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The Cooperative Control of Wildlife Damage

Clifford C. Presnall

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife
Washington 25, D. C.

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CIRCULAR LETTER

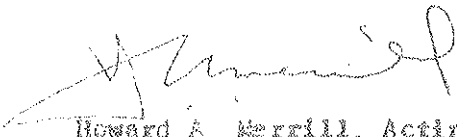
Branch of
Predator and Rodent Control

November 14, 1962

TO: Regional Directors, PARC Regional Supervisors,
District Agents and Assistant District Agents

RE: Talk by Chief, Branch of Predator and Rodent Control

Attached for your information and distribution to PARC Regional Supervisors, District Agents and Assistant District Agents are copies of a talk, "The Cooperative Control of Wildlife Damage," given by Clifford C. Pesshall at the National Audubon Society Convention in Corpus Christi, Texas, on November 12.


Howard A. Merrill, Acting Chief
Branch of Predator & Rodent Control

Attachments

THE COOPERATIVE CONTROL OF WILDLIFE DAMAGE

By
Clifford C. Presnall
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife
Washington 25, D. C.

Recently there came to my office a letter from the question-and-answer editor of a well-known periodical which quoted a reader's query, "I have read many stories about government hunters and would like to know if they really exist." The editor, in referring it to us, stated he was totally unfamiliar with the subject. I feel sure no one in this convention shares that editor's total unfamiliarity. Each of you here has an active interest in nature and her resources, and an alert awareness of government activities in managing such resources. Hence, I welcome this opportunity to discuss with you one segment of resource management, the cooperative control of wildlife damage.

I welcome also, from a personal standpoint, the opportunity of renewing old friendships and meeting new friends, of sharing with all of you the pleasures of this area where many unusual bird-watching experiences are available. Yesterday's field trip was especially rewarding -- what with seeing again some of my lifelong ornithological friends; making many new friends; and seeing several kinds of birds new to me.

In return, it is my hope that the meeting this afternoon may, in its own way, be equally rewarding to each of you, with a review of both the old and the new in wildlife deprecations control.

President Buchheister suggested this convention would be interested in a description of the government predator control program. Dr. Cottam, as panel leader, suggested the desirability of including comments on bird control. I shall attempt both.

Although commonly referred to as a government predator program, it is actually a cooperative program involving government and industry, specifically agriculture, which directly pays most of the costs and reaps most of the benefits. It has been so from its beginning in 1915 when livestock raisers of the Great Basin (Nevada and parts of Oregon, Idaho, Utah and California) pooled their resources to try and stop a severe rabies epidemic among coyotes, which had brought heavy losses of livestock as well as danger to people. In Nevada alone, that year, 60 persons were given anti-rabies treatments. Control of the epidemic, however, was beyond their combined capabilities, so they requested Congress to authorize the Biological Survey to give unified technical guidance and supervision to the work. This was done, and by a coordinated control of coyotes the epidemic was stopped. This success led the ranchers in other States to request government supervision of control work financed largely by the stockmen. As a result, predator losses throughout the range country, which formerly averaged from 10% to 15% or more in sheep for example, are now between 1% and 2%, according to industry estimates, and there have been no major regional outbreaks of rabies among wildlife in the West since the 1915 epidemic. Local outbreaks have been promptly controlled.

The size of the program has varied, dependent upon the funds supplied by agriculture. These funds have, in turn, been inversely proportional to the ranchers' losses. It is grass-roots economics in which each rancher decides how much of a loss he can afford to absorb before an investment in predator control is justified, on a dividend basis. For example, in 1941 when coyote damage had been fairly heavy for several years, agricultural financing of the control program was 50% greater in relation to total national farm receipts than in 1958 when coyote damage had been considerably reduced. A recent increase in coyotes throughout the West may reverse that trend although definite statistics are not yet at hand.

This program has been characterized as an outstanding example of teamwork between industry and government, with industry carrying most of the load. Let me illustrate with an example. This is not a case history, you understand, but all of the events are typical and have occurred scores of times in Western communities. Some time ago the livestock raisers of a certain county were suffering losses from predators which persisted despite poisoning, trapping and hunting by individual ranchers. Hence, a community meeting was held where the ranchers decided that each would contribute toward hiring a full-time county trapper. Also, in typical American fashion, they decided to write a letter to their Congressman. While awaiting a reply, some differences of opinion developed in the county. Two ranchers declined to contribute to the work because

they felt their losses did not warrant it. At the other extreme several ranchers began to advocate an attempt to completely exterminate coyotes by using thallium, which could be readily bought. Prospects for united community action were becoming dim when the Congressman's reply arrived. He suggested the ranchers might simplify their financing difficulties by a special county-wide livestock tax for control purposes as authorized in that State, and might solve their disagreements on methods of control by sending a county representative to the State Advisory Committee on Predator Control which cooperated with the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife in managing county programs. In due course they did this and also voted a county tax of 10 mills on sheep and 3 mills on cattle. One of the dissident ranchers, out-voted by his neighbors on the tax, decided that community interests took precedence over his personal opinions, hence he would be a good neighbor and go along with the program if it would be under professional direction and not a hit or miss proposition of trial and error. The other rancher had such strong convictions about protection of all wildlife that he was willing to absorb sporadic losses of calves to coyotes. Both were reassured when the Bureau project supervisor announced that control would be done only where landowners gave specific written permission and relieved when they learned from the supervisor that thallium would not be used.

All of this is now being done under a cooperative agreement between the county, the State and the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and

Wildlife, operating together through an advisory committee. Nearly 800 such agreements are now in effect. All are coordinated through State agreements, which now provide for local and largely autonomous community action in 43 States. Taking the country as a whole, ranchers pay for two-thirds of the total cost, through individual subscriptions, association funds, or specific livestock taxes. The entire program last year cost \$5,033,011.

That is a lot of money, any way you look at it. Let us look at it from the standpoint of the agricultural industry, which directly and voluntarily pays the major part of the cost. In 1960 the gross national farm income was \$38,100,000,000. In the same year agriculture's share of the predator control bill was a few dollars under \$2,890,000. In simpler terms, approximately 7 mills were spent by agriculture for each \$100 of gross national farm income. The total 1960 cost -- \$4,371,000 including Federal funds -- amounts to about 11 mills for each \$100 of gross income. Here in Texas, where livestock furnishes a large portion of farm income, proportionally more control is requested and financed by the ranchers. The ranchers' mill rate for the State, in relation to each \$100 of farm income was about 26 mills in 1958, the latest year for which we have complete income statistics. It may interest you to know that in 1958 the national farm expenditure for all agricultural pesticides was nearly 150 times greater than the total predator control bill, or approximately \$650,000,000.

To summarize the discussion thus far, the so-called government predator program is largely a farmers' program with local origin, State cooperation, Federal management by request, and with a self-limiting economic basis. So much for the farmers' two-thirds share of this enterprise. Now let us look at the government's one-third share.

Federal participation in the program is based upon three principles: assistance to agriculture; stewardship over the public lands; and leadership in management and conservation of wildlife. All are well recognized principles of our form of government, dating back a half century and more. It is this last principle which motivates the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife and is of primary concern to each of you here. The broad principle is specifically applied to predator control in a number of ways.

On my desk in Washington and in the offices of the Branch of Predator and Rodent Control throughout the country there is a statement entitled "Branch Goals," which says, "The basic objective of the Branch of Predator and Rodent Control is to provide the means whereby wildlife damage may be reduced and maintained at a level tolerable to the people and interests sustaining such damage without jeopardy to the animal life and other natural resources involved." There are other statements here which I will not take time to read now. A few extra copies are here on the platform for those who are interested.

Management of the control program is directed toward reduction of damage to a level which can be tolerated, never toward extermination of animal species. Where damages are controllable only by reduction in numbers of predators, we search for and use methods least likely to damage other creatures. Ways to avoid disturbing the environment and means for assuring safety to humans are also sought. The latter point is being given special emphasis now that increasing numbers of people are seeking recreation in wild-land areas. We are reducing the use of highly toxic and hazardous materials in favor of methods less hazardous to curious humans, even though these are often more expensive and time consuming. Research to minimize hazards to useful animals has been done for many years and is being continued. For example; four years of study produced among other things a method for using Compound 1080 (sodium fluoroacetate) in a manner which resulted in increased numbers of smaller fur animals where coyote numbers were decreased. Further, it was found that the differential toxicity of this chemical practically frees raptorial birds from the hazards attending use of metallic poisons such as thallium. Experiments are now under way to find methods for inhibiting the reproduction of predators. These studies are a part of a major Bureau research program studying all aspects of animal control. This total Bureau program was of the magnitude of nearly three quarters of a million dollars last year.

Among the 700 to 800 hunters who are engaged in the program, chiefly in the 17 States from the Great Plains westward, there are

quite a number who have college training in wildlife management which qualifies them to assist in various phases of research. On one research project, for example, which covered a span of 20 years, there were 18 hunters working in 3 States under direction of a senior scientist from the Bureau's Wildlife Research Center at Denver.

Although selected and supervised by the Bureau, about two-thirds of the hunters are not Federal employees at all but are employees of States, counties, agricultural associations or individual ranchers. Through cooperative agreements the Bureau supervises their activities insuring a responsibility of action and adherence to sound conservation principles. The remainder are Federal employees although some are paid in part from cooperators' funds. Of the 121 Federal supervisors, 76 hold college degrees in wildlife management.

Cold statistics convey little impression, however, of the esprit de corps which puts conservation uppermost in the thoughts and actions of the men doing the work. This does not imply we are perfect. Far from it. We make mistakes, just as some of you do, and like you we admit them and seek to do better. The right spirit is there and that is what counts. Let me give you a few illustrations.

During the severe snowstorms which occurred in South Dakota in March of 1960 all of the predator hunters in that State east of the Missouri River and two supervisors (a dozen men in all) spent a

week feeding pheasants. Thus the survival of several thousand birds was assured.

In this same State and 11 other west-central States our hunters have been making a survey of prairie dog towns. They have found that many dog towns need not be disturbed in any way since they are so located that damage to crops and forage can be adequately reduced by preventing expansion of the towns. In other instances ecology is a limiting factor itself and towns can be allowed to exist without attention. You may be interested to know that the prairie dog survey showed slightly more than 1,400,000 acres of prairie dog towns in the 12 States. It should be noted that prairie dogs have not been eliminated from any State where they existed in pioneer days.

A survey of kit and swift foxes is now being done with early reports indicating an increase roughly parallel to the widespread coyote increase previously mentioned. The Bureau by supervision and emphasis upon its wildlife traditions has stimulated the interest of field men in all phases of management thereby developing a more spontaneous and lasting interest in conservation than would be found in a control effort not wildlife accented.

A few years ago the National Park Service requested Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife advice on how to control wolves on Isle Royale National Park, since the welfare of moose appeared jeopardized from wolf depredations. I accompanied a Park Service biologist on a survey of the situation. We looked the island over intensively,

of starlings into the jet engines. Another wreck of the same sort, apparently involving cowbirds, occurred at Westover Air Base, near Springfield, Massachusetts, on October 10, 1962. No lives were lost, but a Delta Interceptor worth a million and a quarter dollars was totally wrecked. These disasters focus public attention on all problems of conflict between birds and people, so that news items on the subject are appearing frequently. Granted that many are merely nuisance problems -- such as starlings roosting over the inaugural parade route in Washington, D. C. -- the subject is becoming one of serious public concern. It will not be solved by looking the other way and hoping it will disappear. The Bureau does not propose to solve it by engaging at this time in bird control. The Bureau is, however, doing research on the problem.

Research on bird problems is urgent. It must be done to forestall hasty and ill-advised actions and is being done by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife as vigorously as available facilities will permit. Action is spurred by memories of an earlier situation -- similar but less serious and more slowly paced -- when the Bureau conducted research on rodent and predator control methods for over 10 years before control was begun in 1915. Even so, indiscriminate control was done by many impatient individuals, independently of government recommendations.

There are several of you in this Convention who can recall, as I do, the days when nearly every cowhand carried strychnine in his

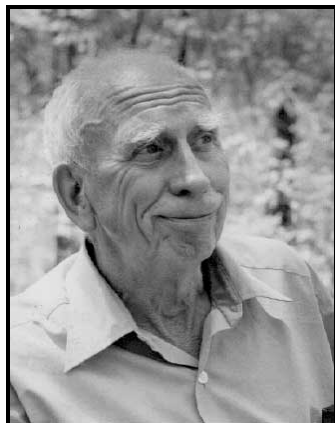
saddle bags to convert cattle carcasses into lethal baits for meat eaters which came along. To avoid such careless destruction has been a constant aim of the Bureau and this is the basis of our strict regulations, inflexible accountability for control poisons and control devices, and emphasis on professional supervision at all levels. We have made honest mistakes, and sometimes have erred in our judgment of men. But we strive toward the goal I quoted earlier, of managing wildlife damage at a level tolerable to those sustaining it and without jeopardy to populations of animals regarded as desirable. It is our job to find ways for people and wildlife to live harmoniously together in this complex age, permitting neither civilization to engulf the wonders of wildlife in its national state nor pest wildlife to unduly burden segments of our economic structure. Wild creatures are neither good nor bad, people assign those qualities to their habits depending upon human interests involved.

Times have changed, but human nature is the same. Speed is now the order of the day, and Bureau research on bird problems is now being done at a speed undreamed of a half century ago. Yet human impatience and urge for action persists now as then. The immediate need is to channel this urge toward directed action in research rather than undirected action and regrets. We are informed there are today some 400 pesticidal chemicals, commonly available under some 4000 trade names, many of which, if misused, can be far more destructive to wildlife than was the country store sale of

strychnine earlier in this century. The Bureau faces the task of forestalling such destruction through education, research, and technical guidance. It is a challenge which can be met only with the united support of all conservation-minded people.



CLIFFORD C.PRESNALL



Clifford was born on December 9, 1898, in Dubuque, Iowa. In 1907, his family moved to Oregon where he spent his boyhood and early manhood. He served in the Army in World War I and graduated from Oregon Agriculture College (now Oregon State University) in 1923 with a BS degree in animal husbandry. He was engaged in livestock ranching and range management in eastern Oregon, Idaho, and California from 1923 to 1929. His original plans were to become a sheep rancher, but after a visit to Yosemite National Park in 1929 he changed career plans. Clifford took and passed the examination for ranger naturalist and received a job at Yosemite in 1930. Shortly after employment he married Ruby Davis from Oregon in an outdoor ceremony at the foot of Bridal Veil Falls in Yosemite. Their son David was born at Yosemite. Clifford also served at Zion and Bryce National Parks from 1934 to 1938, until Clifford was transferred to the national office of the National Park Service. A second son, Dean, was born during his time in Zion and Bryce.

Clifford became a biologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Bureau of Biological Survey, Washington, D.C., in 1939 and then with the Fish and Wildlife Service in 1940 with the Branch of Predator and Rodent Control. During World War II (1941-46) he was transferred to Chicago when the office moved from Washington, D.C. Clifford was transferred back to Washington in 1946 and continued to serve with the Division of Predator and Rodent Control, eventually becoming the chief of this Division in 1961.

He published 30 articles in the period from 1933 to 1964, and they focused mostly on predator-prey relationships. Clifford's published works dealt with the policy issues of predator control as well as the biological relationships between predator and prey species. His professional affiliations included memberships in The Wildlife Society, the American Society of Mammalogists, and the Society of American Foresters.

Clifford retired in 1965 with 36 years of government service and received the distinguished Service Award from the U.S. Department of Interior. On retirement he

moved to Coles Point, Virginia. Clifford was active in numerous advisory and liaison projects with government agencies and private organizations dealing with conservation issues. Clifford died on December 16, 1981, of liver and stomach cancer.

Clifford was elected to the Washington Biologists' Field Club in 1939 and served as treasurer from 1953 to 1962, which was a critical time when the property was sold.