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WILDLIFE WORKERS PREVENT PLAGUES;
SAVE LIVESTOCK; CURB MICE, RATS

NOTE TO EDITORS: This is the fourth in a series of feature stories explaining the work of the Fish and Wildlife Service, which will be issued from time to time. Still available are a few copies of the previous stories on food-habits investigators, refuge managers, and Service surveyors.

Usually Tom Hopewell is a gentle chap who never raises his voice in anger and has the patience of a trout fisherman trying to hook the biggest one this side of the Mississippi. No wonder Tom's family was surprised one morning when they heard him near the sheep corral yelling his head off and using language that was, to say the least, unrefined.

"What's the matter, Tom," queried his anxious wife.

There was plenty the matter, Tom said, because he had just lost 20 of the best sheep in Wyoming, and furthermore he didn't care who knew it, but if those Fish and Wildlife Service predatory-animal workers didn't do something about those coyotes, he, Tom Hopewell, would.

When a man loses 250 lambs to coyotes in less than a month, he can hardly be expected to keep his temper.

Day in and day out, from Coast to Coast and border to border, some Tom Hopewell, some place, raises his voice in protest and shouts for help. And a predatory

animal and rodent control worker of the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior, appears on the scene and does what he can to reduce damage to livestock or property.

This control work is conducted by the Service's Division of Predatory-Animal and Rodent Control. Dorr Green, division chief, has a staff of experts in many States in the Union who act as "trouble-shooters" replying to the many requests received each day for advice or help in reducing damage caused by any one of a dozen or more predatory species.

In New England nursery men, foresters, farmers, and wildlife conservationists generally try to control the number of field mice that damage hundreds of valuable trees every year. Many farmers and orchardists also complain because deer break into the orchards and eat the leaves and buds of the best fruit trees and break off the limbs.

In the west, livestock owners protest when their cattle, sheep, chickens, and pigs are slaughtered by coyotes, wolves, and other predatory animals. Ground squirrels and prairie dogs also come in this list of animals whose activities require control because these burrowing animals have a habit of tearing up valuable grazing lands and destroying agricultural crops.

And all over the country, in cities, towns, villages, and farmlands, the house rat and his many kin play havoc with household goods, food supplies and even department store wares, not to mention that the 123,000,000 rats in the United States are potential carriers of diseases that can be passed on to human beings.

Local Control Necessary

The Fish and Wildlife Service adopts the policy that all animals play an important and necessary role in wildlife conservation and that, except for the rat, no animal should be exterminated.

But whenever a species becomes overpopulated locally or is responsible for too much damage or predation, then control is necessary.

Thus, when cottontail rabbits cause \$3,000 damage by girdling 5,000 apple trees in a nursery, as they did in Yankton, S. Dak., control experts need to move in.

Citizens find control so necessary that they contribute money for this work. Last year cooperating States gave over \$475,000 for control operations, and cooperating counties, livestock associations, and others added another \$1,085,000. That's a pretty good indication that the State, county, and private agencies think the work is well worthwhile.

In California, field mice, chipmunks, ground squirrels and rabbits have ruined hundreds of acres of saplings being raised for forest reproduction. Ground squirrels have also done a nice job of robbing the nests of Valley quail in many localities.

Service control workers were faced with the problem of letting the ground squirrels and other rodents go their merry way, and thus losing valuable trees and the few remaining Valley quail, or of controlling these animals and letting the saplings mature and the Valley quail increase. Since there are plenty of ground squirrels in the country, the decision was obvious. Control measures against the squirrels were instituted.

Work Done Carefully

These control experts are men who have been trained in the proper methods of capturing predatory animals. They are so well-informed on coyotes and wolves, for example, that they almost know what those animals are going to do next.

This brings up another subject. How is this control work done? Some people think the control workers run around the country scattering poisoned bait indiscriminately and that, as a result, other animals pick up the poison and die.

Actually, regulated poisoning is only one of several techniques used. Whenever poisoning methods are used, the control workers place their bait where there is little likelihood that other animals, except the species to be controlled, will reach it. That takes some scientific knowledge, much practice, and considerable care.

Unfortunately amateurs occasionally try to do their own control work, and then it may be tough for any animals that might be in the vicinity.

Predators Still Thrive

Controlling an animal does not mean exterminating the species. Take the coyote for example. Local control of these animals has been practised for many years, but if anything the coyote has been increasing rather than decreasing in numbers throughout the Nation.

In recent years, Fish and Wildlife Service officials have been called on to control coyotes in Atlantic Coast States, far from the original home of this wily animal.

Authentic records of coyotes have been reported in Georgia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Alabama, and Maine in the past 5 years.

The national population of ground squirrels, prairie dogs, and other predators requiring local control is still high despite control measures.

Not the least of the control workers' activities is devoted to the eradication of rats. Service officials are always ready to cooperate in rat-eradication efforts conducted in cities and rural areas throughout the United States.

Rats Take a High Toll

In a recent Fish and Wildlife Service publication, James Silver estimates that rats are responsible for an annual loss to Americans of \$189,000,000. Rats also play an extremely important role in the spread and transmission of disease, he points out.

Common house rats are known to have been responsible for the spread, at one time or another, of bubonic plague, typhus fever, spirocheatal jaundice, rat-bite fever, food poisoning, tularemia, rabies, trichinosis, and other rat-borne diseases.

Mickey Mouse may be cute, but the real, live in-the-flesh member of the rodent family are both annoying and costly. Rats eat grain in farmyard bins, steal food from grocery stores and family pantries, and even have been responsible for short-circuiting electric power lines by chewing on ground cables.

Farms average an annual loss of \$10 each for rat damage, or some \$63,000,000 for all the farms in the United States.

A hungry rat is a hungry rat. He will eat almost anything. So it seemed at any rate, a few years ago when at Providence, R. I., a store reported losses of more than \$100 a week from damages to goods eaten by rats.

The store-rats' taste in foods ran from bird seed, to woolen blankets, to powder puffs. A Service rodent control expert appeared on the scene and taught the storekeeper how to control the rats. Fewer powder puffs have been damaged since then.

Control Workers are Trained

Being a control worker is no soft job. It requires years of experience and training. Most workers specialize either in the control of predatory animals or of rodents. That means the worker is expected to know all about the species with which he deals; daily habits, life histories, food likes and dislikes, the devices necessary to control the animals, and so on.

Above all, however, these Service employees must understand the principles of conservation. Most of the district agents who supervise this type of work are college graduates holding degrees in science.

Back of the field men who actually do the control work are two large staffs of

laboratory investigators constantly experimenting with new techniques to improve methods of control, and affording further protection to other species that may even remotely be affected by control operations.

Not only must these experts know how to control destructive animals, but they are required to know how to determine whether the "accused" animal actually is responsible for the damage. Sometimes persons will swear on their oath that they saw a coyote, a bobcat, or a wolf killing sheep and cattle, and the ranchers demand the alleged predators be wiped out of that local area.

Investigations may prove that the animal actually did kill the sheep or cattle or, on the other hand, that the accused predators were accessories after the fact and not the perpetrators of the raids. Skilled workers are necessary to make these careful studies.

So the next time you meet a predatory animal and rodent control worker, look him over twice. He may have a 2-weeks' growth of beard and sometimes he may look as though he can't sign his name, but if you'll talk to him, you'll realize he knows his business. After 2 weeks of running down a cattle-killing wolf or a couple of coyotes on a sheep-raiding foray, you wouldn't look like the well-dressed businessman yourself.

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