

CONSERVATION

A WEEKLY COLUMN OF PRACTICAL OPINIONS ON THE VITAL ISSUES AFFECTING THE USES AND ABUSES OF NATURAL RESOURCES BY MR. LUDLOW JENKINS, MARSHFIELD.

PREFACE TO "FISH-EATING BIRDS"

(By W. L. McATEE, Principal Biologist, U.S. Biological Survey)

It is very desirable to have available a Teaching Unit on fish-eating birds, a perspective group, which should be furthered in all reasonable ways. The very name "fish-eating birds" implies an enmity upon the food supply of mankind, an implication that is essentially false. The results of all comprehensive investigations of the food habits of these birds agree in indicating that under natural conditions the bulk of their food consists of fishes not directly utilized by man. The underlying reason is that these fishes are more available to the birds, usually because they are more common and easier to catch.

Sometimes where fishes of direct value to man are concentrated, as at hatcheries, considerable losses may be suffered through depredations by fish-eating birds. It is probable in many cases that some form of screening can be devised that will eliminate such damage and with its necessity for combating the birds. Hatchery conditions do not reflect those in Nature, however, and we may be sure that under natural conditions the general rule holds that fish-eating birds will be found to subsist chiefly on the more common kinds. They are more likely to prey on the menhaden rather than on the bluefish of the coast, for example; on the gizzard-shad rather than on the bass in southern waters, and on minnows rather than on trout in the numerous areas harboring both of these groups.

Fishing has gone down before the pressure of a growing human population, but the chief causes are drainage, desiccation, pollution, and overfishing. Everyone knows this is true, yet due to the ineradicable quaintness of mankind in seeking something outside of self to blame, we hear much about the destructiveness of fish-eating birds, the very factor among all that certainly cannot justly be blamed for fish scarcity.

To illustrate, we quote and discuss part of a statement made by Herbert Hoover before a national convention of the Izaak Walton League:

"The history of our food fisheries over the last fifty years is a melancholy book that would have taken some of the calm and optimism out of Izaak Walton. At one time our littoral waters teemed with huge runs of salmon, shad, and sturgeon. But they were easy of capture because they come right up to the fisherman's hands once a year en route to spawn in our streams. "Despite some feeble limitations imposed by state law, we have witnessed the practical destruction of the whole of the salmon, and shad, and sturgeon from the Atlantic Coast. We have seen the destruction of salmon along the Pacific Coast until finally there is but one large salmon fishery remaining—that upon the Alaskan Coast where we still take \$50,000,000 a year in fish. But even Alaska, with the demonic assistance of the tin can, will—unless it is vigorously restrained—have been lost in another ten years."

The lesson to be drawn in these cases, especially where the fishery is definitely exhausted, is that these fisheries grew up, flourished, and declined, in the continuous presence of fish-eating birds. This is conclusive evidence that for all practical purposes the birds had no effect on any part of the process. The birds still remain, they are feeding as they have always fed, but industries they have been accused of ruining have vanished. What more complete abolition from contributing to that result could be desired?

To pass from great to small, we may consider the fate of trout fry in planted streams. It is realized that there is a high percentage of loss and in some cases birds have been blamed for all of it. While they may be responsible in part, there are many other factors that must be considered. The matter has been rather thoroughly studied by Canadian authorities and they report losses due to such diverse factors as warm, stagnant, or peaty water, pollution, lack of food, cannibalism both by larger trout and among the fry, the disproportion-

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tionate increase of enemy and competitor fishes due to selective removal of the trout, and depredations by a variety of other enemies, including birds.

There is prevalent among lay anglers the impression that by intensive stocking, a stream may be made to produce as many fish as desired. This is not at all true, for every stretch of water has in individual ecological conditions that set a limit on its fish population. This limit may be expressed in poundage, which may be shared by few or many fishes. If there are many they will be of smaller size. Indeed it has been reported by an expert that he has found "no way in which large numbers of good-sized trout can be grown on natural food alone" (Edward R. Hewitt, 1934).

When a stream has been stocked up to its natural limit, unless the habitat is altered so as to accommodate more fishes and more food is supplied to continual pouring of fry into it will result in any increase in the yield. In European pond-fish culture, it has been found that the introduction of "a small number of rapacious fish may lead to such a reduction in the (total) numbers of fish, and such a consequent change in the conditions of competition as to serve the best interests of the pond and every species within the pond." (R. E. Coker, 1918). So in a trout stream where escape of the fish is prevented by screen or by ecological conditions, there is a definite limit on fish production, and the presence of natural enemies no doubt has a similar beneficial effect in relation to the size and age groups of the fishes.

This both for reasons governing the fate of planted fry as well as that of maturing trout, it is rash to jump to the conclusion that fish-eating birds are responsible for disappointing output of fishery waters. The real reason may be something quite distinct. Birds are easily observed, hence are first to be thought of in accounting for losses. Most of the other destructive or limiting factors are obscure and require study—a very unpopular thing. Study is necessary, however, for understanding of inter-relationships of wild things and their environment, and only students or those utilizing the results of study can hope to achieve a type of philosophy which will insure rational dealing with wild life.

As a step toward that philosophy, it may be suggested that man often spreads a feast for wild life where it cannot fail to be accepted, yet is surprised and aggrieved that it is. This in brief is the story of crop damage and it applies as well to the managed trout stream and its associated fish-eating birds. The fact that man is the intruder, that he develops valued property in the very domicile of wild life and thereby actually invites depredations, certainly should make for some degree of tolerance for wild creatures innocent of any intent to do harm.

In further mitigation of the "offense" of capturing trout or other fish in waters planted and preserved for angling, it can be urged that the value of the fishes as food for man is not a consideration because they are not sought primarily for food. Even if they were, they could not be claimed as an economical supply because in most cases the amount spent on their production and preserving is far more than their intrinsic worth. No, their value is in providing recreation, or "sport" or "fun" for those who catch them. Neither the fish nor the catching of them is actually essential to anyone, hence the taking of toll by natural enemies, while no doubt a cause of regret to the proprietors, is not an act necessary for punishment. We may well, indeed we must, pause before we adopt outright or allow the gradual growth of a policy, the implication of which is that "sport" or "fun" is taken so seriously in these United States that all wild things interfering or suspected of interfering with it must be eliminated.

This policy, and it is a policy among strenuous advocates of "vermin" control, is untenable for a variety of reasons. As applied to the fish-eating birds, it may be pointed out that this classification embraces 188 species and subspecies or about 13 per cent. of the entire American avifauna. It is inconceivable that aggressive measures threatening so large a proportion of our bird life would be seriously urged by extremists, much less permitted by public acquiescence. Again a large proportion of these birds are already protected by federal or state law and can be legally killed only under authority of special permits, issuance of which surely will not be carried to such an extent as to menace the reasonable abundance of these interesting forms of bird life. As a further consideration, destruction of fish-eating birds may clash with the desires of notable groups of the population, as for instance the National Association of Audubon Societies, and various private and corporate preserve owners who earnestly strive for many years and gloriously succeeded in preventing the extermination of egrets. Incidentally protection of the egret rookeries saved many a heron and ibis. The gulls and terns also were beneficiaries of public condemnation of the plume trade. These victories were hard won and their fruits will not be easily given up.

TIMELY NOTES ON TOPICS

CONNECTED WITH

Silver Fox Farming



Dr. A. K. Cameron, of Crandora, Sask., who attended the meeting of the Canadian National Fox Breeders' Association this week, remained over in Charlottetown until this afternoon when he leaves for Summerside and expects to spend a week or more in that vicinity. While here he made many friends among the foxmen, who have been very interested in hearing about his ventures in mixed fur farming.

The Doctor not only has a large ranch of silver foxes, but has also a considerable number of mink and is experimenting with fisher and marten. He has been successful in raising many litters of fisher and has sold breeding stock to the United States, Norway and some in Canada. He says that the whelping season for fisher runs from about the 18th of March to the 1st of May, and that the female fisher carries her young from 350 to 370 days. Litters are from two to four. He has had very little difficulty in raising young fisher. His breeding stock first came from the wilds and he was fortunate enough to secure wild female fisher with young, but on whelping he successfully raised, but wild female fisher did not prove successful breeders afterwards.

His mink venture looks promising and he believes there is more money in mink than in fox farming because they average larger litters and they only cost about one-third to feed. "The thing is," said he, "to get good mink breeding stock. Close furred and good color, as pointed out in these columns. Marten is in the most beautiful animal of all, in his opinion, but he has not so far been successful in raising any young. However, he is not discouraged and intends to continue until he is successful. Those who meet Dr. Cameron will be delighted with his personality and will certainly find him a most informative conversationalist.

The January number of The Black Fox Magazine, published in New York City, has been brought out as a twentieth anniversary issue, 1917-1937. It is truly a work of art. The cover is in seven colors and it carries many pages of artistic advertising and between fifty and sixty pages of reading matter illustrated with beautiful cuts. Our congratulations are extended to Mrs. Gertrude E. Fox, Editor, and Earl K. Collins, Managing Editor, for having produced what is certainly the finest fox publication ever issued.

The contents include the following articles: "Where to Buy," "Highlights of Twenty Years of the Black Fox Magazine," "The History of Fur Farming," "Fashion Spins the Wheel," "Looking into the Future of Fur Farming," "Listen to an Expert Talk About Color," "Fur Bearers," "The Foundation of the Astor Fortune and Laid by Fur," "The Evolution of Demand for Silver Pelts," "Federal Government in the Field of Fur Animal Research," "What Mink Breeders Ought to Know," "Catching Device for Minks," "Fur Time Marches On," "Reviewing History with our Oldest Living Advertiser," "When Two Foxes Caused a Sensation," "Hints from Old Timers," "Do You Know That," "Ask Us Another."

While the Anniversary Number of The Black Fox Magazine shows the dates of 1917-1937, yet it is older by several years. It was first brought into being by Frank C. Kaye at Saint John, N.B., in the Spring of 1914. The writer was a member of the Canadian Fox Exchange, domiciled at Prowse Bros. corner at that time, and I remember perfectly Mr. Kaye coming in to solicit an advertisement for the new publication. He had a very agreeable personality and went away with a good ad. I think he did very well on Prince Edward Island.

After keeping the publication going with considerable difficulty and a tremendous amount of hard work in the Maritimes, he decided to move to New York. The move was a wise one and The Black Fox Magazine in a very short time became widely circulated in the United States and Canada. In those days it was the principal medium for Prince Edward Islanders who had live foxes to sell, and full page advertisements were carried by leading breeders and dealers here. Mr. Kaye gave the very best that was in him to help along the fox industry, and carried on until some few years ago when his health broke down. Mrs. Gertrude E. Fox then took over and has nobly maintained the traditions of the magazine and broadened its

sphere and influence through connections with the fur trade.

The History of Fur Farming, 1879-1937, one of the leading articles in the above issue, has much of interest to us and we quote small part of it. "The summer of 1879 seems to date the earliest, definitely recorded fact regarding the raising of fur bearing animals in captivity. In that year, Mr. D. H. MacGowan, then a resident of Charlottetown, P.E.I., was fishing for trout in the stream below Haywood's dam at Tignish, when a man named George Platts drove across the road at the head of the dam. He stopped and offered to sell Mr. MacGowan a male fox pup for the modest sum of \$10.00, informing him that a man at North Cape had another, a female, which could be bought.

Mr. MacGowan explained that, since he lived in Charlottetown, fox pups were useless to him and advised Platts to try Benjamin Haywood, who had a stockade at the back of his barn. Mr. MacGowan related the facts later, as follows: "Platts took my advice and returned in a short time driving a cow and a calf for which he had exchanged the fox pup. Mr. Haywood at once went to North Cape and secured the female. He kept the pair for two or three years and actually raised two young ones, the skins of which Mr. Haywood sold to Harry Leslie of Kensington, receiving \$125.00 for the best pelt and \$75.00 for the other."

These skins probably were worth on the London market at that time about \$1,000.00 each. This is the first instance in which silver fox skins were sold from animals raised in captivity. However, Mr. Haywood, through lack of understanding how to feed and care for the foxes, lost his animals through death. But he had "pointed the way." And the flicker of Mr. Haywood's success was recognized by Charles Dalton as indicative of a possible new industry. Mr. Dalton, later Hon. Charles Dalton in the government of Prince Edward Island, began experimenting with red foxes in the year 1887. This was at the western end of the Island, which region will always be regarded as the home of the silver fox. Mr. Dalton kept his actions secret, and succeeded in keeping his foxes quietly concealed in a small shed at Nail Point.

About the same time, Mr. Robert Oulton was pursuing similar experiments on Savage Island with a pair of silver foxes, which he had purchased from a trapper on Anticosti Island. After being ridiculed and pointed out as a "no-good farmer" and a poor, shiftless fox fancier by many people living in the community, Mr. Dalton joined Mr. Oulton in 1895, and together they worked unmolested and successfully with their animals on the isolated area of Savage Island.

Two years later, in 1897, Mr. Dalton built a ranch of his own at Tignish, but still retained an interest in the Oulton ranch. At Tignish he developed into chief fur merchant of the Island, buying and selling skins, and conducting the general fur sale business for the entire district. Previous to 1897, however, three other men, whose names are historical in the annals of fox breeding, became interested in the possibilities of domesticating foxes and cultivating their fur. These three were James Tuplin, James Gordon and Silas Rayner.

They were busily engaged in the business in the early nineties, and were marvellously successful in raising a valuable litter of silver foxes within a short time of the date on which they established their ranch. The five men—Dalton, Oulton, Gordon, Rayner and Tuplin—formed a gentlemen's agreement not to sell live animal to anybody outside the "charmed circle."

So these pioneers in the fox raising business retained about the same number of animals each year and killed the balance for their pelts, which Dalton shipped every January to Lampons of London; and in this way, the five made immense fortunes. An account of sales of twenty-four skins, as one example, netted the five more than six thousand eight hundred and thirty-five pounds, or approximately \$1,385.00 per pelt.

But the "charm" was broken on the circle in 1909. In that year, F. F. Tuplin of New Annan, who was a nephew of Robert Tuplin, managed to secure a pair of silver foxes from his uncle. It was a disastrous thing, so far as the live-man combine was concerned—because as soon as F. F. Tuplin's foxes had young animals, he of-

NEWSY NOTES

BY AGRICOLA

Lady Strathmore's Lawsuit (2)

At that time (circa 1776) the Morning Post was the fashionable society newspaper, a position which I maintained into the times which I can remember. In this paper, then, appeared several articles from time to time, criticizing the Countess's poetic effusions, and what was worse, hinting that the young widow was not leading a life which would meet with the approval of the more rigorous moralists of the time. There came replies defending the Countess, and this led to a duel between the editor of the newspaper and Lieutenant Stoney who posed as champion of the lady. The gallantry of the warrior was rewarded by the Countess marrying him four days after the duel. At first sight this may seem very much as it should be; but when it is known that the whole affair was a sham, that Stoney himself had written both the criticisms and the replies, that the duel was literally a "sham fight," and that an understanding existed all the time between the editor and Stoney, why, that throws quite a different light on the affair. No matter, the aim was achieved, and Stoney had become the husband of the Countess of Strathmore.

But why as Bowes (for Stoney at once assumed this name) had been, he had not been quick enough in this matter. The marriage was barely over when he discovered that the Countess, just a week before the wedding, had by a legal deed vested all her properties in trustees for her sole benefit, but with power reserved to alter and amend the deed. This was "check" to the wily adventurer's play

but he set to work and in about four months he induced her to alter the deed and to invest him with the residue of her income, after providing for certain debts and raising some ready money. The extravagant living of Stoney-Bowes at length forced the family to leave Gilsbie, but not before he had cut down much valuable timber, which nobody would buy from him! He now began to treat the Countess as report said he had treated his first wife. Strange stories I have heard about him—how he locked her up in a closet and fed her with an egg and a biscuit a day. He also took away the Lady Anna Maria, one of her daughters by her former marriage, to Paris, merely to exercise his cruelty in separating the mother and daughter; but the young lady being a ward in Chancery, was brought back by the Court.

The following year (1785) the Countess died from his custody says one account, while another says that her friends came in force and freed her. However that may be, it is matter of record that she immediately began to institute proceedings for a divorce. In the evidence for the case she related that shortly after her marriage she had been deprived of her liberty in every respect. She might not order out her own travelling coach without Stoney-Bowes's special permission. Her own servants were dismissed, and new ones engaged, who were ordered not to attend to her bell when she rang for them. She dared not write nor receive a letter without his knowing the contents, and she was driven from her own table, or forced to sit at it in

(Continued on page 12)

ferred the pups for sale to the highest bidder. Thus a combine was broken,—and a widespread industry was born."

Reginald E. Chapman of Inglewood, California, has a three page ad in the January Black Fox Magazine, devoted to the sale of chinchilla breeding stock. In the introduction it says: "This advertisement is addressed to those fur farmers who are looking for a new type of breeding stock. The information contained in the next two pages will give you, we believe, an idea as to the possibilities in raising chinchillas. The tiny chinchillas are rare fur bearing animals whose silvery grey and extremely fine and light fur is one of the most high prized of commerce.

While chinchilla raising is not yet on a pelting basis, the letters we receive from fur auction markets who have handled chinchilla pelts when they were plentiful, predict that these pelts will bring excellent prices when the time arrives that enough matched skins can be offered to make a cash or cape. We have never pelted an animal for its fur. They are far too valuable for breeding purposes to sacrifice for Miady's adornment. However, our mother colony of chinchillas has now grown to a size which permits the sale of a limited number of breeding pairs. They are guaranteed to litter within six months or they will be replaced with a pair of animals that have littered within that period, along with at least one of the young of such litter, upon the original live pair being returned to our ranch. Our animals are pedigreed, tattooed and scientifically mated."

Continuing the ad. states: "Since 1923, the year M. F. Chapman, an American mining engineer, arrived in the United States from Chile with eleven little chinchillas, the result of years of effort to bring these little creatures out of their cold habitat in the high Andes until the present day, the raising of these almost priceless little animals has near years of study, experiment, disappointment and final triumph. At the world's original South American Chinichilla Farm, Inglewood, California, where there are over eight hundred healthy, robust chinchillas, the questions of habit, climate, diet, breeding and all the rest of the disturbing factors which confront the breeder of fur-bearing animals are matters of record.

Breeding chinchillas is like raising orchids or mining diamonds. The animal is almost extinct in Chile due to trapping and its natural enemies, and they have become the bearers of the costliest of all furs. The average pelts is 12 inches long by 8 inches wide. A chinichilla coat, of average length, requiring from 120 to 140 of these pelts to make, cost upwards of \$100,000. Chinichilla fur is therefore considered the most exclusive fur in the world today."

Statistics are given showing the

number of pelts exported from Chile from 1895 to 1918. In 1895 there were 184,548. In 1917 they had dropped to 4,380 and 1918 export was forbidden.

In January issue of the Fur Trade Review, published in New York, is a photo engraving of a young lady wearing a beautiful silver fox wrap as she appeared at the fashion show held by the New York Auction Company for the Miligan & Morrison Associates on January 4th. It is certainly a magnificent garment and the skins look to be clear and well-trimmed.

Pari houses are using fox fur heavily as trimmings on suits and cloths coats. These trimmings even start on the shoulders and continue down the front or sides of the garment. There is a plentiful use of black Persian lamb, especially on the black coats. Mink and ermine sell freely and are the favorite evening furs. Wolf is used extensively as a trimming fur on the new garments in natural silver and platinum shades.

The January New York Fur Trade Review has a very important article entitled "Silver Fox Looms out in London Raw Fur Season," from which these extracts are taken. "We learn that the 1936-37 production of silver fox should be in the neighborhood of 600,000 skins. This seems quite a reasonable assumption to those who follow developments in Canada, Scandinavia and the United States. The latter have a steady increase from year to year as new countries add their quota to the total and successful ranchers everywhere extend their holdings. It is predicted that before many years, world production will reach a million skins, and it should be possible to absorb this tremendous quantity, providing breeders concentrate on good quality and suitable markings.

London brokers, through whose hands pass the majority of the world's silver foxes, are not afraid of disposing of a million skins a year in future, but they are insisting that the quality must be right. Prices are bound to decline owing to the heavy quantity involved, but this decline will be mainly on the lower grade skins. They have preached this doctrine of quality

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Charlottetown, P. E. I.

for the past ten years, especially to the Scandinavians, whose industry started only after the war.

The seed has fallen on good ground, however, for last year and again in the present pelting season, Norwegian skins have been praised especially for their color, and they have actually commanded a higher figure than the Canadian. The result is that a distinct inferiority complex is apparent on Prince Edward Island.

Which is best? The comparative value of skins from Canada and Norway, the two principal breeding countries which are now fairly equal in importance, invariably leads to heated discussion in London fur circles. Although Canadian breeders assuredly must look to their laurels and see to it that the leaves are not allowed to wither on their brows, they seem to be holding their own. One experienced merchant estimates that on inspection or collection of 10,000 Canadian foxes will yield 70 to 80 per cent. of good skins, but with the Scandinavian the reverse will be the case. Another man, one of the judges at British silver fox championship shows, does not go so far as this, but while he is ready to give full justice to the excellent blue coat of the Scandinavian pelt, he feels that this high level cannot be maintained from year to year.

First come—first bought! The reason why the Scandinavian skins command a higher figure is simply because they reach the London market first, having only a short way to come. When the first skins arrive from Norway they make the carry-over skins look very sick, faded and rusty, so merchants and manufacturers are ready to pay anything for fresh goods—and they ship! Later when the Canadian shipments arrive the market finds its true level at the January auctions in London.

By the way, the writer noticed an article recently from the pen of an American lady who had visited various fox ranches in England, and gave it as her opinion that they would soon offer a considerable amount of competition to Canadian and Norwegian foxes. She said they were producing skins of good quality because of the natural aptitude of the British as breeders of fine cattle, sheep, poultry, dogs, etc. People like to visit the ranches, particularly society people, pick out a fox they like and order it as a pet. The "Buy at Home" cry is being largely used, too, and no doubt if there were enough pelts offering at present it would make considerable difference in prices, but the efforts of ranchers there have been directed towards making sales of live stock, at, of course, very profitable figures.

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