

## The Santa Caligon Irish Setter Club, Inc.

- WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST -  
MAN IN THE MIDDLE

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When Werner O. Nagel went to the University of Missouri in the early 1930's and asked for some instruction in wildlife management a special course of instruction had to be set up for him. Fish and game research was virtually unknown in those days. Such wildlife management as there was had easy solutions to problems. Are you short of quail? Start a quail hatchery and release a few thousand birds across Missouri. Stream fishing not what it used to be? Start another fish hatchery and dump some fingerlings into the river.

Those were easy answers - but they didn't work. Where were the deer, beaver, raccoon and turkeys? What was happening to sildlife? Well, we've grown up since then - some of us.

In 1935 the federal government made it possible for certain universities to start cooperative wildlife research units and to train men. A new applied science was being born - wildlife management. Nagel, the University's "first" wildlife graduate had been just a bit early to benefit from this new training. He helped lead the parade however, with his monograph (co-authored with Dr. Rudolf Bennitt) "A Survey of Resident Game and Furbearers of Missouri."

The very earliest wildlife managers in America came largely from forestry-trained ranks. Today, in the United States, forestry and wildlife are separate specialties, largely because the two fields have been shown to be vastly more complex than originally thought. Dumping pen-reared quail or hatchery bass fingerlings was long ago proved to be an inadequate, if easy, answer in nearly every case.

Since 1935 an increasing number of men specially trained in fishery and game management have been graduated from colleges. Some call them collectively wildlife biologists, and some prefer fishery or game managers. Whatever the title, they have two major jobs: to find out what is the fish or game situation and to find out how it can be bettered. Basic to their fact-finding is their integrity, without which they cannot hope to win support for facts they seek out and report.

When wildlife biologists were a new phenomenon on the scene it was considered great fun by old time wardens, fish and quail hatcherymen and long-time sportsmen to poke fun at these earnest young men. What di these pipsqueaks know about the outdoors? They'd spent a lifetime in woods and fields hunting and fishing, or had been raising quail or bass in hatcheries for a couple of decades. What could a bunch of bookish wildlife managers tell them about the great mysteries of the outdoors? Well, the answer was - plenty.

Where, in the past, biology turned from direct observation outdoors to the detailed world of the laboratory, the new breed of wildlife manager was utilizing the best of both. A man can spend a lifetime outdoors yet be as ignorant of the world around him as the pavement-bound city dweller. Many people walk with relatively unseeing eyes through the myriad life forms around them. It takes the trained man to read the never-obvious face of nature where wildlife populations are concerned.

The biggest problem facing a wildlife manager is "seeing" the things he works with. Fish, quail, deer - any wild creatures - are very difficult to count, handle or manipulate directly. Just as a practical matter, how would you go about counting the deer in your own county?

The wildlife manager is trained in working with creatures that he may seldom contact directly. Thus the physical condition of all deer in the state of Missouri may be known in a general way, by various sampling techniques developed by managers. Such techniques might include tagging, checking station information, and studies of plants in known deer range. Similar sampling techniques are used in fisheries management.

Since you can't count every fish in a lake the size of Table Rock, you must develop indexes or trends in fish populations, if you are to secure information on which to base regulations. A biologist, if he's a good one, will not be pinned down to saying there are exactly 375,462 deer in the state. He can't really know. What he can tell you is that the deer herd is in good physical condition and growing, vigorously or less so, and that the herd can safely stand a certain per cent greater harvest than it got last year, without harm.

All this is based on a great many threads of evidence that, to a man trained to read such slender clues, totals up a picture he can draw with a fair degree of certainty. There is seldom an absolute yes or no in nature, and a good biologist doesn't claim to have ironclad guarantees. He is making an educated estimate, based on the best evidence available, when he reports to his superiors on the status of any game species.

It is the educated part of that estimate that is all important, though. No lifelong guide or ardent quail hunter puts a professional reputation on the line when he soulds off what ought to be done. That's where the integrity of wildlife biologists comes in. Integrity in anyone is what makes civilization possible. We live by believing that most people are going to play the game. Without trust, civilization is impossible.

But with men of professional standing it is more imperative that they have integrity than is the case for the general run of the population. We have to trust the professional wisdom of a doctor, when he diagnoses our illness and prescribes a treatment. When we lose faith in that doctor we go elsewhere, but what if we lost faith in the entire medical profession?

So, too, with a wildlife biologist. As a professional man we have to trust his statements that such-and-such is the case with respect to quail, bass or deer. We trust that he based his statements on the best evidence possible and that his reasoning based on the facts was approximately correct. We know he is under terrific pressures at times from people who have "easy" answers to wildlife problems. Sometimes he works for a political system of fish and game management, and his administrators reject his findings in favor of more popular courses of action. But, like Caesar's wife, who must be above reproach, the wildlife biologist has to put his professional integrity on the line when he reports a situation, otherwise he has no right to the honorable title of professional man or scientist.

The wildlife management field is numerically a small one. There are not many job openings, and the work is often arduous and sometimes dull. An yet there are always those who choose this exacting calling, lured by some intense desire to pry into the secrets of nature. They simply want to know. It is on these men's shoulders that the problems of modern day wildlife fall. Administrators face a public demanding more or better hunting and fishing. They face segments of the public hostile to this fact or that fact of the outdoors. And administrators have to depend on the honest reporting of biologists in order to arrive at a course of action. This puts a big burden on the biologists.

Like any men of purpose they work better if they are relieved of undue pressure. But wildlife biologists cannot escape the pressures put on them by both their bosses and the public. They have to accept those pressures as a fact of life and do the best they can. An informed public, trusting those biologists, will lessen the pressure a great deal.

Wildlife management techniques have come a long way in a scant thirty years. From a free-for-all field where any "old timer" could and did advise the game and fish custodian as to a course of action, we've come to an era where

specialists have to grapple with rather small chunks of what is in reality a total picture of land health. It's no wonder that sportsmen sometimes get impatient. A two, or five, or ten year project fails to come up with a pat answer to a problem, and Joe Doaks howls for the heads of both administrator and biologist. But in an era when sweeping changes are being made in land use, when the demand for more hunting and fishing grows steadily, the problems are too vast for any easy solution. It is going to take the slow, steady, slugging-it-out approach of trained men to reach some solution. And when the solution is reached it isn't going to please everyone, and the situation is going to be changing even then.

With more and more people divorced from the land, yet at the same time demanding more hunting and fishing opportunity, we are going to have to depend more on the biologist to keep track of the present situation, forecast the future, and come up with ways to somehow meet the demands. The wise hunters and fishermen will look closely at fish and game administration and see that it has as much freedom from partisan domination as possible. They will see that a capable administrator is in charge of trained men with integrity to get the facts. They will fight to keep unfair pressures off both administrator and biologist and insist that both have a good "climate" in which to do a job: the biologist to get facts and report them, and the administrator to use those facts upon which to base a course of action.

When they have done that, good sportsmen will keep their hands off and see that others do likewise.

There will always be a temptation to give that college guy his come-uppance, and there will always be impatience with the slow course of fish and game fact-finding. There will be a tendency to snap judge a situation based on one's own experience afield and condemn the biologist's view if it happens to differ. But we're going to have to accept his views in the long run, if we want to have some continuity and progress in fish and game management. We're going to have to swallow the unpleasant draught that there isn't any easy answer and that the trained man is in the best position to diagnose and prescribe. If we do, if we give him our trust and support, we should be assured of some sort of outdoor sport in the years ahead.