

Female Wildlife Expert Holds Doctor's Degree

BY HAZEL McGRATH

A University of Wisconsin co-ed is the first woman to get a University of Wisconsin doctor's degree in zoology and wildlife management because she wants to explain her furred and feathered friends to as large an audience as possible.

She is Ruth Hine of Springfield, Mass., whose approach to the mouse is by way of the trap and the scalpel rather than the shriek and the leap to the mantel.

She is now attached to the wildlife research section of the Wisconsin Conservation department's game management division, doing



Vis-a-vis with a dead deer, Ruth Hine earnestly picks at the back teeth to estimate to within a year the age of the animal for the state conservation department's project on deer management. During the deer season, Ruth is posted at one or another of the conservation stations where hunters' cars are stopped and their booty examined while they beam complacently.

technical and popular writing as well as research in the woods and fields.

"As early as I can remember I treasured grubby little collections of bugs, birds' nests, and small animals," she admits.

Handy With a Scalpel

Ruth does autopsies on field mice with the dispassionate interest other women take in knitting an Argyle sock or baking an apple pie. Her idea of a profitable Sunday afternoon is one spent prying open the mouths of dead deer to study their back teeth.

She took her undergraduate work in zoology at Connecticut college for Women and then came to Wisconsin to take her master's and doctor's degrees.

For her doctoral thesis, she did a study of small mammals of the Madison area to trace the ups and downs of the population during the four seasons and in various environments.

"We ran a standardized trap line every three months in nine areas of the university arboretum," she explains. "We caught 1,823 mice during the four years of the study, from 1946 to the present. All were brought back to the laboratory for autopsy. We

window or kept them covered on the back porch.

"It is especially important to farmers and foresters to know under what conditions mice are most abundant so steps can be taken to control them. They have positive values, too, in controlling insects and providing food for other wildlife."

Helped at Kettle Moraine

When mouse damage was extensive in Kettle Moraine state forest near Campbellsport, Ruth was there with her traps and peanut butter bait to help solve the problem. She has gone as far afield as Jackson Hole, Wyo., and Manitoba, Can., to study the local fauna.

During her years on the Wisconsin campus, Ruth has cherished hamsters, snakes, frogs, toads, and salamanders in the zoology laboratory.

The summer of 1949, before joining the Conservation department as an aide, she worked in the outdoor museum at Palisades park, New York, looking after the collections of skunks, bears, rattlesnakes, lizards, and the like.

When deer, waterfowl, and upland game birds are in season in Wisconsin, Ruth spends her time at conservation checking stations.

Checks Deer for Age

"We check the back teeth of the deer for wear to get the age of the animal, which we can estimate to the year," she reports. "Hunters are interested in our research project and are extremely cooperative. We hope to contribute valuable information for future deer management in the state."

"During their seasons we check the age of pheasants, waterfowl, and grouse by studying wing moult," she adds.

"Some time ago I began to feel the need to explode into writing about wildlife, so I took the courses in feature writing offered in the Wisconsin Journalism school by Prof. Helen Patterson and Lecturer Clay Schoenfield," she continues.

"I look on myself as the middleman between the research man and the public in the writing I do," she says. "When I'm able to explain clearly to the layman the vital importance of the Conservation department's work, I get tremendous satisfaction from my job."

Likes Entertainment

She has published two articles in Audubon magazine: "Out of the Classroom into the Woods" about her experiences in Palisades Park, and "Grassland Dynasty" about plants and animals of the prairie. She has had articles on conservation printed in newspapers. The past fall and winter she has been devoting most of her writing time to putting on paper, in both technical and semi-popular form, results of the Pittman-Roberts federal aid research projects.

Out of the woods and into her apartment, Ruth Hine, 30, lives in



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"We ran a standardized trap line every three months in nine areas of the university arboretum," she explains. "We caught 1,823 mice during the four years of the study, from 1946 to the present. All were brought back to the laboratory for autopsy. We weighed and measured each mouse and then examined it for breeding condition and parasites."

Thesis 220 Pages

When all the autopsies were done and the little bodies counted, Ruth sat down to translate the scientific facts of animal life into terms intelligible to the layman who can't tell a shrew from a field mouse—and who is unaware that his food supply is affected when the small mammal population is not judiciously controlled.

The results cover 220 typewritten pages with the title "The Ecology of Small Mammal Communities."

"I wish we'd saved all the pelts," she says with a grin. "Altogether they would have added up to something interesting in mittens or muff—maybe even a fur coat. Sometimes, when I couldn't get them to the lab right away, I kept the mice in my apartment, wrapped in paper bags and hidden at the back of the refrigerator freezing compartment. My roommate never knew this, of course. Sometimes I hung them out the

park, New York, looking after the collections of skunks, bears, rattle-snakes, lizards, and the like.

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Out of the woods and into her apartment, Ruth tunes up her guitar for an evening of folk songs, or gets out her painting materials to decorate a tray, or bakes an apple pie. She can be lured out of her rooms by almost any entertainment, which involves music from the symphony orchestra to the movie musical, to the square dance.

In business hours, whether she's pushing a baited mouse trap under a bush or putting her research results on paper, Ruth is doing what she most likes to do—and at the same time pioneering in a field where few women have yet penetrated.