TIMELY NOTES ON TOPICS CONNECTED WITH Silver Fox and Mink Farming

In this issue we complete the article by Dr. E. Rendle Bowness entitled—Critical Factors Affecting Mink Feeding and Housing. Considerable of it is applicable to foxes as well, particularly the first part which dealt with the necessity of keeping watering pens filled frequently with fresh, clean water. The remarkable result achieved by Dr. Bowness in filling his pans frequently at his ranch during the hot months must have registered with a great many mink breeders.....

"The practice of running a roll of black building paper over the tops of the pens in a continuous manner throughout the whole row is slightly less undesirable. The only difference between the black building paper and the previous shade arrangement is that it lacks in thickness and thus lacks in ability to store heat. However, it attracts heat by its color and it prevents circulation both horizontally and vertically. For outside pens which are placed in tight rows the best shade and ventilation is provided by a slightly sloping roof made of bright steel or aluminum and raised at least one foot above the top of the pens. The action of bright steel or aluminum is to reflect the heat causing a rapid rise of air drawing cooler air through the pens. The higher the temperature on a sunny day the greater the movement of air under such protection. The slope of such roofs aids in air circulation and the slopes should be towards the south or west depending on whether the pens are run on a line east and west, or north and south.

"While most people regard shade as a safeguard against hot weather losses, its principal value is to keep the Mink comfortable and eating well so that growth does not slacken too much during extremely hot periods of weather. Modern and comfortable pen designs can and does mean many things. No one pen design is uniformly suitable in all parts of the country or under all conditions. While shapes, sizes and types of pens vary according to climate, sheds or no sheds, and the individual ideas and abilities of the rancher in building, still there are some basic principles upon which the majority of breeders agree. Pelting pens should not have less than three square feet of floor space. This is particularly true in male pens which if anything should be somewhat larger. Outside pens should have a weather-proof nest box. Shed pens should have some sort of a sleeping cubicle, either as a standard nest box or some arrangement that provides a hiding place that will protect the animal against loss of body heat especially in the fall months.

"A Mink is pretty well insulated against the cold when he is on the ground. However, when the Mink is suspended up in the air in a pen that does not have a nest box or other arrangements that prevent heat loss, it uses a greater percentage of its food intake in the provision of heat. In other words, you have to provide more food which costs more money in order that that Mink can keep reasonably warm. Other arguments as to the advantage of pens not having nest boxes are rendered futile in the face of this disadvantage.

"There is some confusion in the minds of ranchers as to the affect of light on furring during the fall months. It is not a question of placing the animal in total darkness or something nearly similar, but that of shortening the length of day and conversely making the nights longer. The older conception of the phenomena of furring was bound up with the idea that cold weather was the prime influence. The common complaint on an open and warm fall was that if we could just get some cold weather to fur our Mink up properly everything would be all right. Actually, unseasonably warm fall weather usually interfered with food intake and the animals going off feed faltered in their progress in furring. We all know that sick animals show poor furring ability, thus even minor degrees of interference which destroys appetite also have their effect.

"In our research work we have found that giving the animals a December length day from the middle of September through until pelting time, caused the animals to get right down to business in the production of a winter coat. If Mink can be guilty of thinking, then you can say that you made the Mink think it was later than they realized. Many ranchers place Mink in darkened sheds, old barns and places wherein the light is cut down at all times. Invariably Mink housed under such conditions show a wide variety of reactions in priming and most of them are much later rather than earlier. We have seen ranchers start to pelt on the 10th of November and as they only pelted the animals that showed primeness, were still pelting on the 10th of December where they housed their animals in partial darkness all the time.

"For those who would hurry the furring of their mink, we want to point out very firmly that they must have the proper equipment and layout to do the job successfully. It's not a question that you can induce on any ranch just because you want to. You must have sheds and those sheds have to be equipped with shutters to let in the daylight throughout the day and that can be closed late in the afternoon and left closed until early in the morning. However, for those who feel sheds are useful, it is just the question of designing your new sheds or converting the old so as to follow the principal of sundown at 5 o'clock in the afternoon and sunrise at 8 to 8.30 in the morning. Light has an even more powerful effect on reproduction. It's effect is too risky for other than the research worker to play with. During the winter months, expose your animals to normal daylight and let it go at that."

Lampson, Fraser & Huth's New York sale last week showed a strong advancing price of a variety of furs compared to June. Dressed Silverblu mink had a rise of 25%. Royal Pastels reached a top of $56. for light medium and light, advancing 10%; Aleutians had a top of $40. for dark medium; Breath of Spring Aleutian had a top of $32 for dark medium; Breath of Spring Silverblu a top of $46. for light medium; Stewart Silverblu had a top of $40. for light and pale; Steel Blu a top of $23. The report ends with:—"The supply of mink from the 1949 mink is away down and a lot of dealers and manufacturers have been anxious to take on a little more goods. With so many people in the mink business it is not hard to understand why the mink crop has been pared down so quickly this year."

Soil Protecting Practices For The Maritimes

OTTAWA, Aug. 8—Soil surveys conducted in Prince Edward Island show that approximately 30 per cent of the land can be classed as moderately eroded. This represents a considerable loss in potential productivity with a consequent increase in cost of producing crops, says G.B. Whiteside, Soil Specialist at the Experimental Station, Charlottetown, P.E.I.

Experimental evidence, as well as practical experience, has shown that the most effective protection against erosion is a dense grass cover. Too frequently, however, grasslands are neglected and the vegetation becomes so thin as to afford only partial protection. Good grassland management will improve the density of the sod, and this is a practical step that every farmer can take in protecting his surface soil for productive purposes.

Every spring the action of rainfall and the flow of surface runoff from melting snow presents an erosion hazard on cultivated crop land. This can be reduced to some extent by allowing plant residues as potato and turnip tops to remain on the field to form a trash cover. Ridging the land across the slope, rather than leaving it smooth as frequently happens after potatoes are harvested, can also be effective in reducing surface run-off.

Nature is slow to build but can be quick to destroy, especially when aided by man. Natural processes take several hundreds of years to produce one inch of soil. But when once the land is cleared of its cover of natural vegetation and brought under cultivation, it should be borne in mind that it only takes a comparatively few years of improper soil management on sloping land to destroy the work of centuries.

Sweet Clover, A Soil Building Crop

OTTAWA, August 19, 1950 — In southwestern Ontario growing sweet clover as a soil building crop was a common practice until ten or fifteen years ago. Since then it has become increasingly difficult to obtain good stands of clover in the second year of growth. In recent years, for instance, sweet clover has only been grown successfully in some years on certain fields in areas of Essex County.

It is thought that a fungus disease present in the soil is responsible for the rootrot of sweet clover which kills the plants during the early spring growth of the second year.

At the Experimental Substation at Woodslee, Ont, at breeding programme is under way to develop varieties of sweet clover with resistance to the root rotting disease which is prevalent in the district. Although the breeding work is in its early stages it is hoped says J. W. Aylesworth, that resistant varieties will be available to the farmer within a few years.

At the present time the chief soil building crops used in the district are alfalfa, alfalfa grass mixtures and red clover. These are expensive to establish and once established the perennial types are left down for several years. A biennial crop such as sweet clover would fit quite well in a soil building rotation where feeding livestock was not a factor. Where sweet clover can be grown successfully it would provide cash returns through the production of seed, and in addition, would supply substantial amounts of organic matter and nitrogen for the soil.

NEWSY NOTES

By Agricola

THE LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE

This is now called the Migrant Shrike, but the older title is to be preferred since both our Shrikes are migrants in the accepted sense of the word. John MacSwaine, who includes it in the Island list of 1916, says it is rare, and the New Brunswick lists puts it down as uncommon, but adds that it has been known to breed in that Province. Nova Scotia lists it without remark.

As to the Loggerhead's habits there is little differnce between it and the Northern Shrike. Charles W. Nash of Ontario noticed that the Loggerhead was much fonder of those hairy caterpillars called "Woolly Bears," which are refused by most other birds.

Loggerhead Shrike AOU 622 Rare visitor; no recent records. Plumage: upper parts slaty gray, a black bar on each side of the head, connected by a narrow black line across the forehead at base of the bill; bill hooked, hawk-like, both mandibles black; scapulars and upper tail coverts whitish; wings and tail deep black, primaries white at the base, secondaries tipped with white, the outer one mostly white. Underparts, always white. Length of adult 9.0 inches.

THE BATTLE OF OTTERBURN

On August 10, there was a note in The Guardian, that this date in the year 1388, the battle of Otterburn, in which Douglas defeated Percy, took place. There is a good and reliable account of this battle in Froissart's "Chronicles" upon which we must draw to get the true perspective. The Battle of Chevy Chase was a previous fight, and the account of it has been enlivened by some later poet who "lifted" the story of the death of Douglas from the battle of Otterburn, and inserted it in "Chevy Chase".

The events which led to the battle of Otterburn are these. Richard II, King of England, was a weak monarch, and England in consequence was in a distressed state. James, Earl of Douglas, an enterprising Scot, knowing this, invaded England with a picked force of 4,000 men and passing rapidly and secretly through Northumberland, reached Branspeth in County Durham. This village was looted and burnt by the invaders who now turned northward, plundering and burning every place on their route. One object of the Scottish raids was to secure weapons and iron to be made into weapons, of which Scotland has scant store in those days.

In returning, the Scots lay three days before the walls of Newcastle which were ably defended by Sir Henry Percy ("Hotspur") and Sir Ralph Percy, his brother, sons of the Duke of Northumberland. In order to conclude the siege the impetuous Hotspur challenged Douglas to single combat, like the knights of old. The encounter took place outside the New Gate, and Hotspur was unhorsed. His adversary, seizing Hotspur's spear with its silken pennon, waved it and cried "I'll take this token of the fight to Scotland and place it on the tower of my castle at Dalkeith so that all may see." With an oath, Hotspur replied: "Earl Douglas, you shall not bear it out of Northumberland to make a brag of!" With a taunting remark, "come and get it!" Douglas retired to his tent. These four words cost Douglas his life and Hotspur his freedom.

Very early next morning the Scots struck camp and marched to Ponteland, about seven miles to the northeast, where they captured the castle and burnt it and the village.

Otterburn castle is roughly twenty-five miles from Newcastle in a northwesterly direction. To it the Scots made their way driving the cattle they had "collected". The day was declining when they reached Otterburn, so they retired to the shelter of some ancient British earthworks and built huts of tree branches. They drove the cattle down into the nearby marshes to feed and placed their baggage and the camp-followers and servants in the gateway of the ancient camp —a simple arrangement that was to cost the English dear.

Next morning the Scottish host went to Otterburn Casle intending to treat it as they had treated Ponteland. The garrison resisted so vigorously that the Scots were greatly fatigued at nightfall, and badly in need of rest.

While the Scots were at their unprofitable task, Hotspur was collecting his men. He got together, according to Froissart, 600 spearmen and upwards of 8,000 infantry, "more than enough to fight the Scots who were but 300 lances and 2,000 others." The English left Newcastle after dinner, and following the road the Scots had taken, arrived at the Scottish camp about seven o'clock. It was not yet dark, and the bright August moon shed a peaceful radiance over the scene. Hotspur spied the servants at the entrance of the camp and supposing them to be the main army of the Scots, ordered his men to charge them. Though dog-tired with their long march, they obeyed. Raising the cry "Percy! Percy!" they attacked the servants and camp-followers who fought hard for their lives. The Scots warriors hastily armed themselves, clambered over the earthworks and making a circuit fell upon the English flank —"a great surprise to the English", says Froissart. (concluded in next notes.

SALAMANDER AND WARMING-PAN

Houses of the eighteenth century and part of the nineteenth century were built with fairly large rooms. My present living-room would easily fit into my grandfather's bedroom. Such houses were pleasant in the summer but as the temperature dropped the pleasure was less evident.. The bedrooms, however, all had fireplaces, and the fires were always "laid", meaning that the paper, wood and coal were in situ, so that a fire could be started at once if needed. In order to make sure that the wood ignited, a red-hot "salamander" was thrust into the pile of fuel. This implement was a poker with a large triangular head, shaped like a smoothing-iron. It was heated in the kitchen fire till it glowed, then carried to the bedroom to kindle the fire there.

The guest bedrooms, since they were not in constant use, quickly acquired the chill associated with the ice-box. When a guest did arrive, the fire was instantly lighted, and the bed warmed up by means of a "warming-pan." This was a flat pan (rather like a frying-pan) with a tight lid, and a long wooden handle. The pan was made of copper or brass, and held hot coals. Probably there were rules and regulations for its use, of which we now know nothing; but it without doubt alleviated the misery of the ice-cold bed!

(I have often wondered whether those spacious rooms had a psychological effect on the minds of the occupants?)

NOTES ON CONSANGUINITY

A half-brother, says the dictionary, is a brother by one parent only: a neat definition, when you think it out. The only other kind of brother that you can have — and the commonest — is the brother german, having the same father and mother that you have. German in this case has nothing to do with the nationality; it is related to the word "germane", which see. There are, of course, half-sisters and sisters german, and even cousins german, but half cousins are in a different class. Cousins german are usually called "first cousins" by the geneologists and "cousins" only, by the commonalty. The children of first cousins have likewise two titles: the people refer to them as half-cousins" but the books call them "First cousins once removed." The children of half-cousins are popularly called "quarter-cousins."

Your "second cousin" is the son or daughter of your parent's cousin. In like manner your grandparents are the progenitors of your "third cousins"; and you may extend the family tree to "fourth cousins" if interested!

The children of one's nephews or nieces are one's grand-nephews or grand-nieces.

Your uncle's uncle (that is your grandparents brother) is your "grand-uncle", often termed, though incorrectly, your "great uncle."

There are a few titles which I omit, as just out of focus in any tabular statement of relationships.

Pruning Small Fruits

OTTAWA, Aug. 19 — Pruning small fruits such as currants, gooseberries and raspberries is often neglected. These fruits must be pruned regularly to get the best production, says R.H. Anderson of the Melfort Experimental Station.

Currants are best pruned in the early spring while the wood is dormant. Red and white currants bear most of their fruit on short spurs on two-and three-year old wood. Pruning in this case consists of removing wood older than three years and thinning out all weak growth. The aim is to have vigorous young growth to take the place of the wood older than three years. Lateral growth and tips of new growth may also be removed in the fall, to keep the shape of the bush and to induce spur growth.

Black currants bear much of their fruit on one-year old wood and on the laterals of two-year old wood. It is important to have a supply of one and two-year old stems. All older stems should be removed and the younger stems thinned to ten or twelve stems per plant depending upon the condition of the plant.

The fruiting habit of gooseberries is practically the same as red and white currants, most of the fruit is borne on two-and three-year old stems. They should be pruned to leave approximately three one-year stems, three two-ya and three three-year stems. All branches in contact with the ground should be removed. The pruning may be done in the fall or in the spring before growth begins.

In the case of the raspberry, the canes bear fruit in their second season and then die. Pruning, therefore, consists in removing the canes which bear fruit as soon as the harvest is over, and thinning the new canes where these are too numerous. In thinning the new canes, the weak ones should be removed first and then any surplus of strong ones. The canes that remain should not be closer than six inches apart preferably nine to twelve inches. In the early spring, six inches may be pruned off the tips of the canes. This encourages strong lateral growth which bears most fruit.

How To Cull The Pullet Crop

OTTAWA, August 19, 1950—Early hatched pullets, for the most part, are already in production but the main crop of layers will be brought in from range during September or early October. Culling the prospective laying flock to eliminate the "loafers" has always been good sense but today, with high feed and labour costs, it is absolutely essential if the birds are to return a profit.

Obvious vigor is a first requirement. Unthrifty birds will not pay for their keep. Alert carriage, bright eyes, close, glossy feathering indicate vigor and all other birds should be eliminated. Comb should be fairly large, full, red and fine in texture and wattles should be thin and silky. It is doubtful if birds with rough, pale, coarse or scaly combs and sunken eyes will prove to be good layers, and it may prove more profitable to dispose of these for meat purposes.

The body should be long, broad across the back, deep from back to keel, and the keel should be straight. Breast should be plump and full. There should be good depth between pubic bone and the end of the keel, and there should be good spread between the pubic bones, particularly if the bird has started to lay. Shanks should be clean, flat, thin, and soft at the back.

If the sale of hatching eggs forms any considerable part of the source of revenue, select to breed standards, discarding birds carrying disqualifications such as sprigs, stubs split wing, twisted feathers, and crooked or twisted keels and discard any bird that appears under developed for her age.