



# Audubon

## An Early Partnership: Audubon, Roosevelt, & Breton Island

In the early 1900's, many bird species, including Snowy Egrets and Least Terns, faced extinction by hunters who discovered a lucrative market for their magnificent feathers, then in high demand for fashionable ladies hats. Seeking to prevent further slaughter of the birds, Audubon Societies sought the help of then President Theodore Roosevelt to create a safe haven, and ensure their survival for future generations. Their wish was granted in 1903, when Pelican Island became the first refuge in what would later become the National Wildlife Refuge System. One year later, in 1904, Roosevelt issued an executive order establishing a cluster of islands off the coast of Louisiana as the second federally protected "preserve and breeding ground for native birds", to be called Breton Island Reservation.



Harvard College Library, Theodore Roosevelt Collection

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**“The Audubon Society, which has done far more than any other single agency in creating and fostering an enlightened public sentiment for the preservation of our useful and attractive birds, is a purely voluntary organization, consisting of men and women who in these matters look further ahead than their fellows, and who have the precious gift of sympathetic imagination, so that they are able to see, and to wish to preserve for their children’s children, the beauty and wonder of nature.”**

*President Theodore Roosevelt, A Book-Lover’s Holidays in the Open*

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restrain an unprincipled present-day minority from wasting the heritage of these unborn generations. The movement for the conservation of wild life and the larger movement for the conservation of all our natural resources are essentially democratic in spirit, purpose, and method.” (Roosevelt, A Book-Lover’s Holidays in the Open)

Now, 100 years after the creation of Breton Island National Wildlife Refuge, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service continues to ensure that it remains a safe haven for birds and wildlife. Breton’s significance cannot be overstated: in addition to providing valuable habitat, the islands serve as the first line of defense against storm surges, and act as a buffer to protect our unique coastline. President Theodore Roosevelt, with the help of early conservationists, made great strides to protect America’s special places for birds, wildlife, and people: now it’s up to us to make sure his conservation legacy is upheld.

But Roosevelt didn’t stop there – by the end of his term he had created more than 50 federal refuges across the country. Before Congress allotted funds for the management of these refuges, Audubon Societies supplied boats and employed wardens in jobs that proved to be very dangerous, and in fact, resulted in the murder of Warden Guy Bradley in Florida by poachers. After his presidency in 1915, Roosevelt traveled to Breton Island (the only refuge he is known to have visited) to see firsthand the Brown Pelicans, Reddish Egrets, and the largest colony of terns in the nation. Along with his travel companions, Audubon Warden William Sprinkle and future Governor of Louisiana John M. Parker, he came upon nests that had been raided by plume hunters. He later wrote:

“It was a good object lesson in the needs of having reserves and laws protecting wild life, and a sufficient number of efficient officers to enforce the laws and protect the reserves.... Our duty to the whole, including the unborn generations, bids us