

Conservation

. . . with Marie Mellinger

An Unsporting Sport

When this was a pioneer country, hunting and trapping were essential, for a man's family was often dependent on his prowess with a trap or a gun. Now the sport of hunting has become a big business, and in many instances can hardly be called a sport. All the odds are on the side of man, and the birds and animals seldom have even a "sporting chance." We find no fault with the individual who goes out into the woods, carefully obeying all the laws, and kills his bird or animal, if kill he must. But we do have a lot more respect for those parents who teach their children to hunt with their eyes, or a camera, instead of a gun.

Far too much hunting has degenerated into a barnyard type of slaughter, where almost-tame animals are driven directly to the hunters, or penned up in small areas where they have no chance at all to escape. The description of the buffalo hunt on pages 117-120 of *Bless the Beasts and Children* is more truth than fiction. The same scene occurs over and over, all too often on so called "refuges" where the excuse is that "there are too many animals for the food supply" — in itself an indictment of our vanishing wildlife habitat. If there are too many birds or animals in one area, why can't some be moved, under tranquilizers if necessary, to areas already decimated of all wildlife? And why should our refuges raise tame birds to be turned loose, all too trustful of man, to immediately be shot?

Twenty-five years ago Aldo Leopold wrote, "Take a look at any duck marsh. A cordon of parked cars surrounds it. Crouched on each point of its reedy margin is some pillar of society, automatic ready, trigger finger itching to break, if need be, every law of commonwealth or commonweal to kill a duck. That he is already overfed in no way dampens his avidity for gathering his meat from God." Have you seen any wildlife today? How many of you listen to the pleas of the American Wildlife Federation?

Most appalling, eight out of ten hunters do not even eat their game. The kill is the thing, and after deer season the garbage trucks haul away the remains. Many men, and women, suffer from what a leading psychologist calls "trophy obsession," getting the largest of a species, or unfortunately the most rare.

There should also be growing concern over hunting and trapping methods. Recent studies by Dr. Lars Karsted of Canada, have shown that "three million waterfowl are tortured and destroyed every year by swallowing hundreds of tons of lead shot in their shallow marsh feeding grounds." How many hunters could eat a lead-poisoned duck? This problem could be solved by use of lead-free shot.

After a recent article on trapping, the Atlanta *Constitution* was deluged with letters protesting the use of steel traps. William Lanier wrote, "Soon there will be no playful otters, no beavers, no foxes, no bobcats, for our children to inherit. For every animal reported there are probably 10 or 20 that are never recorded. As for the traps being merciful, assuring a 'quick drowning,' let's try them on the trapper." Florida has banned all but live cage traps. Why can't her neighboring states follow her humane lead?

Man must be made to see the importance of the so-called animal predators to society. Kill the fox and the rabbits overrun the land; kill the rattlesnake and the rats flourish. Left alone, nature reaches her own balance.

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other warblers, the Black-throated Green Warbler and Swainson's Warbler, both of which have isolated coastal plain and mountain breeding populations. This idea of two separate populations is speculation until more field work can be done, but there is some supporting evidence. F.R. Scott (*Raven*, 29:118) found a singing male in Chickahominy Swamp in SW New Kent County, Virginia, on 12 June 1948. In the summer of 1958 he again found several males in the same swamp and vicinity, but no positive nesting evidence was secured. This area is only about 80 miles NE of the Halifax colony and seems to relate both geographically and ecologically to the Halifax site. Also, in parts of the Virginia and West Virginia mountains, especially on steep, deciduous hillsides, the Cerulean Warbler is locally common in several breeding bird census plots (*American Birds*, Vol. 20-26, December issues 1966-1972). The Wilkes County birds seem to relate to this segment of the population. The exact status and distribution of the Cerulean Warbler in North Carolina should be determined by future summer field work.

Addendum: Extensive field work by the author in June 1973 revealed that at least 25 pairs of summering Cerulean Warblers were present and apparently nesting at the Halifax colony.—JML

Brown-headed Cowbird Increases in North Carolina Mountains

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The Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) appears to be on the increase in the North Carolina mountains. Eugene P. Odum found no cowbirds during a survey of breeding birds of the Highlands plateau in 1946-1947 (*Ecology*, 31:587-605). In a similar breeding bird census in Highlands in 1959, 1960, and 1971, I found the cowbird absent. In the spring of 1972, however, the cowbird appeared in the area around the Highlands Biological Station and in an overgrown field 6 miles E of Highlands. Both adults and young have been noted during late May and early June of 1972. They appear to be common. David W. Johnston, in reporting the birds of the Highlands area in 1964, classified the cowbird as uncommon with only one observation during the breeding season (*Jour. Elisha Mitchell Sci. Soc.*, 80:30-38). Their recent increase has been noted in other areas of the North Carolina mountains as well as in the Highlands area. Because the presence of these birds affects the population density of other birds, variations in the Brown-headed Cowbird population should be carefully noted.

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New Book

A long awaited book has just emerged that will prove invaluable to anyone who grows wild flowers. *Growing Wildflowers*, by Marie Sperka (Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 10 East 53rd St., N.Y. 10022, \$8.95), fullfills a need for a practical guide to soil requirements, site preparation, and the specialized needs of each individual species. Marie Sperka, a long time personal friend, has many years experience in growing wild flowers and runs a nursery at Crivitz, Wisconsin. She is a dedicated conservationist and one of the very few nursery operators who raises all of her stock, collecting from the wild only where roads or development threaten natural habitat. Marie has successfully grown bog plants in sphagnum moss on an aluminum foil base, and she has succeeded with many rare beauties extremely difficult to propagate.