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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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STATE RESEARCH SHEDS LIGHT ON FOOD HABITS OF WILD GAME

Studies by State fish and game departments have found--

That snow can chase white-tailed deer away from their "free lunch" counter; that geese, on the other hand, are inclined to hover close to food, snow or no snow; and that the cottontail seems to prefer his vegetables with lots of minerals.

Those are among the findings which three States--South Dakota, Illinois and Massachusetts--made on Federal Aid research projects during the past fiscal year and reported to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Other State food research programs included studies on the nutritive value of eastern hemlock, mountain maple, and apple twigs and leaves under rigorous New Hampshire winter conditions, and chemical analyses of various browse plants on the plains of Texas. The results of these various studies will be used by States in getting more game per acre of land and per dollar of expenditure, Fish and Wildlife Service officials say.

In the Black Hills in South Dakota, an effort was made to hold white-tailed deer in the back country during the winter to prevent depredations on rancher's hay and feed supplies. Two experimental feeding stations were established with Federal Aid funds, which come from an 11 percent tax sportsmen pay on their guns and ammunition. Alfalfa hay, corn on the cob (dry), and an especially prepared deer concentrate comprised the daily fare. All went well until a heavy January snow. There was still plenty of food in the feedgrounds but the white-tails turned their backs to it and moved down to the low country, apparently willing to take "potluck" rather than sure feed in the snowy hills.

It was in southern Illinois that the goose indicated its preference to the right kind of food, snow or no snow. In the Horseshoe Lake area, a 70-acre plot was test-planted with Kentucky fescue grass. This furnished 1,000,000 goose-days of grazing, largely during heavy January snows when nearly 12,000 geese used the field. In another test plot, 108 acres were planted to millet, milo and kaffir corn. More than 20,000 geese fed on this plot in October and November, the millet going first and then the milo and kaffir after the frosts had wilted the leaves and exposed the grains.

Massachusetts wanted to learn what effect fertilization can have on land which is known to be lacking in certain minerals. Two test plots were established. One of these was treated with only muriate of potash; the other got calcium, nitrogen, phosphates and potassium. The cottontail, which probably furnishes more sport hunting than any other animal, showed a three-to-one preference for the plants grown on the land which had the full treatment.

The hemlock, mountain maple and apple browse studies in New Hampshire showed that these plants did not provide proper sustenance during the winter and that deer could have plenty of these and still starve. In Texas it was found that the browse plants carried more winter nutrition than did the herbaceous ones, which is considered to be one reason why the deer and domestic livestock are in competition for available browse at certain times.

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