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The World of George Shiras A National Geographic Miscellany

Titles and Dates

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC magazine, July 1906
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC pictorial supplements,
July 1913 and August 1921
Hunting Wild Life with Camera and Flashlight,
volumes one and two, 1936

Background

♪You see the magazine, of course?

Absolutely.

Have you seen the number with the colored
plates of the North American Fauna?

Yes. I have it in Paris.

And the number containing the panorama of the volcanoes of
Alaska?

That was a wonder.

I enjoyed very much, too, the wild animal photographs of
George Shiras three.

They were damned fine.

I beg your pardon?

They were excellent. That fellow Shiras

You call him that fellow?



Former member of Congress and avid outdoorsman George Shiras, pictured here in the wilderness of his home state of Michigan, pioneered early wildlife photography.

We re old friends, said Harris.

I see. You know George Shiras three. He must be very interesting.

He is. He s about the most interesting man I know.

Ernest Hemingway, from Homage to Switzerland

George Shiras III (or as Shiras signed it, 3d) first saw the woods and waters of northern Michigan in the summer of 1870, when he was 11 years old. Nothing in his later experience would ever dim the impression they made on him not the trappings of wealth and position; not the influence of the finest schools; not the example of his father, a U.S. Supreme Court justice; not a promising legal career of his own. Not even a term spent in the U.S. Congress, where he introduced the legislation that would become the Migratory Bird Law securing for Shiras an important place in the annals of conservation could lure him away for long.

Shiras returned every summer for over 70 years to his family s retreat near Lake Superior, responding to something in the landscape and wildlife that aroused in him a profound fascination. Whatever that quality was, it not only prompted him in youth to become an avid hunter and fisher, it further prompted him by 1889, his 30th year, to largely lay gun and rod aside in favor of a more absorbing instrument: the camera.



Pictorial supplement to July 1913 NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC.
Photograph by George Shiras

Wildlife photography barely existed: Cameras were cumbersome and primitive, wildlife elusive and difficult to film. But Shiras s inventive genius contrived methods and devices that resulted, among other things, in the first flash photographs and the first trip-wire photography of animals at night.

The resulting pictures were breathtakingly

dynamic, utterly unique for the times. Enlargements of some of them the famous Midnight Series of deer at night (see Pictorial Supplements above left and right) won the gold medal in the forestry division at the Paris Exposition of 1900 and then won top prize in the photographic division as well, without ever having been formally entered in that competition! The series also received the grand prize at the St. Louis World s Fair in 1904.



Pictorial supplement to August 1921 NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC.
Photograph by George Shiras

Perhaps inevitably, Shiras came to the attention of Gilbert H. Grosvenor, the Editor of NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC with results profoundly important for both.

Grosvenor printed 74 of Shiras's photographs in the July 1906 issue accompanied by only a brief text, a proportion unheard of in its day. The gamble was wildly successful, making this issue (see left) of the magazine one of the most significant ever published. For Shiras, it meant wide dissemination of his pioneering work. For the National Geographic Society, it meant a gratifying surge in membership and the beginning of a close and renowned association with wildlife photography.

The impact of the July 1906 NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC reached all the way to the President Theodore Roosevelt, who was so taken that he promptly picked up his pen and implored Shiras to write a big book a book of bulk as well as worth, in which you shall embody these pictures and the results of all your

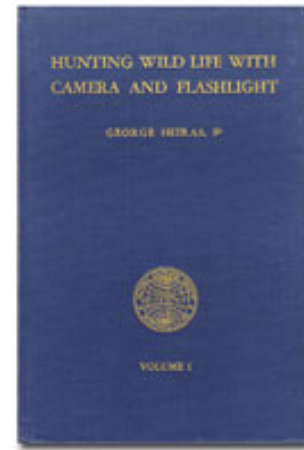
Between 1906 and 1932 Shiras published nine illustrated articles in the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, which generated so many requests for prints that pictorial supplements of two of his prizewinning photographs of deer at night (see illustrations) were included with the July 1913 and August 1921 issues.

Called ***Hunting Wild Game with Camera and Flashlight***, the magnum opus was published in 1935. Nearly 30 years had elapsed since Roosevelt had first urged him to compile it, and in belated recognition of this inspiration, Shiras dedicated the volumes to the memory of the late President.

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photography.

Despite this reception, the exacting Shiras unhappily discovered that many minor errors had crept into the text. So despite failing health for he was now 78 he labored to make the necessary corrections as quickly as possible. The result was the second edition of the work (pictured here) amended, revised, and enlarged published in 1936. Still unsatisfied, Shiras even began work on a third edition, but did not finish it before he died in 1942 at 83.



Failing eyesight in his later years forced Shiras to set aside his camera. He ultimately produced a two-volume book about his wilderness photography.

Thus it is the second edition, in Shiras's judgment, that is the best of the two. Summing up his own life's work as well as his relationship with the Society, its pages remain the most complete guide to the world of George Shiras, a world of woods and waters and wildlife. It remains a monument to an important early conservationist who is also known as the original advocate of wildlife photography.

Mark Jenkins

Collectors note: The **July 1906 NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC** was so popular that it was reprinted soon after its initial publication. These reprints are apparently indistinguishable from the originals. Reprints were also made in 1964. These are marked reprint on the bottom of the cover.

The **pictorial supplements** issued with the July 1913 and August 1921 issues came folded inside the front covers of the magazines. Both unfolded and framed copies were available upon written request to Society headquarters. As can be seen in the illustrations, it is clear that these reproductions were published by the Society.

Shiras had approved a series of limited-edition bromide enlargements of his award-winning *Midnight* pictures in 1901, prior to his close involvement with the National Geographic Society. These were produced in a variety of sizes, often limited to a thousand copies apiece. Copyright by George Shiras 3d would probably appear in the lower left corner of each. These would make a nice find!

Hunting Wild Life by Camera and Flashlight is a handsome two-volume set bound in blue with the Society seal embossed in gold on the front. The first edition, of which about 10,000 copies were printed, was published in October 1935. The second edition, of which about 20,000 copies were printed, was published in September 1936. The price was five U.S. dollars a set, a remarkably low sum, made possible by the fact that neither Shiras nor the Society profited from its sale.

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