

QUALITY IN SILVER FOXES

(By G. Ennis Smith, Superintendent, Experimental Fox Ranch, Summerside)

(PART II)

In the first part of this paper the contention was brought forward that quality in the fur of silver foxes was the all important factor from a breeding standpoint, a quality independent of colour, density, life and lustre; that there might be outstanding inherent quality, yet the fur of the foxes might be of poor colour, open and lacking life and lustre, whilst foxes might have a favourable colour, a good density and desirable life and lustre, and still not have inherent quality, and with such foxes breeders were against an impossible proposition to make any decided improvement in their breeding stock. On the other hand, with a favourable inherent quality, by proper breeding and feeding methods, a continued improvement could be made and ultimately a better colour, a greater density and a more desirable life and lustre could be obtained than with average foxes. Evidence was presented which demonstrated that even leading fox breeders had sold for a mere song the foxes produced in their ranch with superior fur qualities and had not retained the best foxes available for breeding purposes. Also a still more serious aspect was presented that the foxes with outstanding inherent fur qualities had been ruthlessly pelted, which was a severe loss to the silver fox industry as a whole, these foxes being killed off because the quality was not inherited. It is obvious for fox breeders to make an improvement in their breeding stock, it is very necessary that they should retain for breeding purposes the foxes that have inherent quality that they produced from year to year, and one of the most important breeding problems is to recognize quality. If fox breeders have used a systematic method in mating their foxes and have marketed their pelts in such a manner that they are actually aware of the market value of the pelts of the foxes raised in their ranch, they are in a better position to attack their breeding problems than those breeders who have mated their foxes in a promiscuous manner and sold their pelts in a haphazard method. The evidence shows that the quality of the pelts of the foxes raised in every ranch is in the ranch itself, and to that extent it is an individual breeding problem for each individual fox breeder to solve for himself. There is no royal road to silver fox ranching, and like every other sound and profitable business, a dealer in honest living can only be earned by the "sweat of the brow". Fox ranching cannot be carried on by sitting in the office writing advertisements or studying pedigrees; pedigrees may help, but fox breeders must get into their ranches and study the foxes individually and take advantage of every source of information, working in a systematic method so that all the facts associated with their foxes as available as possible, so that they actually know what they are doing. If a person is conscious of his ignorance on any particular phase affecting his foxes, he gathers information on that livelihood, wittingly or unwittingly, phase and eventually becomes well posted, but if he is ignorant of his ignorance, inevitably he will remain ignorant. The majority of fox breeders confess to knowing nothing about worms. Be that as it may, the majority have become so well versed that worms are not a menace nor any worry to them at the present time, but a stage has been reached where the majority of fox breeders on Prince Edward Island and other parts of Canada know more about worms than they do about foxes. Would it be to the advantage of all fox breeders to realize that they have a great deal to learn about foxes. When the Experimental Fox Ranch was established it was the agreed policy of the Department of Agriculture that the ranch should not be stocked with high-class animals, and it appears to have been a very wise decision. It is fairly well known that the initial

breeding stock at the Experimental Fox Ranch was of an inferior standard, but a stage has been reached where high-class animals with very desirable fur qualities are now being produced by the Experimental Fox Ranch. In the ranch there are different foxes that have produced twenty to thirty pups. Although many of their offspring of the second and third generations were used for breeding purposes, there is not a single descendant of many of these foxes in the ranch at the present time. One very prolific polygamous male produced 42 pups that were raised to maturity; while many of his offspring were used for breeding purposes for several generations, except the offspring of one of his grand-daughters, there is not a single other descendant of this fox in the ranch. On the other hand, there is one female raised in the Experimental Fox Ranch that had at the beginning of the present pelting season, 165 living descendants. Probably all the females retained for breeding purposes, this female appeared to have been judged as one that was of the most inferior type, I was always particularly partial to this female. In the first place as a growing pup I thought that she would develop into something, and I was very disappointed in the way in which she finally turned out, but she always produced foxes that were better than herself. There are six generations of this particular female in the ranch, which include all the improved type of foxes. Tracing the genealogical lines through which the greatest improvement has occurred has brought out very striking and most important points. The improvement was not through the offspring in the different generations that the best colour, density, texture, life and lustre, but was through lines of foxes that were inclined to be off colour, open, coarse in texture, and the fur lacking in life and lustre. This female raised 27 pups to maturity. It should be stated here that the female herself was a product of an outcross, and so was her mother. A large number of her daughters were outcrossed on account of the fact of having a lot of single males from different ranches, and each time an outcross was made the lines following the ultimate improved condition were through foxes whose fur was inclined to be a grade off open and very coarse, and it was only when we started to inbreed that the lines of improvement went hand in hand with the desirable qualities with regard to colour, density, texture, life and lustre. Whilst there is not sufficient evidence yet to state definitely that with outcrossing the outstanding quality in the successive lines might pass through foxes pelts demanded higher prices, despite the fact that they were off colour, open at the shoulders, and had other undesirable characteristics? That is to say, could a quality, independent of colour, density, texture, life and lustre, be recognized? The female in question, herself although very poorly furred and very undesirable looking, especially before Christmas, yet during the mating season her silver became very bright and very conspicuous, the individual hairs having a greater size and diameter than those of the average fox, although she was relatively short furred. Therefore, in speaking of size we are not dealing with length. With her offspring in the same litter, some had coarse and strong fur, while others had relatively fine and smooth fur, without showing signs of being weak. With the foxes having coarse and strong fur the silver became brighter and improved in colour during the breeding season, although kept in open pens and subject to inclement weather went off colour during the fall months, yet invariably they improved in colour during January and February. But the most important fact was that in the improvement lines in which the foxes had a greater size and diameter than the other foxes in the same litter, whose offspring did not show any improvement, while they had a clear colour, a desirable density, texture, life and lustre. This could be readily determined by the "feel" of the fur. When inbreeding was carried out in the particular genealogical lines that showed improvement, there was a most marked improvement in the fur of the foxes and immediately there was a production of foxes that had very improved colour, density, texture, life and lustre. It would appear from the study of the results obtained in the Ex-

TIMELY NOTES ON TOPICS CONNECTED WITH Silver Fox Farming



The December Fur auctions in London had record quantities of Silver Fox offered for sale, as a comparison with figures of the previous December will show. At Hudson's Bay Company sale 1934, 4,082 skins were catalogued, while this December 16,073 skins were offered. In addition there were 5,535 skins offered in November, a total increase in November and December of 75% over the highest previous offering.

The quality of the collection was a considerable improvement on the skins offered in November, although the colors were by no means so bright. The skins were almost entirely of Scandinavian origin, it being retained for breeding purposes, this female appeared to have been judged as one that was of the most inferior type, I was always particularly partial to this female.

The following are the highest prices for the different markings. Dark and slightly silvery \$41; One-quarter silvery \$52; One-half silvery \$152; Three-quarter silvery \$155; Silvery \$90.

What is true of the Hudson's Bay Company was probably true of other auction houses such as Frederick Huth & Company, Lampton & Company and Anning & Cobb. The Norwegian and Swedes doubt took advantage of the fact that their pelts were up to the minute in fur quality and filled the market so as to have them disposed of prior to the arrival of the Canadian goods.

The remark with regard to color is rather interesting and shows that although this season has been the most favorable one for years from a silver fox standpoint in Norway and Sweden, yet even then their colorings were not outstanding.

The writer's opinion regarding fox foods procurable in Norway has brought me to the conclusion that they cannot even under the most favorable conditions produce as clear colored pelts as we can in this country. If that is correct we have something to come and go on in the future, although all evidences point to the Scandinavian countries being our most serious obstacle to a profitable conduct of silver fox ranching.

The British Medical Research Council which has had a committee studying the wide range of subjects connected with sex hormones, state that the possibilities of control of the thymus gland are "actually beyond all comprehension. Experiments that have been made in creating the offspring of animals with thymus extract have produced a remarkable precocity of development," the council reported.

When only a few days old baby rats were as advanced after thymus glands as they normally would have been in a month. After being treated for three generations the rats have been born with teeth. At a few hours afterwards they grew fur and could swim and run when two weeks old.

Our show foxmen, in fact all fox ranchers, will be interested in the above, I am confident. Perhaps some of us will be making thymus extract with the intention of forcing our foxes up for next year's fox show. It all seems very simple as explained by the British Medical Research Council, but no doubt there is a nigger in the wood pile somewhere, so we may have to wait for a considerable time before we can take advantage of this new discovery.

The Kelliher Silver Black Fox experimental Fox Ranch that size and diameter of the fur, independent of length, is the most important quality in the fur of silver foxes. If the fur should be fine and lacking in size, although it may have length, while it may be possible to produce animals having fairly favourable colour, density, texture, and relatively clear silver, yet it appears practically impossible to make any advanced improvement; with such foxes it would be impossible to produce outstanding animals, and fox breeders who retain such foxes for breeding purposes are "up against a brick wall" regarding improvement. On the other hand, given a fur of a large size and diameter, while the fur may have a brown shade, may be coarse, open and lacking in life and lustre, yet with proper methods of breeding and feeding, a type of fox can be produced with an extremely dense colour, a remarkable density, being exceptionally close furred, and a striking life and lustre, extremely superior to that which can ever be obtained with foxes that have fur of a smaller diameter. (To be Continued)

NOTE: The Report of the Superintendent of the Experimental Fox Ranch for 1931-32-33-34 is now ready for distribution. Fox breeders may obtain a copy free of charge by writing to the Director of Publicity, Publications Branch, Department of Agriculture, Ottawa, Ont.

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Association (Kelliher, Sask.) under the direction of President A. C. Smith, assisted by their Honorary President A. K. McNeill, founder of the fox industry in that district, held the first auction sale of pelts ever held in Saskatchewan, in the Community Hall on Tuesday, December 10th.

Twenty-six ranchers placed 168 pelts on the sale. With the exception of a few extra good pelts they were all sold. Ranchers and buyers were satisfied and the sale termed quite successful. The general public was most interested and many pictures were taken of the display in the Hall and also outside. Seventy per cent of all offerings were sold at an approximate average price of \$40. H. Isman estimates that close to \$100,000 worth of fox pelts will be sold from this district this season.

The Charlottetown Fox Club and others witnessed a demonstration of grading, lotting, etc., by Colonel U. G. Dawson and assistants, at the Charlottetown Fur Sales Company plant Thursday. They enjoyed it very much and watched with the keenest interest the Colonel's methods of sorting and getting ready for shipment a large number of peltries which were on hand.

The visit of C. C. Avard of Sackville, N. B., to this province last week was evidently enjoyed by him, as we note a very fine article from his pen in his own paper the Sackville Tribune. Mr. Avard is a gifted fact writer and has conducted a large ranch at Sackville, now built up to 500 breeding foxes, and carries on an extensive printing business where numerous publications are issued, besides being active in several other spheres.

He is an intimate friend of Lowell Thomas and visits the versatile man two or three times a year. In fact we believe he is responsible for interesting Lowell in silver fox farming. As our readers are probably aware, Lowell has quite a number of pairs at his country estate near New York and takes rather more interest in them than any other live stock about the place.

The silver fox auction at Oslo, Norway, was held prior to the London sales, had a very good attendance. The market was firm. The full silvers had to be withdrawn because the limits were too high and the medium grades were also held at prices out of proportion to their worth. Low grades were in great demand and sold well. The Danes being the biggest buyers. The average price for skins sold was \$37. The average price for three-quarter silvers sold was \$38, for quarter silvers \$31, and for blacks \$23.

The following editorial in the Canadian Silver Fox and Fur of December is interesting. "There seems to be a fear that Russia will be the strong contender against Canada in the production of silver fox pelts. There have been all kinds of reports or rumours on the number of animals purchased by the United States of Soviet Russia, and the fear is that production will soon be on a large scale in that country. One prominent fur house representative expressed the opinion that we are inclined to agree with him—that silver foxes for that matter—that silver foxes for that matter cannot be produced by forced or regimented labor. The successful breeding of silver foxes is a twenty-four hour a day job. It means not only long hours of manual labor but many hours of thought and planning.

What large shipments of silver foxes have gone from Canada to other countries during the past twelve months? We have endeavored to secure this information but have not been able to put our finger on anything tangible. For instance we were told that Russia had imported some 8,000 animals or 8,000 pairs, no one seemed to know definitely what was true, did they know from whence they came.

Another rumour is that Japan recently gathered together 10,000 silver foxes to establish silver fox farming in the land of the cherry blossom. If correct such large scale operations would certainly secure notice from the general press. Are these purely rumours or are they founded on actual smaller shipments, and like the proverbial snowball, gather size as they roll along?"

With reference to the above editorial it is the writer's comment that the United States of Soviet Russia have been importing large numbers of pairs of silver foxes from Norway and Sweden for years and today it is estimated that they have herds totalling between eight and ten thousand pairs. They have not placed very many pelts on the markets as yet, those sold being handled through annual Leningrad auctions and are the cull pups and non-breeding adults.

Japan has been engaged in the industry for a longer period than Russia, and the total foxes in Japan at the close of last season (1934) were stated to be upwards of 10,000. Pelts from the land of the rising sun have found their way to the London sales, but it is our belief that the great bulk of them is disposed of in Shanghai, Yokohama and other cities of the East, where their habitations are as busy as those of Paris or London.

Discussing the alleged serious competition which Russia will afford in the future with a represen-

NEWSY NOTES

BY AGRICOLA

THE RISING OF 1715 (3)

A painting of the young Earl of Derwentwater, which was (and perhaps still is) at Thorndon, showed a person rather under the middle size, slender and delicate in figure, with his countenance handsome and noble, and expressive of openness and benevolence of character. The Rev. Robert Paton, to whose "History of the late Rebellion" we are indebted for many interesting particulars, thus bears witness to the character of the Earl, though it was to the interest of the historian to disparage him: "The sweetness of his temper and disposition, in which he had few equals, had secured him the affection of all his tenants, neighbours, and dependents, that multitudes would have lived and died for him; he was a man formed by nature to be generally beloved; and he had a benevolence so universal that he seemed to live for others. As he lived among his own people, there he spent his estate; and continually did offices of kindness and good-neighbourhood to everybody as opportunity offered. He kept a house of generous hospitality and noble entertainment which few in that county do and none come up to. He was very charitable to poor and distressed families, on all occasions, whether known to him or not. As the clergyman's "History" is a commendable representation of common sense in this matter as well as wicked undertaking (as he terms the rising) the reader cannot help a feeling of surprise at so striking a testimony to the young Earl's nobility of nature.

When he was in his twenty-third year Lord Derwentwater married Anna, daughter of Sir John Webb, of Canford, in Dorset. This lady had been placed in the convent of the Ursuline Nuns, in Paris, to complete her education; and the young people had become acquainted at the Court of St. Germain. By one of the singular stipulations in which the people of those times indulged, Sir John was obliged to provide residence and table for the young couple for two years; this was in fact secured in the marriage contract, no doubt at the instance of the lady, who is described as of rather imperious temper; and in consequence the Earl and Countess resided for that space at the mansion of the Webb family. In the meantime the Castle at Dilston was being remodelled, and a west front was begun—but never finished.

In the autumn of 1714, the Earl returned to his ancestral home, where his domestic happiness was destined to be short, for already secret preparations were being made among the Jacobites for a rising in favor of the "Pretender" to the British throne. On August 16th, 1715, when James VIII was proclaimed in Scotland, Lord Derwentwater was as much an object of suspicion to the authorities by his well-known sympathy and connection with the house of Stuart, that they issued an order for his arrest. It would have been well for him had they succeeded in doing this, but warning had reached the Earl, and he withdrew from Dilston, hiding himself according to tradition, in the cottage of one of his dependents in the wild and almost inaccessible region of the Linneth Bridge. The prospects of the rising were not very bright; in-

tative fur man some weeks ago, we stated that it did not seem reasonable that Russia could compete successfully against Canadian or Norwegian pelts because of the scarcity of meat in that country. There does not seem to be any substitute for meat as a ration, unless desiccated whale meat, which is sold at a comparatively low price, will take its place.

Numerous fox foods on the market that have given great satisfaction are composed of about one-third desiccated meat products—those from cattle, sheep and swine. Whether the protein of the whole or other fish mammals will be equally as satisfactory can only be determined by actual experiment.

The item in yesterday's Guardian to the effect that Mr. Hillard G. Muttart of Summerside, had received the highest price for a silver fox pelt at the recent Canadian auction sales at Montreal, is gratifying news to his many friends throughout this province and elsewhere.

The particular skin referred to was sold through the Canadian National Fox Breeders' Association Fur Marketing Department and was a yearling male. Asked for a description of the skin Mr. Muttart said it was a "large, extra pale and came from a very good strain which we have developed in our own ranch. The size of this yearling brought a wonderful price in the January Paris sale of 1934, namely \$176.19."

Some time ago it was our pleasure in this column to refer to the success Mr. Muttart's foxes were enjoying at the Provincial Fox Show, Charlottetown. The fact that he is equally successful in the pelt market demonstrates that Muttart foxes are a strain that will stand up under any kind of scrutiny.

And now it is certain to this column for 1935, but unless something drastic intervenes the writer hopes to be with you again in 1936, which is not very far away. As it is usual to pass compliments of the season between friends, I take this opportunity of extending to every silver fox rancher in Prince Edward Island my sincerest hopes for a satisfactory realization of his pelts in the coming fur sale markets and the further hope that 1936 will be real good to him and his.

deed the notices of this rebellion

are surprisingly meagre in the histories consulted by the writer. But local tradition tells of the caution which the Jacobites were obliged to exercise to maintain communication with one another. An old Roman altar at Fourtoun in the valley of the South Tyne, was the receptacle of their correspondence, and a little boy, clad in "the fairest" fatal green; came in the twilight every evening to collect their letters, and to deposit others, which were "spirited" away in like manner. Messages were also carried by female equestrians—the two heiresses of Capheaton, members of the Swinburne family, doing good service in this way. The ladies of the countryside, it may be said, were the most enthusiastic supporters of the Pretender, and the story runs that on one of the Earl's stealthy visits, the Countess approached him for "hiding his head in a hovel" while all the gentry were in arms for the cause of their rightful sovereign. Flinging down her fan, she bade him take it and give his sword to her. His natural hesitation is well expressed in the old ballad of "Derwentwater"—

"Were all around me not my ain, I'd freely gang the gate; Wha has nae fortune fights mair bauid

"Than me wi' large estate." On the morning of the 6th of October, 1715, the fatal step was taken: the Earl accompanied by his brother and a few friends and servants, all well-mounted and armed, set off for the rendezvous at Greenrig, a piece of waste land about three miles south of Redesdale, in the general direction of the Scottish border. If we believe the tales which still lingered in the neighborhood a half a century ago, there was no lack of omens of evil as the cavalade set out. The Earl's favourite dog howled lamentably; his horse became restive and could scarcely be urged forward; soon after starting he found that he had lost from his finger a highly-prized ring, the gift of his revered grandmother, which he constantly wore. In passing through the little town, or rather village, of Corbridge (once the headquarters of a Roman legion), the party rode with drawn swords, and in this fashion proceeded to Beaufort Castle, where they were reinforced by several other gentlemen and their servants.

LEGENDS OF THE SKY (6)

Orion, the constellation of the "giant hunter" is well placed for observation just now. If the stargazer will look a little to the East of South, about 9.30 in the evening at this time of the year (Dec. 20) he will observe four bright stars disposed in a sort of oblong, and halfway down, between the pairs, a slanting line of three stars, with another, fainter, line depending from it. The two upper stars mark the position of Orion's shoulders; the three stars running rather obliquely from his belt—the bands of Orion's of Job 38—and the dependent line is his sword or dagger. The two lower stars of the oblong are supposed to be the giant's hips; and if we trespass into the constellation of Lepus (the Hare) below, some fainter stars will give his legs. A small, close, group of stars does duty for the face.

Having broadly outlined this star-group, we go back for the detail. The "shoulder stars" are the bluish white Bellatrix, and the reddish Betelgeuse, the latter lying to the Eastward. The three stars of the belt were known respectively (from East to West) as Alnitak, Anilam

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