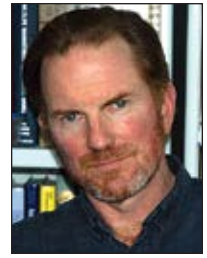


# THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY AND THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB THE LEGACY CONTINUES

SCIENCE BLASTS



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**The story of the origin of wildlife conservation, including the pivotal role of the Boone and Crockett Club, is familiar to Club members. As early as 1872—15 years before co-founding the Club with Theodore Roosevelt—George Bird Grinnell wrote this about bison: “Their days are numbered, and unless some action on this subject is speedily taken....these shaggy brown beasts, these cattle upon a thousand hills, will ere long be among the things of the past.” The Club’s role during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in getting legislation passed and forcing state, provincial and federal governments to take control of the crisis facing wildlife is legendary. Less well known is the Club’s influence on the emergence of the science-based profession of wildlife management.**

When the Club formed in 1887, there was no such thing as a wildlife biologist, let alone a discipline of wildlife biology. Both Grinnell and Roosevelt were academically trained in disciplines such as natural history and paleontology, which emphasized the collection, identification, and cataloging of living and extinct specimens for museum curation. Roosevelt, notoriously, rebelled against this approach, insisting that more needed to be done in the field and less in the confines of a laboratory.

The early years of conservation sought to slow the demise of wildlife and hunting in their presumed slide to extinction. The Club created the

Bronx Zoo in the 1890s so that future generations could see the magnificent animals that once roamed the American West. The early conservation approach comprising restrictive laws, seasons, and bag limits—coupled with a network of refuge areas—indeed slowed the decline of wildlife. But early conservationists realized that more had to be done, including new and different approaches. They recognized that wildlife, unlike plants and geologic strata, required more than cataloging and description. Just as these living entities were the victims of civilization, they required active human intervention to save them.

Enter into the picture Club member Aldo Leopold. Hired away from his Forest Service job in 1928 by the Sporting Arms and Manufacturing Institute (SAAMI) to conduct a series of game surveys across the United States, he was enlisted by the Wildlife Management Institute to lead a team to develop a national policy for game restoration. The ensuing 1930 American Game Policy was monumental in its recommendations and

subsequent implementation. It specified that the work should be carried out by trained wildlife specialists, and thus was born the profession of wildlife management. The policy called for active programs of scientific research to discover causes of wildlife declines and pathways to restoration.

A key outcome of the 1930 policy was the formation of The Wildlife Society (TWS) in 1937 as a professional and scientific society for wildlife biologists. Two years earlier, Club member J.N. “Ding” Darling had created the Cooperative Wildlife Research Units to train graduate students to solve practical problems facing management agencies. Leopold had created the first undergraduate program, but until TWS formed, there was no entity to share scientific information or establish ethical standards for the nascent profession.

As the wildlife profession matured through the 20th century into the 21st, wildlife rebounded, and TWS has remained the only professional scientific society solely dedicated to wildlife

conservation and management. Its mission is “To inspire, empower, and enable wildlife professionals to sustain wildlife populations and habitats through science-based management and conservation.” Many Club professional members have served and led TWS in various capacities during its 80-plus year history. Aldo Leopold was the president of TWS in 1939–40, followed by other Boone and Crockett professional members including Robert Brown, Wini Kessler, Tom Ryder, Bruce Leopold, Rollie Sparrowe, Thomas Franklin, Alan Wentz, and this author—all who remain active Club members today.

TWS is grounded in science, one of the core principles of North American conservation. The future of wildlife conservation will largely depend on the ability of science—both biological and social—to meet challenges vastly different than those

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faced by our founders. Growing the next generation of wildlife professionals by investing in students today is key to conservation’s future.

Once again the Boone and Crockett Club has stepped up as a conservation leader, partnering with TWS to greatly expand services and opportunities for students. The positive impact of the new partnership was in clear view this past October at the first-ever joint annual conference of TWS and the American Fisheries Society. More than 4,300 attendees, over 40 percent of them students, gathered in Reno to share research findings, management successes, professional networks, and other activities to advance the profession. Fellows and professors of the

Boone and Crockett University Programs were prominent in presenting papers and posters. The Club hosted them for an educational luncheon featuring guest speaker Evelyn Merrill, B&C Professional Member and the Canadian section representative to TWS’s governing council. TWS used multiple events and media to acknowledge Boone and Crockett’s support, thus introducing students and professionals across North America and beyond to the Club’s enduring legacy of conservation leadership.

The Club also sponsored the student quiz bowl and more importantly the Student Leaders Luncheon for the second year in a row. Boone and Crockett Professor Josh Millspaugh spoke to the

group about the history of the Club as well as the Hunting for Sustainability Program and our University Programs. The B&C booth staffed by Julie Tripp, Justin Spring, and Karlie Slayer was one of the most popular at the conference trade show. They were quite literally overwhelmed by interested students and professionals alike, and no doubt recruited many Associates.

Without question, the future of wildlife conservation is in the hands of current and future cohorts of students. Will they embrace the Club’s ideals and carry on the legacy of our founders? The Club’s partnership with TWS to support student engagement and success is a wise investment indeed, yielding dividends for the Club, for



wildlife, and for future generations who will inherit this rich heritage to use, enjoy, and conserve. ■



Read more about the Boone and Crockett Club’s involvement at the Annual Wildlife Society Conference this past October in the Winter 2019 issue of *Fair Chase*, page 66.



Julie Tripp (left) and Karlie Slayer (right) staffed the Boone and Crockett Club booth this past October in Reno at the annual conference of TWS and the American Fisheries Society.