

THE POLE TRAP

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The pole trap, widely used at game farms and elsewhere to destroy "varmints" namely hawks and owls, plays no favorites. The beneficial as well as the "so-called" harmful species suffer alike. Blind prejudice and inherent hatred for all birds of prey are reducing our greatest natural check upon rodents at an alarming rate.

The widely popular predator "control" program is bound to produce results not pleasant to contemplate. The folly of this system and tremendous cost of repairing the damage has been amply demonstrated in Europe where the cry now is to "bring back the birds of prey."

The economic status of predatory birds is firmly established, and their actual worth a matter of open record. With these facts in hand it is in the best public interest that the practices born of ignorance must be discouraged by immediate public enlightenment or by the restraint of law. To qualify the foregoing statements, the following facts and figures, based upon laboratory and field experiments, speak for themselves.

Rough-legged Hawk

The American rough-legged hawk is a winter hawk commonly destroyed by the pole trap. The Journal of Agricultural Research, Feb. 23, 1924, states as follows: "95 per cent of the food of this hawk consists of the common meadow mouse. If provided with an abundance of food, a pair of meadow mice will produce 17 litters a year, from two to nine young, the average being five. As the young are ready to breed at the age of 25 days, the potential increase of one pair exceeds a million individuals a year. Tests have shown that it actually takes 23 pounds of green food a year to support one meadow mouse. As one hundred meadow mice to the acre is not unusual, it is easy to see that this number will reduce the crop yield by one ton of green or one-half ton of dry hay per acre. The U. S. department of agriculture estimates that on the assumption that probably no farm today averages less than 10 meadow mice per acre, the loss on the 65 million acres of hay fields in the country runs a minimum of three million tons of hay a year, and more if predator destruction allows the mouse population to rise above the 10 per acre figure."

Helps Quail

Herbert L. Stoddard, the internationally famous quail expert, has found that the marsh hawk (one of the most common pole trap victims) tends to concentrate in the winter on areas in the south where cotton rats are found in large numbers, and eats them almost exclusively to the great benefit of the quail, as in the spring the cotton rat is a terrific destroyer of quail nests, being fond of eggs.

The foregoing facts, with little variation, will serve to illustrate the value of 28 of the 33 predatory birds that are residents in or migrate through our state.

Injurious rodents reach their peak of abundance in the fall. It is easy to see what would happen to agriculture if this surplus was not ruthlessly cut into by the migrating hawks. Under normal conditions, therefore, the rate at which the rodents breed just about equals and balances the rate at which predators catch and eat them. Once the predator destruction allows the army of rodents to gain the upper hand, crop raising is made impossible as has been notably demonstrated in certain of our western states. Unfortunately it is during this season when agriculture most needs the hawk that the pole trapper is most active.

Public Suffers

I am personally acquainted with several of our less scrupulous game breeders, and do know that as long as the use of the pole trap is permitted our beneficial birds of prey and the public will suffer. The only interpretation placed by such people upon the economic side of this question is its effect upon their own pocketbook. It is true that many of our beneficial hawks develop game destroying propensities in the face of easy pickings at a game farm. However, the loss sustained by the game farmer is very small compared to the loss to agriculture and the general public if the hawk is killed. The surreptitious disposition of as many as 50 beneficial birds of prey at one game farm a year is not uncommon. Each one of these birds has an annual value conservatively estimated at \$5 (these figures based upon fact) to agriculture. In one year the man has robbed the public of \$250, and in 10 years \$2,500. In the name of common horse sense, this man should and must be stopped.

General Welfare

Those who use pole traps and particularly the game breeder, must come to realize that there are a far greater number of citizens interested in and vitally concerned with the general public welfare and success of agricultural efforts than those interested in pheasants.

Pheasants are recognized as valuable game birds (and at certain seasons of the year, insect destroyers) but we must remember that our native birds adequately took care of the insects and furnished excellent game before the pheasant was introduced.

The state can better afford to furnish ordinary cheap chicken wire covering for open and unprotected rearing pens at game farms, than to sustain the further loss to the public by permitting destruction of the beneficial birds of prey through use of the pole trap.

Sharon—A skunk wandering around town halted traffic. There was one vacant seat at school because a small boy stopped to pet the "pussy".