having most courteously placed it at our disposal. The other boat, named the *Royal Tern*, was the property of the Audubon Society, being allotted to the work of cruising among and protecting the bird colonies on those islands set apart as bird refuges by the National and State Governments.

"The *Royal Tern* is commanded

by Captain William Sprinkle, born and bred on this Gulf coast, who knows the sea-fowl, and the islands where they breed and dwell, as he knows the winds and the lovely, smiling, treacherous Gulf waters. He is game warden, and he and the *Royal Tern* are the police force for over five hundred square miles of sand-bars, shallow waters, and intricate channels. The man and the boat are two of the chief obstacles in the way of the poachers, the plume hunters, and eggers, who always threaten these bird sanctuaries.

"In Florida one of the best game wardens of the Audubon Society was killed by these sordid bird-butchers. A fearless man and a good boat are needed to keep such gentry in awe. Captain Sprinkle meets the first requirement, the hull of the *Royal Tern* the second. But the engines of the *Tern* are worthless; she can catch no freebooter; she is safe only in the mildest weather. Is there not some bird-lover of means and imagination who will put a good engine in her? Such a service would be very real. As for Captain Sprinkle, his services are, of course, underpaid, his salary bearing no relation to their value. The Biological Survey does its best with its limited means; the Audubon Society adds something extra; but this very efficient and disinterested laborer is worth a good deal more than the hire he receives. The government pays many of its servants, usually those with easy jobs, too much; but the best men, who do the hardest work, the men in the life-saving and lighthouse service, the forest rangers, and those who patrol and protect the reserves of wild life, are almost always underpaid.

Increase in birds

"Yet, in spite of all the disadvantages, much has been accomplished. This particular reservation was set apart by presidential proclamation in 1905 (*sic-1904*). Captain Sprinkle was at once put in