

Migratory Bird Sanctuaries.—Before the Migratory Birds Convention Act was passed, there had been in Canada a number of public and private wildlife sanctuaries, parks and game preserves, within which a degree of protection was afforded to all non-injurious forms of wildlife. The first—and, for over 30 years, the only—bird sanctuary established by the Government of Canada was at Long Lake in the Northwest Territories (now known as Last Mountain Lake, in the Province of Saskatchewan). An area of 2,500 acres in this district was, on June 8, 1887, “reserved from sale and settlement, and set apart as breeding grounds for wild fowl”. In 1921 this sanctuary, under the name of Last Mountain Lake Bird Sanctuary, was extended in area and brought under the provisions of the Migratory Birds Convention Act. It was transferred in 1930 to the Province of Saskatchewan, which still maintains it.

The first bird sanctuaries to be set up under the Migratory Birds Convention Act were the Bonaventure Island-Percé Rock Bird Sanctuary and the Bird Rocks Bird Sanctuary. Both of these were authorized by the Federal Government on Mar. 29, 1919, after having been created by an Act of the Legislature of the Province of Quebec.

The Bonaventure Island—Percé Rock Bird Sanctuary.—This Sanctuary consists of two parts, Percé Rock and the cliffs of Bonaventure Island, lying off the eastern tip of the Gaspé Peninsula in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The combined land area is small (only 32 acres) but the sanctuary is important, not only because of its historic priority but because of its quality as a bird refuge.

Percé Rock is a limestone mass a few hundred yards off shore, about 1,500 feet long and 300 feet wide, with an isolated column close to its seaward end. The sides of the rock rise perpendicularly out of the sea to a maximum height of 288 feet. These cliffs are unscalable by man and inaccessible to predatory animals, thus making the area on top of the rock a refuge of unequalled security for sea birds. The rock gained its name from the fact that it was formerly pierced by two or more great archways. Only one of these archways now remains, collapse of another during the 19th century having produced the isolated column mentioned above. All sea waters within one mile of Percé Rock are included in the sanctuary area.

During the nesting and brood-rearing season the top of Percé Rock is the abode of hundreds of double-crested cormorants and herring gulls, while small numbers of kittiwakes and guillemots nest on the sides of the Rock.

The other part of this sanctuary consists of the cliffs on the seaward side of Bonaventure Island, about three miles from Percé Rock. These cliffs, about a mile and a quarter in length, are composed of red sandstone and attain a height of about 250 feet.

The Bonaventure Island cliffs are pre-eminently the nesting-place of gannets. The number of gannets here, formerly exceedingly large, had decreased to a low point of 8,000 in 1919. Twenty-eight years of sanctuary protection increased the number to 18,000 in 1947, making this one of the four largest gannet colonies in the world. The cliffs are also used as nest-sites by herring gulls, black guillemots and other sea birds.

Both Percé Rock and the Bonaventure Island cliffs can be closely viewed by visitors coming in boats from the neighbouring mainland. In consequence, this sanctuary is a famous tourist attraction, and has had an incalculable effect in spreading interest in bird life and its conservation.