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ARMADILLOS FOUND NOT GUILTY;  
SKUNKS DESTROYED QUAIL EGGS

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Texas sportsmen apparently were wrong in suspecting that the armadillo destroys many eggs of quail and poultry, a preliminary investigation indicates. Most of the damage laid at the armadillo's door was done by other animals, principally the skunk, the Biological Survey of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Texas Game, Fish, and Oyster Commission found, when the sportsmen asked for help in controlling the suspected animal.

A study of the food habits of the armadillo showed that it feeds almost entirely on insects, and is therefore beneficial. In fact, the scientists say, the individual armadillo is the greatest consumer of insects among all our insectivorous animals, and the occasional slight damage it may do cannot be urged as adequate reason for an eradication campaign.

When an armadillo is rummaging about for food, it may occasionally plough through a nest or otherwise leave evidence that it has been digging, and as a result, the Bureau explains, a casual observer is likely to believe that the animals are destructive egg-eaters. Tests conducted with both free and captive animals show, however, that the armadillos do not recognize whole hen eggs as food. In captivity, it is true, the animals do learn to break quail eggs and eat them; but the investigators believe that in the wild they do this rarely. Analyses of the contents of stomachs so far examined reveal no egg material but show that the armadillo is a voracious consumer of beetles, ants, grasshoppers, termites, caterpillars, and in fact of all the small creatures it finds by its characteristic method of feeding, rooting in the soil.

It is entirely unfair, says the Biological Survey, to blame the armadillos of a locality for a quail scarcity that should be attributed to several other factors, including stray dogs, razorback hogs, trampling cattle, and browsing animals that destroy cover.

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