

have thrived in this state, creating an autumn tradition as popular as gridiron rivalries and the World Series for many. Long-time locals still talk of Depression-era days when they flushed rising clouds of ringnecks from weed patches to feed their families through the long winter ahead. It was about the same time affluent sportsmen from around the world began coming to the prairies to experience the incredible sport.

But as with much of America's wildlife, South Dakota's pheasant population has risen and fallen at the whims of Mother Nature. Worse yet, it suffered at the hands of modern agriculture, which steadily replaced needed nesting and winter cover with sprawling inland seas of corn and wheat. But the tide has turned. South Dakota's pheasant hunting has been nothing short of phenomenal lately.

"Thanks to several things—mild winters, the cover of the Conservation Reserve Program, and private habitat programs—our pheasant population has been incredible the last few years," said Paul Nelson, president of Paul Nelson Farm, the Gettysburg outfitter who hosted the hunters mentioned above. "Most of our guests have simply never seen anything like it, or compare it to the glory days of the 1950s. It's not uncommon for our guests to flush 200 pheasants from just one field."

Not surprisingly, the mind-boggling bird numbers have again brought sportsmen from around the world to the place where pheasants outnumber people many, many times over. "Pheasant hunting is really, really big in South Dakota. People come from all over the world," said Mark Kayser, outdoor promotions manager, South Dakota Department of Tourism. "We estimate we had 100,000 hunters afield on opening day. A lot of them have been coming for years. It's like a homecoming for them."

According to Mr. Kayser, the visiting hunters come from all walks of life. Air strips are lined with private jets, and parking lots hold everything from new Suburbans to rusted old pickup campers that seem to spew low-income sportsmen like clowns from a tiny circus car.

But no matter how they arrive, the visiting sportsmen are spending much-needed money in pursuit of South Dakota's state bird. "Our Game, Fish and Parks Department estimated that pheasant hunting adds about \$55 million to the South Dakota economy," said Mr. Kayser, a lifelong resident and avid sportsman. "Some think that's on the conservative side. But there's no question that it's very big for a lot of small-town economies that are otherwise just dependent on agriculture."

So it appeared during a recent trek through the central part of the state. Every convenience store held a full selection of ammo, orange hats, gloves and licenses. Signs advertising church-sponsored dinners and bird-cleaning services were as common as mile markers on some highways.

Accommodations ranged from tents, back bedrooms in the homes of landowners who allow hunters to roam their land and bunk for a nominal fee. In recent years a number of businesses have blossomed that cater to sportsmen who want the *creme de la creme* of wingshooting action and worldly accommodations, such as Mr. Nelson's legendary establishment.

Picked up in a nearby Pierre, guests are taken along a back-road maze that soon places them at the huge lodge that features a country opulence and is rated among the best in the nation. Served by a hand-picked staff from across the state, Mr. Nelson's guests feast on five-star cuisine as they talk business or simply relax.

But there is no time for total relaxation when taken afield by Mr. Nelson's guides and

dogs. Proof that agriculture and wildlife can coexist, Paul Nelson Farm's thousands of acres spew birds like bees from a shaken hive. The wingshooting is indeed so good that Mr. Nelson had to seek special regulation that allows gunners to take more than the state-regulated three-bird-per-day limit.

Still, the action is hot enough that most guests are back at the lodge by late afternoon, where they can bang a round of sporting clays or simply sit quietly on a balcony, favored drink in hand as they watch scores of gaudy cockbirds sail into a small sanctuary just yards from the lodge. Mr. Nelson reports that few who depart fail to leave a deposit for another all-inclusive hunt, which will cost around \$2,000 for three days.

After a morning at Mr. Nelson's, I joined Bob Tinker, of Tinker Kennels, near his home in Pierre. Walking upland prairie pastures toward endless horizons, we followed his stylish English setters as they found, pointed and retrieved prairie chickens and sharptail grouse.

The next morning I traded walking boots for waders and made a predawn trudge into a marsh that actually smelled of ducks with Mike Moody, a guide from Herrick. The first flock of mallards that passed over our decoys was easily 100 yards from first duck to last. Never were there not ducks in the air. Totally addicted, I was with Mr. Moody the following morning for another incredible day. At one point some 200 beautiful mallards landed amid our decoys, like leaves cascading from an autumn maple.

As we walked from the marsh at mid-morning, bags of decoys on our backs and limits of tasty ducks in our hands, I learned the best duck hunt of my life could be just the beginning. "A lot of times we'll take our ducks, then walk the C.R.P. [Conservation Reserve Program grasses] for pheasants in the afternoon," said Mr. Moody. "And if the geese are in and you fill out on pheasants in time, you could even . . ."

HONORING THE JACKSON'S FOR CELEBRATING THEIR 50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Mr. ASHCROFT. Mr. President, these are trying times for the family in America. Unfortunately, too many broken homes have become part of our national culture. It is tragic that nearly half of all couples married today will see their union dissolve into divorce. The effects of divorce on families and particularly the children of broken families are devastating. In such an era, I believe it is both instructive and important to honor those who have taken the commitment of "til death us do part" seriously and have successfully demonstrated the timeless principles of love, honor, and fidelity, to build a strong family. These qualities make our country strong.

For these important reasons, I rise today to honor Woodrow and Billie Dove Jackson who on February 23 celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. My wife, Janet, and I look forward to the day we can celebrate a similar milestone. The Jackson's commitment to the principles and values of their marriage deserves to be saluted and recognized. I wish them and their family all the best as they celebrate this substantial marker on their journey together.

HONORING THE LETTMAN'S FOR CELEBRATING THEIR 60TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Mr. ASHCROFT. Mr. President, these are trying times for the family in America. Unfortunately, too many broken homes have become part of our national culture. It is tragic that nearly half of all couples married today will see their union dissolve into divorce. The effects of divorce on families and particularly the children of broken families are devastating. In such an era, I believe it is both instructive and important to honor those who have taken the commitment of "til death us do part" seriously and have successfully demonstrated the timeless principles of love, honor, and fidelity, to build a strong family. These qualities make our country strong.

For these important reasons, I rise today to honor William and Stella Lettman who on February 14 celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. My wife, Janet, and I look forward to the day we can celebrate a similar milestone. The Lettman's commitment to the principles and values of their marriage deserves to be saluted and recognized. I wish them and their family all the best as they celebrate this substantial marker on their journey together.

IT FINALLY HAPPENED: FEDERAL DEBT BURDEN EXCEEDS \$5 TRILLION

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, on January 8, 1835, in the 58th year of our Republic, a distinguished native of North Carolina, Andrew Jackson, hosted a banquet to celebrate the Nation's deliverance from economic bondage. The national debt had been paid. There was cause for great celebration, because the payment of the national debt was considered to be a triumph of republican government.

President Jackson delivered the following toast: "The Payment of the Public Debt—Let us commemorate it as an event which gives us increased power as a nation, and reflects luster on our Federal Union, of whose justice, fidelity and wisdom it is a glorious illustration."

Fast-forward 161 years, Mr. President: Today it is my sad duty to report that on this past Friday, February 23, 1996, the Federal debt passed the \$5 trillion mark—a new world record. Never before in history had a nation encumbered itself with a debt so enormous.

The sheer arithmetic of the Federal debt is so immense that it boggles the mind. Consider these figures: As of the close of business this past Friday, February 23, 1996, the Federal debt stood at \$5,017,056,630,040.53.

Let me run that by once more a bit more slowly—5 trillion, 17 billion, 56 million, 630 thousand, 40 dollars and 53 cents. The enormity becomes more clearly in focus when one bears in mind