

## **TRANSCRIPT**

**INTERVIEWEE:** Rob Sawyer

**INTERVIEWER:** David Todd

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**David Todd** [00:00:01] Well, good morning. My name is David Todd, and I have the nice privilege of being here with Rob Sawyer.

**David Todd** [00:00:09] And with his permission, we plan on recording this interview for research and educational work on behalf of a nonprofit group called the Conservation History Association of Texas, and for a book and a website for Texas A&M University Press, and finally, for an archive at the Briscoe Center for American History, which is located at the University of Texas at Austin.

**David Todd** [00:00:31] And I want to stress that he would have all rights to use recording as he sees fit.

**David Todd** [00:00:37] And before we went any further, I wanted to make sure that that's good, and that's okay with you, Mr. Sawyer.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:00:43] You bet it is. David. Thank you. And good morning.

**David Todd** [00:00:46] All right, well, great. Let's dive into this and get started.

**David Todd** [00:00:51] It is Saturday, April 8th, 2023. It's just a little after 10:00 in the morning Central Time. And my name is David Todd, and I'm representing the Conservation History Association of Texas. And I am based in Austin. And we are conducting an audio interview with Rob Sawyer. This is a remote interview. He is based in the Sugar Land area. And this is actually a segue from an earlier interview that we did on April 4th. And we'll be picking up basically where we dropped off on the last interview.

**David Todd** [00:01:32] As a way of introducing Mr. Sawyer, he is a petroleum geologist by training and practice. He's also a manager of the Spread Oaks Ranch near Markham, Texas, and he's been a prolific author of a number of titles, including "A Hundred Years of Texas Waterfowl Hunting: The Decoys, Guides, Clubs and Places 1870s to 1970s", as well as "Texas Market Hunting Stories: Waterfowl, Game Laws and Outlaws", a third book, "Images of the Hunt", and even a fourth, "The Tarpon Club and the Genius of E.H.R. Green".

**David Todd** [00:02:12] He knows a lot of this from research in the literature, but also with many, many interviews with guides, hunters, land managers, game managers and so on. So, he brings a lot of knowledge to these stories and we're very fortunate to be talking to him.

**David Todd** [00:02:29] We will be again, as we were on April 4th, talking to him about his life and career today, but trying to focus on some of what he's learned about the history of waterfowl hunting, poaching and similar topics, mostly based on the Texas coastal plain.

**David Todd** [00:02:46] So, as just a first question, I thought, which really isn't, it's not the first in the whole interview because of course we covered a lot before on April 4th, but I think where we would like to pick up is just to try to get Mr. Sawyer to tell us about the demand that was driving all this market hunting in the early days. There's just, it seems like there was a variety of different kinds of commercial and retail uses for food and fat and feathers and other products. And maybe you can fill us in on the many details of this.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:03:22] Well you bet, David. So, we were leaving off mainly with the early years of Texas market hunting when settlement Texas, pre-Civil War, uses of waterfowl and this was before waterfowl was a culinary fad, a cuisine, for the, for the masses. It was a necessity before the Civil War. Wild fowl feathers, for example, were used to fill mattresses, pillows. It was a tradition for brides to receive feather pillows when, when they got married. Absolutely, absolutely critical.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:03:58] And feathers were expensive, \$0.50 a pound in the 1840s. Then, of course, the marketplace discovered the importance and the demand, and wholesale merchants began carrying them across coastal Texas and inland towns and cities. And they ordered their feathers in bales and shipped them by the half ton. So, it became big business.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:04:23] In the household, fat was used. Every homestead boiled down their birds and skimmed off the fat, used it for cooking, and they used it for soap.

**David Todd** [00:04:39] And maybe take us to the next section here. It sounds like these birds had a number of hunting techniques that were deployed to try to harvest them and bring them to market. Can you walk us through some of those, and how that whole arsenal evolved over time?

**Rob Sawyer** [00:05:09] Well, it did evolve over time. So, the firearms were very unsophisticated compared to today's firearms. Waterfowlers used black powder flintlock muzzle loaders and early breech-loading shotguns. It wasn't until the late 1870s that you could buy your black powder already loaded in shells.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:05:34] Things changed in 1882 with the first repeating shotgun. That was a pump gun made by John Browning. And then things got a little easier. You can imagine with muzzle-loading and flint locks, you couldn't get your powder wet. And that was a hard thing to do in a duck-hunting environment. By the turn of the century, Browning developed the first automatic or semi-automatic shotgun.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:06:02] So, when technology impacted shotgunning, it became easier to shoot. More people took it up. And firearms to the shoulder: I guess that's the best way to look at it. You know, with a big flintlock or muzzle-loader, you were resting that gun on a fencepost or a log, but with smaller, lighter, to-the-shoulder shotguns, market gunners, even sport hunters, did something called steer shooting, where they would use a trained oxen, walk along beside the grazing animal, and birds were not at all afraid of cattle, longhorn cattle, and they could get right up beside them and take a shot.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:07:01] Usually they weren't wing shooting. They were doing what's called pot shooting, but ammunition was expensive, and the way they got around that was making one shot on the water.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:07:13] They also did night shooting. Same kind of thing. Birds on the water again.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:07:17] As wing shooting began to get popularized. There was a thing called a sinkbox, popularized on the Chesapeake Bay, and it was sort of a floating coffin with decoys around it. And that was a particularly useful technique for canvasbacks and other diving ducks.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:07:36] One of the more I call it insidious guns was a punt gun or a swivel gun. And those were great, great long weapons, single, I mean a punt gun's actually been compared to a cannon. They were sculled at night with a lantern on the bow of a boat and the fire pot, as it was called in the old days, or a gunning lamp, was illuminated with charcoal, wood, candles. And it was not uncommon for these to catch fire, which was a bad thing on the bow of a wooden boat.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:08:09] Another thing that market men did was they baited the birds. They wanted to get them as many into one area as they could. They used corn, sorghum, barley, even sugar beet pulp, even tomato seeds.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:08:24] And we got two stories that I thought were interesting. In 1874, a hunter near Goliad soaked his corn in alcohol and opium. Then he went around day after day and just caught them.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:08:42] One of them, another market hunter, caught some the same way. And he earned, he earned \$4,000 for those geese, which is about \$130,000 in today's inflation.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:08:57] So, lots of, lots of ways that they harvested birds. Many of these are illegal now, but it was for money. It wasn't for sport.

**David Todd** [00:09:12] Yeah, it sounds like it was hard work, but lucrative.

**David Todd** [00:09:18] So, tell us about the next stage in this process, how the ducks and geese and other birds might have been taken to market and then preserved once they were in, you know, preparation for sale?

**Rob Sawyer** [00:09:36] Yeah, you bet. These were the days before the gasoline engines. So, if you were, if you were a market hunter inland, you had a wagon that was hooked up to oxen or horses. On Texas bays, you always used a sailboat.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:09:52] And you, the market men, in the earliest days, just they wouldn't go out if it was warm. If it was cold, they'd take days to get to the local marketplace.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:10:09] Salt and brining was popularized for waterfowl and for other meat going to market. It was popularized probably by the 1840s and 50s, and these were birds that were cleaned and put in barrels with salt or brine. And salt was very expensive. It had to be, it had to be made, it couldn't be bought for many years.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:10:35] And then right around 1865, after the Civil War, 1870, there was a whole market in New England ice. So, these brigs would leave New England and they would saw these giant slabs of ice and take them across the Atlantic Ocean into the Gulf of Mexico by brigs and steamers. And Texas' bigger towns and cities like Galveston and Rockport at the

time, built ice houses where they would store that New England ice. So, that helped birds, helped with the preservation of birds as well.

**David Todd** [00:11:20] Boy, that's really remarkable that this industry stretched all the way to New England to support it.

**David Todd** [00:11:28] And tell us a little bit about the prices that waterfowl might bring when they were brought to market in those days.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:11:38] So before the Civil War, you'd spend about fifty cents in bigger cities like Indianola, Houston, Galveston, anywhere from thirty to fifty cents a pair. They were cheaper as you went down the coast, as little as fifteen cents by the time you got down to Brownsville.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:11:56] But, that would all change by the 1880s. This is before the Civil War. It's all local consumption. Your only market was by the side of the road, restaurants, boarding houses.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:12:11] And, all species of ducks, geese, swans, cranes, shorebirds, prairie chickens. If it was alive, it was harvested and it was sold in the marketplace. Canvasbacks were always number one. But, all species were sold locally.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:12:32] And, some of the names that they used, it was interesting. Cornfield ducks in Brownsville. It took me a long time to realize that, to learn, that a cornfield duck was actually a whistler. And as for geese, the gunners knew what to call them, but none of the market men did. The Canada geese apparently, the big geese, were the only bird listed as a goose. Speckled bellies and blue geese were always called just gray geese. And for some reason I've never figured out snow geese were called brant.

**David Todd** [00:13:07] Interesting. So, they were still kind of developing the vernacular, the nomenclature for all the birds that were being brought to market.

**David Todd** [00:13:20] Well, so, I guess this brings us to the peak years. And I understand that there was just tremendous growth after the Civil War and maybe you can help us trace why there was this growth in the market hunting.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:13:40] Yes. The big boom years, across the United States, and of course, Texas, was really about 1880 and until about 1900. It got a little ... federal laws didn't come in till, federal laws with teeth, didn't come in until about 1918. But individual states had lawmaking capabilities. So, Texas market hunting peaked early, 1903, when Texas passed its first laws. But between 1880 and 1903, there was just a massive demand for waterfowl.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:14:22] Canvasbacks were prized by epicureans above all other waterfowl. But the media and the public elevated waterfowl, wild game, to the height of culinary chic and it took off. It grew.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:14:41] Combine demand with growth and technology. A lot of things happened in that short period of time just after 1880. Firearms evolved. I mentioned the first repeating shotguns. Well, that made it easier to go to the field. It made it, and the harvest was, became larger as a result.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:15:03] But refrigeration came in and railroads came to most of Texas. So, now you can see how a combination of technology gave birth, if you will, gave rise, to a whole marketplace. You could you could shoot Texas ducks on the bay and have them in Chicago in literally two to three days and get them there without salt, without spoilage. And it was, that's really the definition of the peak years.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:15:35] And I would say that canvasback was the duck that really drove it all for Texas.

**David Todd** [00:15:46] We were just speaking about the transport techniques and some of the other technological innovations that allowed market hunting to really boom in the 1880s and 1890s.

**David Todd** [00:16:00] And, I think, as a next step, maybe we'll talk a little bit about the areas of the Texas coastal plain that were supplying a lot of the waterfowl that was going into this big new market. So, perhaps you can fill us in on that, Mr. Sawyer.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:16:23] You bet. So, though all birds were part of the local market demand marketplace. But, the export market was different, and the number one bird that really defined the export market was two canvasback. And those were, you know, in the Chesapeake Bay, volumes of canvasbacks were being stressed by over-harvest. New York canvasbacks had already been wiped out. And America discovered Texas. And it was big business. The big, big hunting operations followed the canvasback.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:17:00] In Texas, there were two to three really prime canvasback areas for wintering birds. And they were all driven by a type of food that the canvasback preferred, which is the Vallisneria, also known as wild celery or eelgrass. And Lake Surprise which is in the east side of Texas' Smith Point, by Galveston Bay, was Texas' best canvasback gunning water body.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:17:34] And it was controlled by a syndicate of market gunners. It was no longer the domain of the sport hunter. They had fence riders. There were stories of people who tried to hunt it, poach it, who were driven out by the market syndicates.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:17:53] And it's easy, I guess, to see why. There was a Chicago market man in 1893 who shot 5000 canvasbacks on the lake. And in those days, 200 canvasbacks were worth about almost \$30,000 in today's value. So, it was big business.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:18:17] One of the owners of Lake Surprise was Galveston's Colonel Moody, and he hired market gunners to shoot his lake and took a piece of the money.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:18:31] Another area was Harbor Island. And that's Aransas Pass, behind St. Joseph's Island. And a third big area was Hynes Bay on the Guadalupe delta.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:18:43] So, there were as many as forty market hunters on Harbor Island and Hynes Bay, and they didn't always get along.

**David Todd** [00:18:53] Gosh. And so, other than the wild celery and eelgrass that characterized these areas that were so rich in canvasbacks. Was there anything else that you know would be key to finding those birds there in such rich concentrations? These were sort of enclosed bays, is that right, near, I guess, the deltas of major rivers.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:19:31] I don't know what drove Hynes Bay and Harbor Island ecosystems particularly, but I do know a little bit about Lake Surprise and it was perfect. It was a big freshwater lake right off the Gulf of Mexico, and it was just the perfect salinity and mineral content for wild celery grass. And I'm guessing salinity was the big driver in Hynes Bay as well. Harbor Island's a little bit unique in that it was way more saline than the other two locations and there's certainly no wild celery there today.

**David Todd** [00:20:14] It's intriguing. I guess these ecosystems have all changed a good deal.

**David Todd** [00:20:21] Well, so, take us to the next chapter in this story, how these birds were brought from the field to the table. How was this transit done?

**Rob Sawyer** [00:20:37] Yes. So, we are starting to see the change now, a major change, in Texas from a cart-driven mode of transportation, to railroads and also steamers. Sailboats got bigger. So, you, with ice, for example, you were able to take a sailboat, load it up with ice, and you could stay days, weeks, on the gunning grounds of the bays.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:21:05] In fact, the market men came up with something called buy boats, which was a boat that the fish, oyster and game dealers would set out, anchor. You could sail up, sell your birds, and then you'd go right back to shooting.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:21:21] So, it was beginning to get industrialized.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:21:25] All along the coast, you had game houses, and what they would call fish, oyster and game dealers. And either the buy boat or your boat sailed up where they had people who would pluck your birds, put them in wooden barrels filled with ice, load them on steamships in the 1870s, but express railroads by the 1880s. Now, you're talking about no spoilage, rapid transport, and the ability to move and sell large volumes of birds.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:21:59] And a big, big part of that, David, was commercial ice-making. So, we sort of take ice for granted now. But when the first ice-making machinery reached Galveston in the 1880s, it was, it became the standard for long-distance rail shipment.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:22:22] Now, let's look at delivering those birds by rail, whether it's Denver, Chicago, New York or wherever these Texas birds went. Once they got to the destination, there was something called a cold storage plant. And, at first, they were called refrigerated meat markets. But they allowed game merchants, and even hotels, to advertise the availability of fish, oysters and game year-round. So, now you're talking about a evolved, advanced transportation and refrigeration network that built a big business.

**David Todd** [00:23:00] Well, that's striking. So, I guess it goes from a seasonal business to something that could be offered year-round - summer, fall, winter - even if the birds were just being shot during a small part of the year, I guess.

**David Todd** [00:23:16] So, if I'm following you, one of the other key parts of this is the export market and the express and forwarding agencies. Maybe you can tell us a little bit about that segment of this whole system.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:23:35] So, you can see that there's a lot of moving pieces now to the big business of market hunting, 1880s to 1900. Every town that had a railroad had a business

called fish, oyster and game dealers. It also, another kind of new job that developed was wild game shippers, who called themselves express or forwarding agencies. So, lots of middlemen.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:24:08] And of course they were the ones who took you from your home-based cold storage where you held the birds, and cold storage was everything. You could time ... whatever you sold to market prices. If demand was high and product was low, you could release your birds from cold storage. And so they were holding an awful lot of birds.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:24:37] In 1889, there was one cold storage area, cold storage house, if you will, in New York. It had Texas game consisting of 1200 canvasbacks, 30,000 plovers and 15,000 snipes. We're talking large volume.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:24:58] There was another one: 1897, I believe it was, that was holding 10,000 ducks and 80,000 geese that they were timing to put out at Christmas that year.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:25:10] So, what you're getting a sense of is high demand and the market hunting industry grew to meet that demand.

**David Todd** [00:25:23] Boy, the scale of this, the number of zeros involved, is just astounding.

**David Todd** [00:25:30] Well, so, tell us a little bit about the hunters are actually supplying all this waterfowl to the market.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:25:38] So, in the early years, it was pretty innocuous. You had a guy and a gun and he shot enough birds to sell at a small town.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:25:49] Now, things have grown. And I guess you can also get a sense that, in addition to high demand and technology, there was also another nascent thing growing in North America. And that was conservation. And as I talk to you about the next few topics, you'll get a sense why we started to need conservation. And I know we're going to talk about that in a later interview.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:26:15] But the number of market men grew, as you can expect. In Galveston, there was something called the mosquito fleet, and it was hundreds of sloops. They sailed all around the Galveston Bay area. In the summers and spring, they would net fish and move vegetables and fruit. But wintertime, they hunted ducks, and brought them into Galveston to that railroad depot there. And there was ... one of the Galveston mosquito fleet's sloops, I saw records where he docks in 1893 with over 2000 ducks. So, a lot of birds.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:26:58] There was a family I followed out of Rockport, which was I mentioned Harbor Island, and Rockport was nearby. It was the Bludworth family and they were shipbuilders. And they were market hunters and they were kind of like Colonel Moody in that most of what they sold to market were canvasbacks.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:27:24] Smith Point's William Nelson - so, he used to shoot Lake Surprise until Moody's market hunters asked him graciously to leave. So, he's the one who really established Hynes Bay. And he owned nearly a dozen fish, oyster and game dealers or markets in the 1880s.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:27:48] But, what really began to evolve, David, was commission men. This was a change. Before commission market men, professional hunters, the business was always

in the hands of local people that knew the bays, knew the ways of waterfowl. They were, compared to commission market men, they were pretty unsophisticated.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:28:13] But, when the commission boys came to town, things changed. They were not greeted particularly. They weren't warmly greeted by the locals.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:28:23] Probably the biggest of the commission market businesses was one called the Western Commission and Western Poultry and Game Company. This was run by Nat Wetzel. He had 125 hunters and they followed the flyway from Canada to the Gulf Coast. And they had big offices in St. Louis, Kansas City and Houston, and they shipped wild game worldwide.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:28:50] So, change in scale. He provided all of his hired hands with five-shot pump shotguns. He shipped ammunition to wherever they were hunting by the railroad boxcar, and he installed refrigeration on all his buy boats. He would ship his ducks in refrigerated boxes and then they would stay in cold storage for up to two years.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:29:16] So, now we've changed from a local marketplace to a business that was global in scale. And the professional hunters were from all over the United States.

**David Todd** [00:29:34] Boy. So, they really upped the ante in a sense with, you know, the improved marketing techniques and the ammunition and the pump shotguns and the railroad boxcars and buy boats. Gosh, things were really accelerating.

**David Todd** [00:29:50] Well, I guess one way to understand this is to get maybe a sense of the volume of birds during these peak years. Could you tell us a little about that?

**Rob Sawyer** [00:30:02] Well, you mentioned before there was a lot of zeros, and that's the case again. Just step back for a moment. Only a few birds were actually exported. Plovers were a big bird in the marketplace.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:30:15] Canvasbacks, redheads, but canvasback was everywhere. You couldn't read a wintertime menu in a hotel without canvasbacks being featured. If you were running with the Vanderbilts and some of the Morgans and other wealthy Americans in New York, canvasback, terrapins were always featured at their dinner tables. It was the height of culinary chic.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:30:45] And so, I mentioned fish, oyster and game dealers. There were about anywhere from two to forty of these merchants in each of the major export centers in Texas. There were about a dozen export centers by the 1890s. The biggest were in Galveston, Port Lavaca, Rockport, Corpus Christi, Dallas and San Antonio, which were inland, also had them. Big business.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:31:16] And I put together an estimate of the numbers of birds shipped. And during the peak years, it was about 600 to 700,000. That was a lot of birds. And that doesn't include the number that was killed for the local marketplace, which certainly would put the figure at a million to maybe even 2 million birds a year.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:31:44] It was not sustainable. People didn't know it at the time. Or few people did, but it was not sustainable.



**Rob Sawyer** [00:31:53] Robins were a big part of the local market. There was one Texas market hunter who used to shoot roosts. And the last year of illegal hunting market hunting in Texas, 1903, he supplied 120 of them to local restaurants.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:32:13] But, one of the changes, when you look at the listing by the game dealers, by the 1890s, you no longer sold northern curlews, which were Eskimo curlews, on the game listings. You didn't see whooping cranes and you didn't see passenger pigeons. Now you're getting a sense that there's there are some changes starting to occur in in Texas', and North America's, wild bird population.

**David Todd** [00:32:44] So, Rob, just to sort of give us a sense of what it means to ship 600 to 700,000 ducks in a season, do you have any sense of what the take is in a typical year now in, you know, legal duck hunting? Any sort of idea of the scale there?

**Rob Sawyer** [00:33:08] No, I, I wish I did. And it would be a pretty easy number, I think, to come up with. But if I said something, I would be saying it wrong.

**David Todd** [00:33:17] Okay. All right. Definitely something we can look up at some other time.

**David Todd** [00:33:24] So, I guess driving all this, this sort of industrial-scale hunting and trading in waterfowl is high prices and lots of people making these, these markets happen, middlemen and so on. Can you give us an idea of the, the prices and number of people involved?

**Rob Sawyer** [00:33:48] Well, gone was the 25-cent canvasback during the peak years. The market man was paid by the fish, game and oyster dealers, he was paid about \$8 a dozen for Texas canvasbacks. Now we've got a middlemen and that's our express shippers. Those wholesalers would sell them up north for about two to five dollars a pair. The wholesalers would sell them in the marketplace for seven dollars a pair. So, a lot of markup. And of course, restaurants charged about double that for canvasback on the plate. And I think the one that surprised me the most was as early as the 1870s, steamers were taking Texas canvasbacks to England, and by the 1890s, they were selling for \$25 a pair, which is about \$800 today. So, you're looking at a bird that had a lot of a lot of dollar value to the coastal economy.

**David Todd** [00:35:01] Boy, that's that is remarkable. They were, they were really treasured, it sounds like.

**David Todd** [00:35:09] Well, and as I understand it, people were not just eating the meat, but they were also marketing these birds for their feathers. And that milliners got into this whole business of forming demand for waterfowl. Can you talk a little bit about that industry as well?

**Rob Sawyer** [00:35:31] Yeah, I was surprised by the magnitude of it. So, you looked at the canvasback as kind of culinary chic. At the same time, there was a major increase in ladies' fashions in urban centers around the world. Big part of their society garb were hats. And somehow or another, feathers became the single largest, mink later, but before mink, your social status was defined by your feathers on hats and accessories.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:36:10] And those feathers came at the, really, the expense of waterbirds, particularly colonial and wading birds - that would be our egrets, our roseate spoonbills, whooping and sandhill cranes, terns, herons, almost any bird.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:36:33] And they were harvested in a really not so good way. They, the gunners, would go to their roosts and they'd see these big roosts, rookeries, if you will, of birds, and they would shoot them.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:36:50] And the market was kind of like it was for canvasbacks. It was, it was pretty intense.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:37:00] I was, when I was researching this one, I found that there was a London woman who had a gown who was, I think, adorned with 600 Brazilian hummingbirds. And there was an evening dress of one other young, young person that was trimmed with, I think, fifty canaries. And these hats would have stuffed birds peeping out of the feathers on the top. And there'd wires to show, where they had butterflies flying around the feathers. And it was, well, I can't picture it today, but it was it was popular.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:37:38] And once again, demand drove big business. The snowy egret, the name for it was the bonnet martyr, because so many of those were killed. They were wiped out along the East Coast by the late 1890s. And then most of those gunners went to Texas with the intention of doing the same thing.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:38:01] But, big dollars again, market hunters received about 140 to as much as \$640 a pound for feathers. That's between five and twenty thousand dollars today.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:38:16] And you get a sense of how big the business was that the New York merchant who, when he put orders in to Texas for plumes, they were in orders, or lots, of 10,000 each. So that's a lot of feathers.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:38:35] You know, that turns out that, I never really thought about quill pens, which everybody had before Bic came out. And almost all of those quills were using swan feathers, wing feathers.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:38:51] So, once again, the combination of demand, technology and price drove a big, big business in market hunting for food for the table, and in this case, in feathers for predominantly ladies' hats.

**David Todd** [00:39:14] Boy, that's, that's remarkable - you know, on top of what you were telling us before about, you know, the demand for different kinds of birds for meat, and then we move into feathers for adornment and quills for writing.

**David Todd** [00:39:32] You know, this is an aside and I hadn't asked before, but I had read that during the Victorian era there was a lot of interest also in, among sort of amateur naturalists, in collecting birds and eggs just for their home, I don't know, archive or sort of private exhibit. Have you run into any records about that?

**Rob Sawyer** [00:40:01] Yes, I was as surprised as you were. They actually had a name. They were called eggers, and it was big business. So, a lot of young boys would rob the nests of these different shore and wading birds and sell the eggs. And once again, if demand was high enough, it actually had an impact on the spring, springtime birds. Surprising.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:40:34] So, eggs, feathers, meat - everything about the market industry would get some attention by the late 1890s, even a little bit earlier. And then, the big argument was who controlled America's wildlife? And do we want, are we having an impact on it? Almost had to, well, we did, had to reeducate much of society that these things were, it was possible that we could lose them. And passenger pigeon and the bison around the same time - it was a wake-up call. It wasn't going to last forever at these numbers.

**David Todd** [00:41:17] Well, these declines in waterfowl that were being seen, I guess nationwide, but also in Texas. Can you track them back to some of the different kinds of pressures that it might have been receiving, you know, whether it's the birds themselves or their habitat?

**Rob Sawyer** [00:41:39] Yes. So, I'd say, you know, I simplify things, but really there were two things that impacted the decline of America's wildlife. Certainly, the hunter's gun. But, a lot of things could survive that. But, habitat destruction was parallel to the hunt and it was escalating during the latter half of the 1800s as well, in Texas.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:42:09] One of the ... you mentioned the eelgrass. Well, we lost all our eelgrass in Texas because of channels, some that we dug into our bays and allowed saltwater into those bays. In the case of Lake Surprise, it was a channel between that freshwater body and Galveston Bay that, I guess East Bay, that was dug and allowed saltwater.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:42:37] So, we lost that magical water chemistry, if you will. Bringing in saltwater killed a lot of what was high-quality duck food.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:42:53] We dug channels parallel to the coast - the Intracoastal Waterway - connecting bays. Same thing, just allowing a injection of saltwater into a previously freshwater ecosystem.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:43:07] We drained our marshlands.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:43:10] Hurricanes also wiped out the Vallisneria. First that giant hurricane - 1900's - killed most of the Vallisneria in Lake Surprise, although it came back for a few years.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:43:23] You take things like the passenger pigeons, well, they, one of the big things that hurt those were the clearing of hardwoods in lakes where they did their summer nesting.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:43:37] Same with the, or similar with the, northern curlew: it wasn't the hunter's gun that wiped that one out. It was the plowing of the short grass prairie along the central flyway and the loss of those millions of, I guess, billions of insects that it had fed on.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:43:56] So, really two things: we shot too many and we changed the habitat that these big numbers of birds relied on.

**David Todd** [00:44:08] Boy. Well, I guess just as maybe the big factor of the changes in the waterfowl counts and other birds and habitat destruction, we start to see some efforts of protection. And maybe you can talk about some of the groups that were trying to change awareness of the problem, education and maybe some lobbying as well. Can you go through some of that?

**Rob Sawyer** [00:44:41] You bet. So, so, you said the right word, which is education. We had to, we had to convince America that animals were worth protecting. And that wasn't necessarily an easy thing to do. It really started - protection, or even the concept of protection - was with some of the wealthy sportsmen of the day, usually based out of New York. And I'd say that the first national coalition to even consider conservation was the International Association for the Protection of Game, and it was founded in 1874.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:45:21] But, it was followed by a number of others. The American Ornithologist Union, the Audubon Societies, weren't bird lovers at the time, they were sportsmen who wanted to help frame guidelines for the protection of wildlife. Of course, Boone & Crockett, with our famed Teddy Roosevelt, the League of American Sportsmen, the Game Protective and Propagation Association.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:45:49] And really, they were twofold: affected awareness of sportsmen, naturalists, and the beginning of the involvement of the concerned citizen, I'll call them the non-hunter.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:46:04] And a really big part: so, you have to remember that states had the rights to govern their own wildlife, even migratory birds. The federal government did not. It was all up to the states. So, these national organizations helped the states and their lawmakers craft the legal language to govern the killing of, at the very beginning, it was mostly plumage birds, but also game birds and even songbirds.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:46:40] So, in Texas, we not only had to come up with our own game protection laws, but they weren't always statewide. At the beginning, we left it up to individual efforts, and imagine what that's like, if you're living on the border of four counties and they start passing game laws. You had better watch where you walked and where you hunted.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:47:07] Galveston passed the first game law in 1860 and it was for bobwhite quail. And they actually came up with a closed season. So, it was before the Civil War, they were seeing the impact that fire, guns and habitat destruction had on bobwhite quail.

**David Todd** [00:47:33] So, at a pretty early stage, there was an understanding that seasons might be one way to protect birds, having a sort of on again, off again level of hunting pressures.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:47:49] Yes, but it was not for migratory birds, only for birds like our prairie chicken, Attwater's prairie chicken it was later named, quail, even dove.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:48:00] And the enforcement, we had absolutely no game wardens. Enforcement was left to sportsmen's clubs like the Harris County Sportsmen's Association, San Antonio Gun Club. And they hired their own game wardens. They called them fence riders. Can you imagine? You're out hunting and somebody comes up and tells you you're, you know, you're in violation of some law that you didn't know even existed. And you're staring down the barrel of a shotgun of somebody from the Houston Gun Club. That could have gone sideways very quickly.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:48:43] But, Texas, I was always fascinated that Texas was one of the earlier of the states to begin to enact rigorous legislation to protect bird life in particular. And it

turned out it wasn't because there was a bunch of conservationists, but it was because of an awful lot of sport hunters were going to the field and finding no waterfowl because market gunners had wiped them out. So early laws were designed strictly by sportsmen for sportsmen, and they were really aimed at the market hunter. Still, what they did was just great work.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:49:26] And the three big names that are, I guess, spent something like 30 years on game law enforcement through the legislature were Oscar Guessaz out of San Antonio, Mervyn Davis out of Waco, and the well-known naturalist Henry Attwater. They started the first Texas State Sportsmen Association and worked hard to form our very first game laws.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:49:57] Most of what passed at first in the 1880s was a game law on deer and upland birds. But, no notice was ever given to these laws. And part of the problem was enforcement. There were no game wardens. It was kind of that Sportsmen's Club kind of enforcement.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:50:22] And something like 56 counties in Texas said, "Nah, we're not interested in any game laws".

**Rob Sawyer** [00:50:27] But, in 1891, the three men were able to pass through the Texas legislature protection for plumage birds. But, it looked good on paper. It didn't really happen. After 12 years, not a single prosecution had been made, and again, counties opted out of it. Every time anybody tried to introduce any language to protect waterfowl, it was always stricken from any of the bills.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:51:04] And finally, 1903, there was something called the model game law. And it had some strong language in it. It made it illegal to shoot migratory birds at night. It outlawed transportation of migratory birds.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:51:25] But again, no enforcement, no game wardens. There was no budget. Judges refused to support any game laws at all.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:51:38] Finally, in 1907, we introduced a Game Warden Act and the first limit on the number of ducks that could be killed each day. The limit was a generous 25. And so at this point now, Texas is really on the board. In 1903, that was the law.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:51:59] But, 1907, they hired their very first game wardens and they were called deputy commissioners. They were paid \$3 a day. And it's interesting, if you look at some of the game wardens that were hired by the Office of Game, Fish and Oyster Commission, a lot of them were former market cutter. So, you got kind of the fox guarding the henhouse.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:52:29] But, it looked good again on paper. It wasn't a good start. Hunting licenses were supposed to pay for these deputy commissioners, but in 1907, with 75 hunting licenses were sold and only one case that was related in any way to migratory birds was even prosecuted. So, but it was a start.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:52:56] And, it started with Texas and Texas legislation. And it was almost, I guess, fifteen, fifteen years later that we passed the, or the federal government passed the 1918 Migratory Treaty Act.

**David Todd** [00:53:17] So, this is, just to reel back a little bit, but I was struck by two things you mentioned kind of in passing, is that it sounds like some of this early legislation in Texas not only targeted the hunters, but it tried to regulate shipments and authorized, I would say, in 1913, I guess train conductors could intervene. And it sounds like they were starting to kind of look at this as a kind of holistic problem. It wasn't just people in the field, but it was this whole network of folks who were I guess shipping agents and transport folks and merchants down the line. Is that fair to say?

**Rob Sawyer** [00:54:02] Yes, it is. And remember, so conservation wasn't the word being used in Texas. It was a battle against the market gunner, so that wealthy sportsmen, so that sportsmen, would have something to hunt because the market gunners were that efficient. By this point, they have taken whole systems, whole estuaries, out of production. They were, there were, if you followed in the footsteps of a market hunter, you weren't going to have any ducks.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:54:42] Gotcha. Okay. Well, to sort of pick up where we were earlier discussing this, so the Migratory Bird Treaty Act gets passed in 1918. And what sort of impact do you think that had, of course, across the country, but especially in Texas? What do you think we saw as an effect here?

**Rob Sawyer** [00:55:08] So, that was, it was interesting to me to learn that the states had the rights over migratory waterfowl and all wildlife, as opposed to the federal. And that's what kept the federal government from doing what so many of the legislatures thought was right.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:55:30] And I think the first federal law was 1897 with Teller and Lacey and the Hoar bill. They were designed to really aim their legislation at the feather trade again, because that was, you know, we were seeing so many of those birds wiped out.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:55:57] And not really, get no game wardens, no enforcement.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:56:02] Well, it wasn't until the 1913 Federal Migratory Act was passed (still, states had sovereignty over migratory birds), but that law transferred, at last, the authority to the federal government. So now you see things changing. It's like, okay, the federal government holding the power, if you will, over states. A lot of backlash to that. Market gunning was made a federal offense. Pretty strong stuff.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:56:37] You talked about hunting seasons. So, finally there was a hunting season for migratory birds in every state in the union. Also, it was prohibited to kill any swans, curlews or cranes. So, a big awakening to the fact that birds were in crisis.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:56:58] But still, there wasn't any money for game wardens. So, the 1913 was challenged again in court on states' rights and there were no game wardens. But, in 1918 they kind of fixed all the language. And the most important part of that was they allocated federal funds for enforcement. Now, admittedly, those first federal game wardens, it wasn't a lot of them. There was only 20 of them in all United States.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:57:29] So, what the fed did was it started giving some of our state game wardens badges. And so they were, they carried dual titles.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:57:40] So, big awakening in the consciousness of outdoorsmen in Texas by this point. Yes, you still had outlaws. And, in fact, there's a whole chapter in the market hunting book on outlaws. And in, but in general, population was being educated to the need to be a little less self-centered, and to try to recognize that continued non-stop shooting was going to wipe out a lot of bird species.

**David Todd** [00:58:23] You know, it seems like there's a whole strand through what you're telling us about the resistance to some of these early efforts at regulating market hunting. And some of it sounds like was in the courts - that they wouldn't uphold some of these violations. And so, the wardens weren't getting a lot of support from what I understood. Is that, is that accurate?

**Rob Sawyer** [00:58:55] Yes, it is. And I don't know nationwide, but I read about one Colorado County judge that said, or newspaper editor, that said if any of the judges in one of our courts were to actually charge you with a violation of any of these game laws, they would be soundly defeated at the polls.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:59:22] And the judges came up with creative ways of excusing those that broke the law. There was a Fort Worth restaurateur who always had wild ducks on his menu. When game wardens arrested him, he just told the judge they were tame, and nobody could prove they were wild. So, so he got off.

**Rob Sawyer** [00:59:48] There was one Beaumont market hunter, who was, Tom Fuller, I guess, was his name, and he was arrested every year, and every year he was fined \$10. And that's because it didn't matter if you had 200 ducks or one. They didn't fine you by the number of ducks, just, just \$10, period.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:00:15] There was a case that went to trial in Orange County, and the defendant said, "Well, no, we didn't shoot these ducks in Texas in 1913, I think it was. We shot them in Louisiana where it was legal. So once again, they got off.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:00:33] There were game wardens that just threw up their arms, resigned. They said, you know, we can't, we can't do anything. Little attention is paid to any of the game wardens and the higher courts just ignore us.

**David Todd** [01:00:52] Well, and I gather with such, you know, difficulties enforcing the law, there must have been a number of outlaws that were taking advantage of this.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:01:04] You bet. And that was that was I hate to admit it, but that was kind of a fun chapter to write, because now you're combining duck hunting with outlaws. And it always makes for a good, good story. So, you know, if you look at it, waterfowl was a natural resource and it was a culture of consumption. I mean ducks and geese were sold in every hotel and restaurant. You went to a small town, church or community fair, that's what you were eating. Housewives fed their family on wild ducks and peddlers traveled door to door. It was a culture.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:01:47] And, so, I think there was a point somewhere between kind of 1905, some of our earlier, earliest seizures, if you will, all the way up through kind of 1960s in Texas. The outlaws came up with all kinds of ways to get waterfowl across state lines.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:02:15] One of the most common was a ruse where you'd load up a barrel then you covered it in ice and fish and you'd market it as seafood.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:02:26] There was a ring of Bay City, Texas, market hunters that the game wardens were after for a while, and they finally caught them. But it turned out that this commission, commission group, if you will, had hired boys all under nine years old to do the shooting. So, the game warden who made the arrests could do nothing with them on account of their tender age.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:02:52] And, you know, in Texas, remember that it's technically illegal after 1903 to ship wild ducks, but in many other parts of the nation, it was legal to do so until 1918. So, it certainly made it worthwhile to try to get ducks across the state lines.

**David Todd** [01:03:21] So, it sounds like there was a few other ways to get, I guess, these birds moving and sold and some money in your pocket. I've seen some of your notes, which are just, it's stunning, the creativity. Maybe you can give us just a few more examples, maybe one from Caddo Lake, the outlaw hunting culture up there. Is there any example from there?

**David Todd** [01:04:05] So, Rob, just a moment ago, you were telling us a story about outlaw hunting and how some of these operators used the ruse of hiring young boys who could not be convicted in the courts because they were minors. And I think you have some other examples of some of these tactics that outlaw hunters used to evade prosecution.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:04:33] Yes, I collected a number of those. And they were all they were all, all unique. There was one shipper that would circumvent the law by transporting all of his cargoes of ducks out to the high seas, past the three-mile limit of Texas jurisdiction where they were picked up by an oceangoing vessel. And all it said, all the article said, was they went on to other states, Louisiana. But you know that that's a lot of effort to sail out, to meet an oceangoing boat.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:05:10] There was a Chicago consignment firm, I think it was about 1910. It provided its local outlaw hunters with an entire fleet of sailing skiffs, and they fitted each boat with an esoteric icebox that could hold up to 1000 ducks. Big, still big business.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:05:34] I talked to the family of, a couple of families, about outlaw market gunners and just wonderful stories. There was a Sabine Pass market hunter, and the whole community worked to keep the law at bay. And the quote from this gentleman was the story my dad always told me. Is if the big boat house doors were open, you could hunt. If the doors were closed, then the caretakers had seen someone suspicious that they suspected was a game warden.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:06:03] There was a wonderful woman that I interviewed out of Port Arthur, and she just told it the way it was. She said ducks were meat during the Depression. That was our main meat supply. She said my husband would go duck hunting out of season and he'd come back and he'd sell the ducks at the courthouse. That would tickle me because the people who knew it was against the law to do it were the ones buying the ducks.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:06:31] Again, a culture.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:06:36] You know, there was a, Caddo Lake was one of those rare ecosystems that was combined with a strong hunting and outdoor culture, if you will, with a rare and



bountiful ecosystem. And the idea of game laws kind of divided the community in two. And some of the people in the area tried to get game wardens to come, and others were doing everything they could to, if they came, to get them out.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:07:11] There was one outlaw duck hunter who spotted a game warden snooping around his property and he leans his gun out the window and shot him. He loaded his gun with birdshot though, so just mainly kept the lawman from, as Joe said, thinking twice about prowling his property again.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:07:31] Some local folks gave the game wardens a house so that they'd have a place to stay if they would come. And when they did, I guess they'd been there about a month or two when somebody stole all their boats. So, Caddo was probably just a microcosm of the rest of Texas, but the stories were preserved and available.

**David Todd** [01:07:58] That's really striking. So, there was a division in some of these small communities of people who welcomed the regulation and those that really resisted it.

**David Todd** [01:08:13] So I, I thought this this might be a good chance to come into the maybe more modern era. I understand that there was a series of stings in the 20th century that caught up a lot of these outlaw hunters. Maybe you can talk about that.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:08:37] The first one...

**David Todd** [01:08:39] [Wait a second. Rob, I am just looking at our recording and I'm getting a kind of strange signature and I'm wondering if this is recording on your end. Usually, I get a kind of like, I don't know, a parallel graph that shows your tones and this one. Oh, now it... can you just speak a little bit? I want to make sure we get this recording.]

**Rob Sawyer** [01:09:13] [Have you got me?]

**David Todd** [01:09:15] [Now, it seems, I think we're, this seems better. This seems better.]

**Rob Sawyer** [01:09:20] [Where do you think it might have gotten lost?]

**David Todd** [01:09:24] [Well, just the first several minutes might have been lost. I'll need to look at it after we get the recording and I can look at it. But let's resume. I think that if we talk about Texas stings, we're getting close to a close here. And we can just see how it looks, you know, after the fact.]

**Rob Sawyer** [01:09:47] [Right. And if we've got to patch something back in, I mean, it's more work for you, but this one's going to be a quilt. Any way you look at it.]

**David Todd** [01:09:57] [Yeah, that's okay. This has happened, rarely, but it does happen. And, you know, just all I ask is your patience and we can make it work.]

**David Todd** [01:10:08] So, if you could just maybe introduce the whole idea of these stings, that sounds like a pretty amazing story.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:10:18] Yes. So, so by, you know, by the thirties, there was a lot of meat, if you will, behind the federal game wardens and federal game laws. And Texas was one of the states that was certainly on the radar of federal game wardens.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:10:40] First of what we call "stings", would have been in 1938. And it's an undercover operation. There were ten Dallas and Fort Worth restauranteurs that racked up fifty charges, federal violations, for selling thousands of ducks, doves, plovers, quail. In fact, one of the most egregious spent 13 months in the Leavenworth Penitentiary over that one.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:11:09] And things went quiet, until 1956. And '56 was a big sting. Two years of undercover work by a gentleman by the name of Anthony Stefano. He posed as a traveling jewelry salesman and a part time trader in wild game. So, I was able to interview a number of people who were still alive and had been charged and caught in the 1956 sting. And this thing was big enough that it was covered in newspapers across the entire United States, and even Sports Illustrated and Outdoor Life magazines wrote articles on it.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:11:52] It was April when about a hundred law enforcement officials from eight different states converged on southeast Texas and they arrested 53 people. And the lists were interesting - businessmen, ranchers, watermen, hunting guides, even law enforcement officials, which surprised me then. The High Island justice of the peace was one of them. A Beaumont policeman was another. A deputy constable was another in law enforcement. And he ran in 19, he ran again for reelection from federal prison and won. So evidently, the local people didn't think too poorly of him.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:12:40] But, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the one that ran that sting. And they said that as many as 200,000 birds had been illegally killed and sold. But, you know, curiously, after two years, they only came up with a little over 2000 ducks and maybe 400 geese. So, it could have been that maybe things were exaggerated a little bit.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:13:08] But, nonetheless, the Texas world changed after 1956. The outlaw gunner was, there were less of them, or let's just say they were a lot more careful after that. But most people say that market hunting pretty well ended after that big sting. Federal prison does have an impact on your desire to continue to break the law, I think. So, if you look at a lot of these towns that were involved up and down the coast in this '56 sting, all of a sudden you started seeing advertisements for hunting guides in towns that you never saw it before. And some of these names were those who either were charged or should have been charged in the '56 sting and had, quote unquote, gone legal after '56.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:14:05] So that's sort of, to me, that's a benchmark. That's kind of the culmination of all the years of legislation and all the years of growing sentiment for the preservation of wildlife kind of all came together in '56. And I use that as the time period where market hunting really lost its, lost favor, and it became kind of small-scale business after that. That was the, that was the end.

**David Todd** [01:14:43] Well, and was there one last big sting? I think I'd heard, maybe read in your some of your notes, that in 1988 there was a pretty big operation that went after some of the day-hunting outfits. Maybe you could fill us in about that.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:15:02] That one is still very controversial to this day. But, I've talked to some of the federal agents involved. I talked with some of the people who were arrested during the '88 sting. Perhaps what all sides will agree on was that big federal operation did not involve market - nobody selling birds. But there were a handful of guiding outfits who still had, I guess, the mentality of an endless resource. And almost every law, every law-abiding

sportsman recognized that those were legitimate charges and those groups deserved what they got.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:15:55] But the controversial part of that one is that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Special operations agents ended up charging over 200 club owners with 1300 violations of the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act. And I think the best way to say it is that almost all of those, other than the big egregious outfits, the prosecutors dropped almost all of those charges, something like 80 or 90% of them, which tells you, if they're not willing to prosecute them, that they may have been a little overzealous in some of the things that they did.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:16:49] But, Texas hasn't had another big sting like that. And, hopefully, we never will earn the right to have to have one again.

**David Todd** [01:17:05] Boy, what a dramatic story from the early days of subsistence hunting through market hunting's peak and then these efforts to pass legislation and get it enforced and then do these stings to really make it clear that the government meant business.

**David Todd** [01:17:26] I thought that at this point it might be good to just take a little detour to talk about your interest in this whole story and your ability to research it and prepare a book, actually a series of books, A Hundred Years of Texas Waterfowl Hunting, Texas Market Hunting, images of the Hunt, the Tarpon Club, which I guess is more about fishing, but again, about use of the natural resources along the coast. What, what drove you to write these books? Not an easy thing.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:18:06] Yeah, it's a passion. There was, there was a really good story to tell that'd never been told before. And it's a story that's been told all up and down the East Coast, well, it's been told across America - volumes and volumes and volumes of books that that celebrate our natural heritage in every other state except Texas.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:18:33] And, you know, I didn't know when I started whether I'd have a 25-page book or a 300,000-word book, but it turned out to be the latter. And, and there's probably room for another one, but I'll leave the next one for somebody else.

**David Todd** [01:18:54] Well, very grateful for the work you've done.

**David Todd** [01:18:59] And when you look back on this, it seems like there is a strain that goes through all these stories of a kind of tension and collision between market hunters and sports hunters. You know, is that is that something that you recognize or is that sort of a side story?

**Rob Sawyer** [01:19:24] Well, that's, that's absolutely true. And, basically, as I think I've word it in the book, that they both had blood on their hands. Well, sportsmen would often kill as many or more birds as market hunters. But so, so there wasn't a conservation ethos running through any of, many of these sportsmen. But the market hunter, when, particularly the commission hunters, were so efficient that it was bad blood between sportsmen and market hunters, and it would be today, I think. I don't think it would be any different today.

**David Todd** [01:20:12] Well, do you think it was in part sort of a culture clash between, I guess the market hunters, you know, were part of a pretty lucrative industry, but I imagine a lot of them were not paid tremendously well and it was kind of seasonal work. But these

sportsmen. I guess, you know, this is discretionary, this is their, you know, sport and hobby. It's not something they're relying on for their, you know, food on their table.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:20:42] Yes, that's certainly true, though. So, yes, you look at the big dollars. Well, some of these market hunters, the ones that had the canvasback syndicated gunning grounds, they made money. The market hunters made money. But most of the market hunters in Texas were watermen. And they used nets. They weren't wealthy at all. And they were scratching out a living from the land. There were also huge months where there weren't sufficient waterfowl to gun.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:21:23] But yes, the sport gunners with the power, if you will, the legislative influence, were extraordinarily wealthy. So, it was a clash between the haves and the have-nots.

**David Todd** [01:21:41] Yes. Something else I was interested in. I think you pointed out that some of the early efforts at conserving waterfowl might have been informed by, you know, the decline, really the collapse, of the bison herds and some of the market hunting that was happening there. And I was wondering if there were any kind of connections, you know, were any of the market hunters that were involved in the bison die-out, also hunters on the coast for waterfowl? Or was it more just a kind of awareness thing, that people were starting to realize that these, these great herds and flocks were, were declining really fast.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:22:25] It was an awareness. It's a good analogy, because, you know, I mentioned how the combination of demand and technology led to taking a natural resource and contributing rapidly to its decline. Well, with the buffalo herds, it was about 1873 to '4 that a new technology in tanning was developed and suddenly hide tanning was a big business in North America. And it coincided with a governmental edict, if you will, kind of an equivalent to demand to wipe the bison herds out as a way to influence the southern plains Indians that relied on those herds.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:23:21] So, there was no shortage of market hunters for the bison, most of which were Western rifleman and even Eastern sportsmen that came over following the railroads. And they made rather quick work out of great numbers, and they were not discouraged in their efforts to do so.

**David Todd** [01:23:44] Yeah.

**David Todd** [01:23:47] There's something else I wanted to ask you about. Some of the really wonderful duck and goose flocks that I, you know, I've seen in sort of modern times were in the areas around the Eagle Lake and Garwood and down towards Egypt, Texas, you know, where there's lots of rice grown. And I was curious if you see any connection, you know, after the eelgrass was less visible on the coast between where crops were planted and where waterfowl were seen and where some of the hunting pressure occurred. I just was curious about the connection between, you know, some of these crops, rice in particular. And maybe you can talk to somebody about that and then we'll wrap up real soon.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:24:45] So, the rice industry came to Texas just towards the end of the legal market hunting years. First grown in the Beaumont area, kind of mid-1890s, and then really started to cross Texas in earnest. Eagle Lake was about 1897, '98, and down to Matagorda.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:25:10] And so, you could just imagine this crop was just, it was the first large-scale duck food. And I read one paragraph about market hunters. So, sportsmen complained that they'd follow the market hunter and wouldn't have any birds. And then market hunters would complain that they were following in the wake of rice fields and where they were hunting on the coast weren't any birds because they were all in the rice fields.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:25:47] Rice was a big deal. Birds just swarmed it. Remember that all the rice was shocked, they called it, and left in the field to dry and waterfowl would just, just destroy it. Just waste it. Most rice farmers would hire gunners to come in and shoot night and day to keep birds off of their rice fields. But it was a really big deal until efficiencies, the age-old word technology, with modern threshing and harvesting machinery that evolved in, well, '36 to about '50. Birds, of course, still came to rice fields, but they would leave entire estuaries to get to rice fields and even standing rice.

**David Todd** [01:26:49] I see. So, they were coming in after the harvest and collecting a lot of the grain that was on the ground. And these modern threshers collected most of that and discourage them from coming? Is that, is that the story?

**Rob Sawyer** [01:27:06] Most of the great stories were of standing ... so, so picture these, say, the first process in harvesting rice by hand was to use a machete and to, or any other threshing type machine, you would stand all the rice up in in shocks, they called them, to dry. So here is rice, though, still on the stalk, in great piles. And then they would come in and thresh it. They would take the grain off the stalk and leave it in big piles so they would dry as quickly as they could to get it to wagons.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:27:50] In that process, there was tons and tons of, of pounds of, of, of grain, and the ducks would feed it hard. They, they would, they would knock it off the shocked stalks they... The stories that I'd get of what the way the ducks behaved around rice was out of character. They lost their wariness. They were, they'd fight over each other to get to the grain.

**David Todd** [01:28:22] That's striking. Well, I guess it was tasty and filling. Well, it's always so interesting how land use can interact with these wild creatures. And so, thanks for filling us in on that.

**David Todd** [01:28:44] I have run out of questions for today. I just have one last thing I should ask you which is sort of a catch-all, and that is there something that we might have missed is, you know, is there something we skipped over perhaps in the discussions we've had in the last several days?

**Rob Sawyer** [01:29:07] Yeah, that's a great question. You know, there's a point that I always, I usually get to, but I think it's important. When you look at any of the books on market hunting like mine, it's not intended to be a glorification of large quantities of our natural resource being harvested. It supposed to be, and intended to be a profile of the people who made a living off of, a very tough living, out of our natural environment. Wooden boats as mariners to do things that we can't do today with power boats. It was watermen, the market hunters, it was a way of life that was an important part of history, important part of economies in early Texas. And yes, it was destined to disappear. And, of course, it should have.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:30:12] But, if nothing else, it serves as a good warning for the future. That combination of habitat loss and the gun are quite capable of reducing our natural resources to something we would no longer have or appreciate.

**David Todd** [01:30:36] Yes. You know, that's a good way to describe it, and it may be a good way to round this out. Just said that, you know we need to take care.

**David Todd** [01:30:46] And so, thank you for your generosity, time and time again, with this interview. And I really wanted to thank you for your work, not just writing these books, but, you know, doing the research, which is just striking - all the primary sources that you went to, these folks who could tell the stories really from experience or from their family lore. So priceless stuff. And thank you so much.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:31:18] Well, thanks. I looked forward to, I really looked forward to doing this with you. It's one of my, Texas history, outdoor history, is one of my favorite subject matters, and I'm glad I have the opportunity to share it with you and with others.

**David Todd** [01:31:34] Great. Well, thank you, Rob. I appreciate your time and I wish you a good weekend. And please give my apologies to your family, both the two-legged and four-legged folks for indulging us here today.

**Rob Sawyer** [01:31:51] Thank you, brother. Talk with you soon.

**David Todd** [01:31:53] Yeah, you take care. Bye, now.