

## Hunting of Birds in the Dutch East Indies for the 19-20 Century Fashion Industry

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**Abstract:** *The exploitation of the natural environment that occurred in the Dutch East Indies could not be separated from the influence of trade factors and the arrival of foreign nations. As happened to cloves in Maluku, nutmeg in Banda, sandalwood in Nusa Tenggara, teak in Java and birds of paradise in Irian. This hunt was influenced by the growth of the fashion industry in Europe and America which used fur as decoration on women's coats or hats at that time. The boom in demand for the feathers of these exotic birds reached its peak in the late 19th century. On the other hand, the concern about hunting, which is considered to be increasing over time, has caused reactions from various circles to produce several policies to suppress animal hunting that can lead to extinction.*

**Keywords:** *Bird Hunting, Dutch East Indies, Government Policy, Fashion Industry*

## **Preliminary**

Hunting for animals is an activity that has been known since the emergence of humans to meet their food needs even in modern times. Hunting activities underwent various developments which eventually led to the accompanying technological developments in the form of weapons ranging from spears, arrows, wooden chopsticks to iron tools such as spearheads and arrows. The hunting process has also developed, hunting techniques with various traps to attract prey. In its development, hunting has also experienced a shift in purpose, starting from fulfilling the need for food, then hobbies to playing a role in economic factors. This also applies to the nobles in the archipelago who spend most of their time hunting. Hunting certain types of animals became a hobby favored by local aristocrats as well as a marker of their status. Whether in Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan or Sulawesi. The animals that are hunted are of various types, from deer, elephants to tigers. This hunting hobby is still valid and favored by Europeans who are increasingly living in the Archipelago Archipelago.

The exploitation of the natural environment that occurred in the Dutch East Indies could not be separated from the influence of trade factors and the arrival of foreign nations. As happened to cloves in Maluku, nutmeg in Banda, sandalwood in Nusa Tenggara, teak in Java and birds of paradise in Irian. Animal commodities in the form of birds will be discussed further in this article. The trade in bird feathers, especially the bird of paradise, which has been a prima donna, has been around for a long time and has increased with the presence of international trade by the Dutch (Boomgaard, 1997: 15). This increase was due to the late 19th century fashion industry in Europe and America which influenced the hunting of certain animals in the archipelago. For example, bird of paradise feathers to decorate women's hats in the 1860s. Apart from bird feathers, Other animals such as snakes and crocodiles are also used as raw materials for leather shoes and bags. Bird of paradise feathers itself became a trading commodity and its largest jump at the end of the nineteenth century (Cribb, 1997: 200-201)

The demand behind this expansion of trade came from the European and American fashion industries, where the feathers of the bird of paradise were widely used, especially for decorating women's hats. Starting with the queen of France, Marie Antoinette wore a hat decorated with feathers. Furthermore, the trend of using bird feathers in the fashion world began to spread in Europe and America (Mason, 2002: 2). From the early nineteenth century fashion entrepreneurs began to use a variety of materials derived from birds, from owl heads, swallow wings, and preserved bodies of robins and hummingbirds, to stork and ostrich feathers (Doughty, 1975: 20). In response to this,

## **Method**

The method used in this research is the historical method. The historical research method is divided into five stages, namely topic selection, followed by heuristics, namely collecting primary, secondary, and tertiary sources, then criticism, criticism here is divided into two, namely internal and external criticism. Then there is interpretation or interpretation. And the last one is historiography or historical writing.

## Exploitation of Birds for Economic Interest

Figure 1 A Woman Wearing a Hat With Whole Bird Taxiderm circa 1912



Source: Library of Congress

In the mid-nineteenth century, the use of bird feathers in fashion had become a trend for women in Europe and America. In the 1870s many women's fashion magazines carried pictures of hats decorated with bird feathers and even preserved whole birds. Finally in 1880, the fashion trend in which bird feathers or even whole birds were preserved for decoration on women's hats combined with various flowers, leaves to dry plants became very popular (Mason, 2002: 2). The birds used include the types of white storks, hummingbirds, sparrows, birds of paradise and other exotic birds that are commonly found in Africa and Asia.

In the area of origin itself, namely Irian, although there has been a trade in birds of paradise for a long time, the trade is still at a fairly low level and does not damage the bird population. Apart from being traded, birds of paradise were also given to the authorities as a form of respect (Andaya, 1993: 99). According to records made by the Dutch East Indies government, the second quarter of the nineteenth century saw an increase in the demand for birds of paradise. These birds are indicated to be used as scientific collections or souvenirs (Wallace, 1890: 439-440). The birds obtained from the Aru Islands and New Guinea were then sent to Batavia and Singapore as a trade center as well as a transit point for shipments to Europe and America (Cribb, 1997: 382).

The common trade route is that first the natives of Irian serve as hunters of birds of paradise, then the game is handed over to traders from Maluku in exchange for tobacco, cotton or other

goods. After that, the merchant resell the game to Chinese, Dutch and other European traders. From here, the feathers of these exotic birds are collected for later export to Paris, London, Vienna, Amsterdam and others. This is where the feathers that will decorate beautiful hats decorated with exotic bird feathers come from (Boomgaard, 1999: 279). In addition, there were other alternatives that were made by the Dutch and Chinese traders to send more professional hunters. Unlike the local inhabitants of Irian who hunt using arrows, these bounty hunters are equipped with more modern weapons. Hunted by these hunters are also considered to be of higher quality than those of the local population. Even so, traders from the Netherlands and China still received a supply of game from the local population due to the increasing demand for birds in Europe.

Their favorite technique was to build bark on trees used by birds of paradise and shoot them with blunt-headed arrows. The stunned birds would then fall to the ground where they could be picked up by other villagers without damaging their skin in any way (Wallace 1890:422). After the skin was preserved, they were traded. However, in the second half of the nineteenth century, hunting seems to be increasingly dominated by semi-professional hunters from the Moluccas, especially Ternate. These hunters mostly used firearms, as there was now a market for feathers and all birds and hunters could buy decaying carcasses for a higher kill rate.

## **Conservation and Protection Efforts**

In November 1885, the minister of Colonies in The Hague received a letter signed by executives from *Bond ter Bestrijding eener Gruwelmode* which was an association against the use of birds for clothing and especially hats. In their letter, they conveyed their concern about the bird of paradise due to the roofjact or hunting for booty and urged the colony minister to take precautions against this hunting (Cribb, 1997: 389). In addition, in 1896 Naturalists PJ van Houten and M. C Piepers wrote notes about their concern about some animals and plants being threatened with their sustainability. Among them mentioned in their records are orchids, birds of paradise, Javan peacocks, rhinos, banteng and forest people. This record was later recognized by the colony minister and subsequently passed on to the Governor General in Batavia (Boomgaard, 1999: 264). Another anxious voice was addressed to the press and the Dutch Parliament and in 1896 the Minister of Colonies made a series of light requests for information from the colonial government. The question of whether these birds are in danger of extinction is becoming increasingly important. There seems to be a consensus for now that although extinction will not occur, current hunting levels cannot be maintained and must be reduced (Cribb, 1997:389). As a result of these complaints, between 1896 and 1897, the colonial government and officials in the ministries in The Hague investigated and considered various possibilities that occurred in the Dutch East Indies. smuggling. Then some parties also proposed the imposition of a tax on the export of birds of paradise, but the imposition of this tax would not limit hunting, related to taxes also constrained by technical problems related that New Guinea had not officially become part of the territory of the Dutch East Indies government (Cribb, 1997: 389). In addition, the trade of birds of paradise is also a support for the economy in the eastern region. So a policy is needed that can satisfy the need to protect birds, economic benefits and the administrative capacity of the Dutch East Indies government (Cribb, 1997: 394).

The director of agriculture, Melchior Treub, then made suggestions for the protection of birds as well as to include them in the law on hunting and protection of wildlife that has existed since around 1900. After much debate and deliberation, Director of Justice SJ Lagerweij, finally produced a draft regulation for the protection of birds across the colony in November 1901. There are three categories of birds that get protection from this regulation. First, birds are given full protection from killing or possession, alive or dead. Then the second group, namely birds that cannot be hunted with firearms, blowguns or catapults and finally birds whose hunting can be permitted by the local government either without limitation or for a certain time and place (Cribb, 1997: 392). The issue of bird protection received attention again in 1907 when the *Nederlandsche Vereeniging tot Bescherming van Dieren* wrote to the Minister of Colonies that the efforts made by the Dutch East Indies government had not shown a significant impact and urged more intensive action to be taken. Then in May 1908 the *Nederlandsche Vereeniging tot Bescherming van Dieren* wrote again a critique that considered that the efforts to protect birds by the Dutch East Indies government were not in line with international opinion and generally referred to actions taken to protect endangered species. Pressure was also obtained from outside parties, namely from England. It is in the UK itself where the protection of birds has become a matter of widespread national interest which has led the UK government to start taking steps to enact laws prohibiting the import of bird feathers. The British government also approached the Dutch government to invite it to become part of an international convention that resulted in an agreement to ban trade. Even so, in fact in 1907 in the Dutch East Indies, which was a Dutch colony, the recorded export value of bird feathers was f 694,829. This resulted in the Dutch being accused of being more concerned with economic gain and ignoring moral awareness of the environment and science. In addition, the government is also considering the possibility of substantial costs to oversee the ban on this matter. Therefore, the Netherlands decided to tolerate the trade in feathers and birds and also to ensure that hunting was properly regulated (Cribb, 1997: 395).

The first formal action to protect birds of paradise was when the *Ordonnantie tot Bescherming van sommige in het wild levende Zoogdieren en Vogels* which is an ordinance for the protection of certain wild mammals and birds came into effect in 1910. This regulation regulates the comprehensive protection of all wild mammals and birds. in the colony but there were some exceptions regarding protected animals in these regulations. Among them are animals that are considered dangerous species such as tigers, then animals that are considered dangerous to human life, monkeys and orangutans which are considered as robbers in plantations, then kingfishers, ricebirds and barbets which are considered predators in fish ponds, rice fields or even gardens. can be killed indefinitely. Likewise other animals such as wild boar, pigeons and waterfowl. The regulation also excludes some deer, elephants, parrots, parrots, and several other species from protection with the exception of having received a hunting permit by the regional administrator (Cribb, 1997: 396).

Protection of birds is also undertaken by the *Nederlandsch Indische Vereeniging tot Natuurbescherming* whose members are predominantly European with a few Javanese aristocratic descent who have an interest in protecting nature, the members of this organization are also dominated by scientists. They lobbied the colonial government to build a nature reserve as well as protection for the birds of paradise. In addition, they also provide a forum aimed at strengthening

and directing public attention to pay more attention to the environment and protection of certain species (Cribb, 1997: 398).

In addition, there is also an international campaign that emphasizes ending the trade in birds of paradise. In the Dutch East Indies, this campaign was spearheaded by Dr KW Dammerman who is the head of the zoological museum at the Buitenzorg Botanical Gardens and a member of the *Nederlandsch Indische Vereeniging tot Natuurbescherming*. In the Netherlands itself, the *Natura Artis Magistra* zoological community formed a committee to promote a ban on the export of birds and bird parts from the colonies (Westermann 1947: 37) and soon the British government announced that imports of bird feathers and skins (except from ostriches and eider ducks) would be outlawed throughout England starting in 1922 (Cribb, 1997: 400). Finally, in 1931, the Animal Protection Act, the *Dierenbeschermings verordening*, was enacted which provided full protection to all birds and many other species (Westermann 1947: 37-40). This is also motivated by the declining interest in the use of fur in the fashion world, especially hats.

## **Conclusion**

The exoticism and beauty of flora and fauna in tropical countries, one of which is the Dutch East Indies, has attracted many foreigners. This makes a lot of flora and fauna from tropical countries serve as a trading commodity. As a result, hunting cannot be avoided. In addition, the women's fashion world in the 19th century also started using exotic birds as part of their headdresses. With this trend there was a surge in hunting which was influenced by the growth of the fashion industry in Europe and America which used fur as decoration on women's coats or hats at that time. The boom in demand for the feathers of these exotic birds reached its peak in the late 19th century. On the other hand, the concern about hunting, which is considered to be increasing over time, has caused reactions from various circles to produce several policies to suppress animal hunting that can lead to extinction.

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