



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEY

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CANNIBALISM AMONG CAPTIVE GAME BIRDS MAY BE CURED BY TABLE SALT

Cannibalism, which is prevalent among game birds in captivity, may be cured by common table salt, a preliminary report by the Bureau of Biological Survey to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes revealed today.

For many years game bird breeders have been troubled with cannibalistic tendencies among their flocks. This vice, which is seen in adults but is particularly prevalent in young growing stock, has been costly to the breeders. Manifestations of cannibalism include pecking at the beak, head, back, and toes, feather pulling, and occasionally, though seldom, disembowling.

To control this serious problem, the Bureau of Biological Survey, in cooperation with the Bureau of Animal Industry, of the Department of Agriculture, conducted a series of preliminary studies at the Survey's Patuxent Research Refuge, Bowie, Maryland. The investigation was authorized by the Bankhead-Jones Act.

Preliminary studies indicate that a deficiency of common salt in the diet is one of the factors, if not the main factor, leading to cannibalism. A slight increase in the salt content of the diet of adult bobwhite quails stopped outbreaks of toe pecking within 24 hours. Even fighting, which in some respects is related to cannibalism, was checked by adding salt to the diet. Breeders are cautioned, however, that too great an increase in the salt content may be injurious to the birds.

The principal game species bred in captivity are the bobwhite quail, ring-necked pheasant, Hungarian partridge, chukar partridge, and wild turkey.

The problem requires further investigation. The research will be conducted by the Department of the Interior in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture.

Meanwhile, the preliminary findings of the investigation, which are of much importance to the game-bird industry, have been issued in the form of a mimeographed leaflet, BS-163, entitled "Common Salt as a Curative for Cannibalism Among Game Birds in Captivity." The leaflet is available to the public upon request.

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