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PEST CONTROL OPERATOR INVOLVEMENT IN WILDLIFE CONTROL*

by

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I was very happy to be invited to appear on this program. George Halazon and I have shared a good relationship for over 25 years. Bob Henderson has been a ready source of information and help ever since he came to his present job at K-State. I hope you fellows from other states know and communicate with your professional pest control people similarly. It is my aim that the formal portion of this paper will trigger questions and discussion at its conclusion.

As a Kansas farm boy of eight years of age, I started trapping pocket gophers in alfalfa fields on my way to and from a one-room country school. The sickening odor of a weasel caught in one of these traps still lingers in my mind. I also learned that a bull snake could be almost impossible to pull out of such a hole once he had set his body muscles.

From pocket gopher bounty, I moved on up the scale to hunting and trapping opossum, muskrats, striped skunk, and the little spotted skunk for their pelts. I haven't seen this member of the genus *Spilogale* for years. Can anyone tell me what happened to it in Eastern Kansas?

This might be a good place to admit to you that back in the last '30's and early '40's, I yearned to be a government fish and game biologist. I was teaching biology in a high school, junior-college combination and working out a Master's degree at what is now Oklahoma State. My major was zoology with a minor in botany. Needless to say, I took every state and federal examination along this line that I could, but World War II came before such a job appeared!

As I had worked in entomology and I had written my master's thesis on *Sigmodon hispidus texianus*, the cotton rat, the army decided to make me the entomologist in charge of pest control at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, where I stayed until the end of the war. This work experience led to the establishment of Schendel Pest Control, Inc., in Topeka in 1947.

As a past president of the National Pest Control Association, I'd like to tell you a little about our particular field of structural pest control as opposed to field or crop pest control. Members of our organization generally confine their efforts to pests in or near structures. Termite and other insect damage of wood and cellulose products is a major field of endeavor. We also do a lot of work concerning primarily Murid rodents. Occasionally this work is done on city dumps, railroad sidings, and other areas some distance from structures. Pest bird control (sparrows, pigeons and starlings primarily) usually is carried out on or in structures, but may take us to waste dumps, animal feed lots, tree roosting sights, etc.

Some of us over the years have worked occasionally on pocket gophers, snakes, muskrats, raccoons, crow, prairie dogs, and moles in areas at varying distances from structures.

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Most structural pest control people at one time or another have been asked to help with such problems as squirrels and bats in attics; skunks, raccoons and opossums in or under structures; pack rats in farm outbuildings and machinery; an owl who has gotten down through a chimney; and snakes, cotton rats, tortoises, rabbits and other forms of wildlife in window wells and even in basements. At times some of our best help is pointing out closures that need to be made to keep the offender out. At other times, we may sell live traps and give instruction on their use.

Every now and then we find sewer rats entering a home or business through a steel water trap. A couple of years ago an architect friend of mine called to say that he had a very wet squirrel loose in a bathroom. I felt sure my friend had mistaken a rat for a squirrel, so I went out on this call. He was right. A limb of a nearby tree made a jump of only a couple of feet necessary to get on the house roof. The squirrel no doubt thought that the warm air coming from the sewer standpipe suggested a good nesting area, so he started down. I suppose the first place he could stop his descent was at the stool lateral. I was careful to not let the squirrel out as I entered the bathroom and was soon able to catch him with the aid of a towel and a pair of heavy leather gloves. The family wanted him released in their yard, so I had the sewer standpipe capped with one-half inch hail screen.

We get quite a number of squirrel calls during December, January and February, especially in older wood construction homes. Sometimes simply closing their entrance holes when they are known to be outside will suffice. If they already have their young inside they will cut through almost anything to get to them. Live trapping is often the best approach to a squirrel problem. We have never had one return when we have taken them five or six miles away for release.

Have you heard of the perplexed pest control operator who couldn't quite believe the request that was coming in over the telephone from a distraught young housewife: "Sir, I would like to buy two thousand ants, five hundred roaches, and twenty mice."

"Lady, we don't sell those animals. We come out and get rid of them. Just why do you wish to make such a purchase?"

"We are moving and the landlord insists that we leave the apartment just as we found it!"

I suppose the P.C.O.'s greatest involvement in wildlife control at the present time is in control of pest birds - namely sparrows, starlings and pigeons. This work is normally done on or in buildings or at an animal feeding operation. Avitrol is one of the few chemicals left for such use.

A few years ago a large downtown building in Topeka had approximately 5,000 starlings descend upon it about this time of year just as the first severe cold weather of winter came. The starlings roosted on every window ledge, a corner time-and-temperature sign, as well as on a 20 ft. by 40 ft. institutional sign extending approximately 18 feet above the roof of the building. It was supported by a steel framework which made an ideal roosting area.

It doesn't take much imagination to understand the filth and histoplasmosis disease potential on the street around this building. The collection of the manure on the roof tended to clog drains and cause faster decomposition of the roof.

At that time we were working with Chemagro Chemical Company who had an experimental permit to use an endrin or a penthion product called Queltox. Within about a month, we had killed or moved most of the birds from the roof and window ledge areas.

The last two dozen birds on the corner sign were the hardest to move as we could not get to the roosting ledges to treat them. Regular use of large fire crackers in early evening finally moved them after three or four days of regular usage. These fire crackers were dropped to the most effective position by way of a fishing pole and line from a window above the sign. Of course, police approval had to be obtained for this work.

We as pest control people and you as wildlife damage specialists need to work at getting to know each other and learning to have confidence in each other. I am sure there have been times that P.C.O.'s have promised more than they could deliver. There have also been times where a reputable P.C.O. has spent hours of time laying out a bird control program for a town or city only to have a government specialist come in and tell the people that he will help them accomplish the same ends without paying the fee that private enterprise has to have to stay in business. The P.C.O. becomes very gun-shy of asking the state wildlife man for further help or suggestions when he loses out in this type of situation. The Pied Piper of Hamlin was another exterminator who had his collection problems, too.

We as P.C.O.'s are looking for continuing contracts where we can set up a control program in which we move the initial flock and continue to keep the area relatively free of birds through regular monthly control work. The big plus factor that we have is this continued surveillance of the problem. The average business or farm owner has so many other things to look after in his business that he normally does not follow up month after month on a problem of this kind to continue to keep the premises free of birds.

Four years ago this winter, we started the largest bird control contract we have ever had. It consists of two cement plants. One had an estimated three to five hundred thousand starlings and the other had six to eight hundred thousand. This was a monumental undertaking which included shooting, poisoning, and sound. Both plants were relatively free after about two months time and regular maintenance work has kept birds to a minimum level in these plants since.

You may ask, "In what other areas of wildlife damage control are P.C.O.'s interested?" I believe I can answer that we are interested in work that is concentrated in area and is of enough economic importance to afford a reasonable fee for such work. A farmer who has 25 acres or more of pasture or grain being destroyed by prairie dogs can well afford our service if his land is near other work that we do. Unless the farmer has special expertise and spare time for this work and the necessary follow-up, he should call us.

Some P.C.O.'s are interested in orchard and nut grove control of rodents and pest birds. Very few would be interested in field crop bird or mammal control. Even less are interested in coyote control.

We are certainly interested in mole, pocket gopher and ground squirrel control work.

One of our most interesting rodent episodes had to do with an inquisitive ten-year old at one of our home accounts. This youngster and his palymates had been feeding and watching a ground squirrel in their yard. The dog also wanted to get into the act, so he grabbed the little rodent. As the boy tried to free the ground squirrel from the dog's less-than-death grip, he was bitten by the squirrel. In the ensuing pandemonium the boy and the dog both lost their pet and he made for the protection of his hole under a cement slab. The doctor's pronouncement was: "Get the ground squirrel undamaged, or ten-year-old takes rabies shots!" At this point the parents came to us for help. We reasoned that a baited live trap would be about the only answer if the ground squirrel were not already so badly hurt that he would die in his hole. Sure enough, he was in the trap next morning and he was found to be rabied-free.

Some of you have had trouble with the careless use of sodium fluoracetate (Compound 1080) in rat control work about small town grain elevators and open faced city dumps. The following episode will let you know why I have healthy respect for this very effective, deadly P.C.O. tool.

One of my most horrifying experiences in rodent control had to do with a mass poisoning of dogs with Compound 1080. I had been in Topeka about five months in October of 1947 and my business was beginning to pick up nicely when the city fathers became worried about rats in a public dump along the river in the center of town. The county agriculture agent, the Chamber of Commerce agricultural representative, the City Health Officer, a

representative from the State Department of Agriculture and just about anyone else interested in rodent control, including myself, were invited in on this rodent control effort. The group was headed by a Fish and Wildlife man. Approximately 150 pounds of ground horse meat was mixed with sodium fluoroacetate and distributed over the face of this open dump. I did enquire about the proximity of the area to housing and dogs, but was assured that we were safe. The material was put out on Friday and it turned quite cold that weekend with no great recovery of dead rats. By Sunday something like 20 dogs had died from typical 1080 poisoning. Approximately 75 dogs ranging over a period of three months were thought to have died from this one incident. The distance from the dump for dog deaths ranged up to five miles.

I suppose the last time we used 1080 in any way other than in a liquid bait inside a building was at a country elevator in a small town. A heavy rat population both inside and out prompted us to use a little 1080 powder on some fresh apple slices in addition to the liquid bait stations inside the elevator. A portion of the building stood on piling with open area underneath. This space sloped back to a creek area with a clearance of four or five feet to only six to twelve inches up near the building. We felt we were quite safe in using these apple slices in the tight area. Dogs would not be attracted to the bait and humans would not likely go into this area, and the baits would soon dry up. To shorten the story, it snowed that evening and a rabbit who sought shelter from the snow ate one or more of our apple slices. A neighbor's dog found the rabbit--so we bought the owner a new pup.

Speaking of rodents makes me think of the little boy who kept pestering his father, "Daddy, how much water do you think there is in a mouse?" Finally the father laid down his paper and asked the son just why he was so interested in the subject of water in a mouse. "Well, daddy, a mouse ran up teacher's leg in school today. She grabbed it against her thigh under her skirt and she must have squeezed a pint of water out of that poor little mouse."

Another question you may ask is: "What kind of research and other help do professional pest control operators need?"

1. We need a safer, more attractive starlicide.
2. We need new techniques of attracting starlings to food baits near roosting areas.
3. We need a cheaper, safer flock alarming repellent than Avitrol (4-amino-pyridine.)
4. We need an easy-to-use, more effective repellent for deer, raccoon and rabbit.
5. We need a fair minded approach to problems where circumstantial evidence may involve a P.C.O. Have you ever been tempted to point the finger of blame at a P.C.O. before you have positive proof of his chemicals causing the problem?
6. We need concerted effort by wildlife people and P.C.O.'s to get EPA to relax its rule of not using a chemical for a specific job unless directions appear on the label for such use. The comparatively small amount of chemicals actually used nation-wide for these purposes does not allow for elaborate research necessary under EPA rules to get another animal added to the labels. Examples are: phostoxine for prairie dog control, zinc phosphide for ground squirrel control, etc. Can you show me a para dichlorobenzene label for moving bats or squirrels out of an attic or skunks out of a crawl space?

I believe this is a good place to draw the formal portion of this talk to a close and allow for open discussion of points which you wish to bring up.