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The Field and Stream Game Bag

THE

Field and Stream

GAME BAG

Edited, with Foreword and Notes, by

ROBESON BAILEY

Doubleday & Company, Inc.

GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK, 1948

Acknowledgment

Thanks are due Mr. Eltinge F. Warner, publisher of Field & Stream, and to the individual authors, for permission to reprint the material of this book. I am also grateful for the efficient help of Mrs. C. A. Pollard, of Doubleday & Company, and to Mr. William S. Cushing for the use of his file of the magazine.

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**PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES
AT
THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS, GARDEN CITY, N. Y.
FIRST EDITION**

Foreword

Many good books on shooting have been published in recent years. Some of these have dealt with the technical, how-to-do-it aspects of the sport. Others have been charming reminiscences of by-gone days, when the entire picture of shooting in America was very different from what it is now.

For some time I have thought that a book about shooting which stressed the more or less immediate scene would interest both beginning and veteran sportsmen. Because our country has such great variety of game and topography and cover, I wanted a book that would show more than could any one man's experience, no matter how fortunate that man might be in his ability to travel and hunt over the length and breadth of the continent. Although most sportsmen are devoted to the particular kinds of shooting native to them, nevertheless nearly all of them cherish the hope of someday getting a crack at the game in the other fellow's pasture. What is it like to shoot blue grouse in the Western mountains, or ruffed grouse in the abandoned farmlands of New England? Who does not want to go duck and goose shooting along the great Mississippi flyway, or try for a turkey gobbler in the mountain South?

For the sources of such a book, it was natural to think of Field & Stream, our most alert and vigorous outdoor magazine. Here, in stories and articles, is the report of experienced sportsmen in every corner of the country. It seemed to me that if a selection of them were brought together, a comprehensive and interesting book would result. And if the selection were limited to, say, a dozen years, the further advantage of immediacy would be gained. For that reason, the selections have been confined to those published since 1935.

Foreword

Within the memory of living men the over-all conditions of shooting in America have vastly changed. The change is most noticeable in the decline of game and the increase of hunters. The hunters are continuing to increase—at a greater rate than ever—for more people are yearly discovering the delights and benefits of outdoor experience, and hunting is one of the most instinctive of man's pursuits. Paradoxically, however, the game is now generally holding its own, and in some cases, such as the white-tailed deer, more than holding its own. Authorities tell us, for example, that there are more deer now in the United States than there ever were. This paradox is much more the result of intelligent interest and activity on the part of those entrusted with managing our wildlife resources than on such simple prohibitions as permanently closed seasons. There could be game enough for all, provided we agree on what is enough and learn how to manage the areas where game thrives as well as the game itself. We are working toward that agreement and management, but success in achieving the goal is ultimately dependent on all of us.

The emphasis in this book is on so-called small game, the subject of big game being reserved for possible treatment in a later volume.

ROBESON BAILEY

Williamsburg, Mass.

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The Field and Stream Game Bag

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On Conservation

No one who enjoys the outdoors—for that matter, no one who takes his citizenship seriously—can escape some ugly facts about our national history and our selfish, stupid, and indolent attitudes toward the conservation of our natural resources. The nineteenth century saw much useless killing of our game, the extinction of the passenger pigeon and the near-extinction of the buffalo being cases in point. We should have waked up sooner to the fact that market gunning was not the proper way to harvest game resources, that game must be protected and managed. To that extent, gunners must be blamed for part of the sorry contrast between the game population of the mid-nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth.

Nevertheless, there has been much progress in the last fifty years, and the future of shooting as a sport seems safer today than at any time in this century. The shooters themselves, along with other conservational agencies, have shown a determination and intelligence in their efforts to make things better which should shame their critics, especially those who would ban all shooting on the grounds that it disrupts the "balance of nature." That "balance" is largely a romantic myth insofar as it applies to wild game, and was permanently destroyed (if it ever existed) when the first man domesticated the first wildlife.

In order to record some of the problems and successes of game conservation, I have included the two studies by Eltinge F. Warner, Field & Stream's publisher, and Harold Titus, the magazine's Conservation Editor. To be sure, the waterfowl picture has suffered a change for the worse since Mr. Warner's article appeared five years ago. What interests me as a duck shooter, however, is to notice how quickly the decline in the duck and goose population became the concern of or-

ganized sportsmen and the conservation agencies with which they co-operate. The speed with which new, restricted shooting seasons, hours, and bag limits were put into effect for 1947 is gratifying evidence of our ability to move toward effective control with prompt efficiency.

Indeed, the hunters have received a disproportionate blame for the depletion of our wildlife resources. The real villains of this story are the industrialists, and with them I include all the "special interest" boys who for so long have been polluting our waters, laying waste our forest lands, exhausting our soil, grabbing our public lands, and thwarting the expressed will of our people by the corruption of democratic processes. These are serious charges, but they are impossible to refute and long have been known to even the most casual students of the conservation movement. For this reason, I have included Mr. Rutledge's eloquent editorial, "The Birthright and the Pottage," in the hope it may stir a few readers to more active participation in the never-ceasing fight to preserve not only the recreational heritage of every American child but also that very industrialism itself which must depend for its own future on healthy forests, clean water, and productive soil.

A NEW HIGH!

by Eltinge F. Warner

THE Great Plains, the continent's greatest reservoir of feathered game, is spilling over. In fact, the resurgence of upland game and waterfowl has been so astounding that in places the supply has reached the danger point. This has been partly brought about by favorable weather, lack of transportation, and shortage of shotgun shells, but is primarily due to new nesting and breeding areas in Canada and the United States. Yes, you hunters, there may be so much game out on the prairies that we will be compelled to control these marginal game crops of pheasants, ducks, quail, and Huns.

To quote from an editorial in the February issue of *Field & Stream*: "This game constitutes a very important part of our natural resources. It means a crop which must be harvested just as surely and as carefully as any farm or ranch crop, be it grain or livestock. . . . To permit an increase of any game bird or animal over and above the available food supply is to destroy that bird or animal just as surely as by over-shooting.

"A wise cattle rancher, for instance, will not attempt to raise more calves than his range will feed. On the other hand, he will not butcher his breeding stock and thus destroy the source of his supply. He will endeavor to maintain his herd at a level which will produce a calf crop in proportion to the amount of available grass."

From Alberta to Texas come warning, astonishing reports. As many as 120,000,000 ducks may migrate from Canadian prairies to the United States this fall. Six years ago there were not many more than 40,000,000 on the entire continent. The problem of food will be serious.

The ring-necked pheasant now has a range from Alberta to northern Texas. It has become the most widely distributed upland bird of the plains country. Pheasants are so numerous in South Dakota that an extra pheasant season was declared this year; half the state was thrown open from January 30 to February 28 [1942]. Too many birds; too much damage by them in the grainfields.

Mr. Bob-White is also on the increase. There are probably more bob-

white quail in the plains country now than at any time in the last quarter century. It is said that in the early days there were more quail in Oklahoma than in any other state. Last fall they were so abundant there that old-timers said the good old hunting days were back. In northern Texas and in Kansas and southern Nebraska the comeback of the quail is conversation among all hunters. Never have there been so many in recent years!

No species in history has staged such a near-miracle comeback as have our ducks in the last six years. Their recovery represents the greatest achievement in conservation that has ever been scored in the world, and it shows what is possible when American and Canadian sportsmen roll up their shirt sleeves. Who is responsible? It would be impossible to list all the organizations and groups and individuals who have helped in this victory.

There is Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson, Director of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Under Dr. Gabrielson's administration of Duck Stamp funds and work relief money, thousands upon thousands of acres of duck-breeding areas have been established in the United States so that the ducks coming down from the breeding grounds in the North will have protection and food down these flyways on their way South—a much-needed link, rounding out this entire program of breeding, feeding, and protection of the duck flights each year.

And Tom Main, Will Reid, Lou Barkhausen, and others of Ducks Unlimited. They estimate there are now millions of additional waterfowl on this continent because of new projects and control work on the Canadian breeding grounds—ducks that wouldn't be here if it weren't for Ducks Unlimited. Dr. Gabrielson, at a dinner given in honor of Lou Barkhausen, said, "This man helped to make possible the greatest wildlife-conservation miracle of the world."

Waterfowl which breed on the Northern prairies spread all over the United States; surface and deep-diving ducks fan out in all directions to both coasts and also down the mid-continent flyways. Banding has proved this. A large percentage of our ducks breed in the three provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. It has taken years to convince some Californians that a good part of their ducks cross the Rockies.

I followed the waterfowl this year [1942] from Alberta to Texas, and I can attest to their abundance. There were a few areas, however, where the shooting was disappointing. One of the most famous marshes in Louisiana had its poorest season. Where there had been clouds of waterfowl there were but a few scattered birds.

In parts of Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska, hunters are still looking for the hordes of new ducks. From Stuttgart, Arkansas,

18,000 ducks were shipped out, compared with 15,000 a year ago; but at DeWitt, only a few miles distant, the shooting was poor. The ducks went through, all right, but the sky-blackening flights of them hung to the West. Central Nebraska and western Kansas and the Panhandle of Texas attracted their heaviest flights in the last twenty-five years.

Millions of mallards wintered in the Panhandle, and the old-time duck shooters say they saw more canvasbacks than ever before. In Louisiana they reported that even the bluebills had deserted them. On the Western plains beginners were gaping at great flights of scaup and calling them a new kind of butterball.

Hunters along the Missouri and the Mississippi rivers may expect their best season when it is dry out on the prairies. One of these years the tens of thousands of prairie lakes in Nebraska and Kansas and Texas will all be dry, and then the ducks will cover up the open water in the river states. Wet years, such as the last two years on the plains, are abnormal, but fine for Texas shooters.

At Calgary last fall I was told by Tom Main that large numbers of ducks, hatched in central Alberta, embark on a 500-mile trek to the Athabasca Delta in the north as soon as they are able to fly. This data has been obtained through banding operations, but information is incomplete.

Nature itself is the outstanding cause of the expanding flocks. The devastating drought cycle spent itself, and for the last several years the prairies have blossomed under the heaviest rainfall in decades. Wheat and grain crops have been bountiful. Thick grass covers the pastures. Weed growths have been prodigious.

Another tremendous factor has been the getting together of the sportsmen of the United States and Canada. The American and Canadian hunters have buried their differences. Without discounting any of the grand work being done by Ducks Unlimited, its biggest achievement, I believe, is in uniting the sportsmen of the country in a common purpose. I made the trip through Alberta last fall to obtain a firsthand view of the work of Ducks Unlimited. I returned to New York sold clear down to my heels. The whole story can never be told; it's too big, too vast to be easily grasped or disseminated.

I talked to Canadian sportsmen. I talked to farmers in their fields. I talked to government officials. From the lips of all poured friendly words of praise for the American sportsmen. This good-will work in Canada has done more to improve Canadian-American relations than anything I know.

Before Ducks Unlimited it was difficult to interest many Canadians in the protection of waterfowl. The Canadian is instinctively a conservationist in that he is a clean, decent, intelligent sportsman. But at

the mention of ducks and geese he threw up his hands. He knew of our market shooting and our slaughter pens in the States in the early days.

"Why protect them for those game hogs down south?" they said. "We have them for only a few days in the fall, and then they shoot them all winter in the States."

Canada had all the responsibilities of producing the crop, and her neighbors were taking more than their share. This is exactly what we were doing. So the Canadians didn't bother themselves too much when more and more marshes were drained, when hay fires swept the breeding grounds, and when human and other predators decimated the young birds.

But this all is changed. There is no place where the spirit of sportsmanship rides higher in the collar than in Canada. Their sportsmen are getting the kick of their lives rebuilding our waterfowl hordes, and a great part of all this broad understanding has been brought about by Mr. Main and his assistants, including E. S. Russenholt, Assistant General Manager; George Fanset, Chief Engineer; Rennie Harley, Engineer (all Canadians), and others of Ducks Unlimited.

Farmers are among the biggest boosters of Ducks Unlimited in Canada, and the value of their contribution is incalculable. Irrigation districts in Alberta are donating the water to maintain large lakes in the drought districts.

I spent ten days in Alberta and saw but 1 per cent of the Ducks Unlimited projects completed and under way. United States money to the amount of \$169,000 was spent in Canada by Ducks Unlimited last year. This represents but a part of the investment; the amount of land contributed by the Canadian government and the water from the irrigation ditches would run into large figures if computed on a money basis. The same work could be done in the United States for not less than a million dollars. Canadians, with their land and water and with the co-operation of the farmers, are doing far more work than is represented by the dollars which the sportsmen of the United States are sending up to them. Much of this was made possible by the Canadian Pacific Railway, which built extensive irrigation districts and then presented them to the farmer.

"How many ducks were on this continent at the peak, say, fifty years ago?" I asked Tom Main. His rough estimate is between 500 and 600 million. He says, if our conservation programs continue to expand both in Canada and the United States, our breeding and wintering grounds should accommodate from 200 to 250 million. This would double our present duck population; Tom thinks it possible within five years.

As to the geese, the United States Wildlife Service reduced the bag limits last season on the honker and other related species, such as the lesser Canada and the Hutchins' goose. The breeding grounds of the geese in the Far North are not threatened, but geese are slow breeders and they are hunted relentlessly. Everyone wants to hunt geese; there are thousands who would rather bag a Canada goose than kill a deer or a bear. But Dr. Gabrielson will be able to check the decline; more sanctuaries should solve it. Many localities reported larger flights last fall.

A typical project I visited is Lake Barkhausen. The lake cost about \$8,000. The upkeep will be negligible. It is estimated it will save 25,000 ducks each year.

Lake Barkhausen is in Crawling Valley, Alberta. Its history is deadly similar to countless other shallow lakes and bald prairies now being converted into permanent bodies of water. In May, in former years, its waters covered about 300 acres. By July it was completely dry. Untold millions of waterfowl perished around its borders. But now Tom has constructed a dam to inundate 900 acres, and a supply ditch three miles long has been built to the farmers' irrigation canal.

Such work is a fitting tribute to Lou Barkhausen of Chicago, former president of Ducks Unlimited, and one of our truly great conservationists. Similar lakes in Canada have been named after: John B. Coleman, Louis B. Traung, John Bracken, Joe Knapp, Max Fleischmann. Each has rendered conspicuous service; each has dipped deeply into his pocket to keep up the work. And one of the largest of these projects should be honored by the name of Will Reid of California, now President of Ducks Unlimited. He has devoted all of his time during the past year to soliciting money. Will Reid has visited nearly every state; he has called upon thousands of sportsmen. Because of the war, it has been doubly hard to get over the message to those who should be interested, but under Mr. Reid's hammering the work has been intensified.

Cassil's Lake near Brooks, in Alberta, was another duck trap drying up in May. But free irrigation water has been secured from the farmers, and a permanent lake of 3,000 acres has been created. About \$8,000 was spent here—50,000 more ducks saved each year. Crab Lake is still another. It has 1,000 acres of permanent water, maintained from waste pouring off irrigation fields.

I talked with a farmer near Cassil's Lake. "They're doing things up here," he said. "I've seen the whole prairies around here alive, literally crawling with small and mother ducks, when the hatching had started and this marsh had dried up. They were dying. I've had the back of my car filled with hundreds I had gathered up because I didn't know what

else to do. But there was no place to take them, and I had to dump them out. I hate to think of it. We're proud of what's being done, and all of us want to help."

The actual projects are but a part of the work. On the south end of Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba are the Libau-Netley marshes of 50,000 acres. This is a redhead breeding center. The big losses here were due not to drought, but to man-made fires. Ducks Unlimited representatives explained the program to the farmers, who got busy sponsoring a governmental act making it an offense to do any burning after April.

The farmers agreed not to cut hay in this district, adjacent to the marshes, until after the first half in July. The rate of redhead production in the Libau-Netley marshes increased 700 per cent.

Ducks Unlimited now controls one million acres of land donated by the Canadian government. A year ago the Canadian government contributed \$8,000 to one project.

The story of the migration of ducks is fascinating. It is estimated that last fall on August 1 there were 97 million ducks in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and the Northwest Territories. Seventy-five or 80 per cent of the ducks are hatched in Canada and Alaska.

Of these 97 million, about 65 million, or a third less, are expected to report back on the breeding grounds in Canada this spring. A third of them will have failed to make the grade. Twenty per cent will have been killed. Another 5 per cent will have been lost as cripples, and along the migration routes and wintering grounds natural causes will have taken an additional toll of 6 or 7 per cent.

About 73 per cent of the potential crop on the breeding grounds have been lost on the average over a period of years. I asked Tom Main how much the losses had been reduced in five years.

"Maybe 5 per cent," he replied. He said the management of Ducks Unlimited believes that by proper direction at least half this 73-per-cent loss can be eliminated.

"Drought leads in the destruction. It takes a toll of 20 per cent. Crows and magpies, on which some control work has been started, take 15 per cent. Fire is third, with 12 per cent; jackfish are responsible for 8 per cent, and so on. Duck sickness already has been nearly stopped in both countries. Not more than 50,000 ducks a year now die from botulism. It is startling to note that crows and magpies destroy more waterfowl than all the shotguns in Canada and the United States."

Banding operations reveal that Texas is the most popular wintering ground for ducks raised in the prairie provinces. Louisiana is second, and California third.

Texas last year contributed \$6,000 to Ducks Unlimited, while California gave \$49,000. But Texas has become aroused; they have heard

over in Houston that Alfred Glassell in Louisiana is raising \$20,000 for a particular refuge in Canada to be known as Lake Louisiana. So John Suman, state chairman of Ducks Unlimited in Texas, has started to raise \$30,000 for a Lake Texas in Canada.

Duck hunters are urged to pick out males in their shooting, as it is estimated there are six drakes to every four hens. Some sporting-goods dealers and clubs last fall gave prizes to the gunners who brought in the most drakes. This will help to rebalance the sex ratio and to save the females. An excess of males cuts down the reproductiveness of the females. There is evidence that the sexes are about equal at birth, but that the females suffer badly when they stay with their ducklings in the drought areas.

In a résumé of game conditions on the Great Plains there is but one sad note: the true prairie chicken is hardly holding its own. The greater prairie chicken has increased the last two years in Kansas, Nebraska, and in the Dakotas, but this is because of most favorable weather conditions. It has not increased as have the quail, ducks, and pheasants.

In parts of Kansas the chicken has staged a phenomenal comeback, but the areas are limited. In Woodson County alone, south of Topeka and east of Wichita, observers report there are between 50,000 and 80,000 of the greater prairie chicken.

But the plight of the Attwater prairie chicken, now found only along the coastal regions of Texas, is desperate. The Attwater chicken is said to be the first cousin of the heath hen, formerly so plentiful in New England, but now extinct. Less than 5,000 of the Attwater are left, and more of its natural habitat is being flooded in the campaign for increased rice acreage. The Attwater has not responded to closed seasons, and in the last five years probably has decreased 30 per cent. The constricting range and overgrazing of pasture lands, factors so far unanswerable, have them backed against the wall.

The lesser prairie chicken in north Texas and western Oklahoma is coming back slowly, thanks to the intelligent experiments made with the Pittman-Robertson funds. Winter feeding is keeping the birds on large ranches, thus preventing their concentration in grainfields in the closely settled districts where protection is difficult.

The sharp-tailed grouse is reported in reduced numbers in the North; but most observers insist the reduction is part of a cycle, and that it will jump back within a year or two. The sharptail, which has adapted itself to civilization better than the true prairie chicken, is not believed in danger. The range of the sharptail extends from Alberta and Saskatchewan along the Rocky Mountain slopes to northern New Mexico.

One of my favorite shooting grounds is Texas. More shotgun shells are fired in Texas than in any other state, and probably it is visited by

fewer outside sportsmen, comparatively speaking, than any of the states favored by extraordinary concentrations of game. Duck and goose and quail hunters from the East usually stop off in Arkansas or Louisiana or Oklahoma. Texas even has a wild-turkey population of 250,000.

Gene Howe of Amarillo, Texas, a member of the State Game and Fish Commission, a Trustee of Ducks Unlimited and of the American Wildlife Institute, accompanied me to Alberta. We explored the possibility of introducing the Hungarian partridge to the high plains of the Panhandle. Much of the Panhandle is farmed, producing wheat, oats, sorghum grains, and alfalfa. Amarillo has an altitude of 3,676 feet, and it has zero weather each winter. Topographically, the Panhandle and much of Alberta and Saskatchewan are very similar.

At Brooks, I had the pleasure of meeting that grand old man of Alberta, Fred J. Green of Calgary, who introduced the first Hungarian partridges into the province. Mr. Green raised the money with which he purchased 175 pairs of Hungarian partridges. They were released twelve miles south of Calgary on April 21, 1910. In the fall of 1913 an open season was permitted. Now the Hun is Canada's most abundant upland game bird. In certain districts these birds are so plentiful that there is a three-month open season and a limit of 25 birds.

Mr. Green has done much to distinguish himself in conservation work. He is still active, and when I met him in Brooks he was there to hunt both the Hun and the pheasant, which he also helped to introduce into Canada. Mr. Green told me that the bob-white was introduced into British Columbia some years back. It multiplied to the point where they had one open season, and then a bad winter wiped them out. No more were imported.

Ralph Yeatter and Arthur Hawkins, of the Illinois Natural History Survey, have kindly made a study of the Panhandle area for *Field & Stream*, looking forward to the release of the Hungarian partridge. From the temperature standpoint they say that the Panhandle is on the borderline, but Mr. Hawkins recommended that the experiment be made. Says Mr. Yeatter:

"The average May, June, and July temperatures at Amarillo are a little higher than in any known Hungarian range in North America. This subspecies does not occur anywhere in Europe where the temperatures are quite so high during these months. Other subspecies occur where it is somewhat warmer than Amarillo. But temperature is almost as high in eastern Indiana, where Huns are established and are spreading south."

Aldo Leopold has pointed out that latitude is not the only controlling factor, since failures have also occurred in the northern portion of its ranges in places apparently similar to those where the birds have be-

come established. The Hungarian partridge is plentiful in the Dakotas, where they are shot in open seasons, but Nebraska has released thousands of birds without success.

The common Hungarian partridge in the United States and Canada is nearly twice as large as the bob-white quail. Ornithologists recognize more than ten subspecies of this gray partridge, *Perdix perdix*, ranges of which extend from the British Isles to western Mongolia and from the Arctic Circle in northwestern Russia to south-central Asia and southern Europe.

Yeatter says that other subspecies occur where it is warmer than in Amarillo. This suggests the inquiry as to why some of the subspecies, adapted to Southern climes, should not be introduced in the United States after the war. Surely there is some open-field bird, such as the Hun, that will take the place of the prairie chicken on our Western and Southern plains. As this article goes to press, *Field & Stream* has completed arrangements to plant two hundred pairs of Hungarian partridges in the Panhandle. Here's hoping for a new high in the Southwest!

PENNSYLVANIA

by Harold Titus

WHEN you begin to talk about Pennsylvania, most hunters who keep up on what's current in the outdoor world are going to think about deer management, and the informed fishermen will remember that here is the home of a project which virtually guarantees him a trout or two that will test not only his tackle but his know-how. This is true because the Keystone State has gone to town in solving a brace of problems that plague fish and game administrators clear across the continent. Its Game Commission has done a job of managing deer that took not only foresight, intelligence, and a background of abundant information, but a world of courage to boot. And its Board of Fish Commissioners, in the deservedly famous Spring Creek project, has almost assured trouters of the chance of tying into a lunker even in this day of stupendous pressure on all brook, brown, and rainbow habitats in populated regions.

But you can't rivet your attention on such outstanding accomplishments and think you are informed about Pennsylvania, because by so doing a host of other important resources and triumphs will be muffed. It's a balanced ration that Pennsylvania offers its home folks and the multitude of sporting guests, and the state seems to keep dishing it out under a demand that mounts with the years.

In 1940 over 666,000 residents bought hunting licenses, and an estimated 150,000 more hunted on their own lands, where no permit is required. In that same year nearly 13,000 non-residents came into the state to have a try at deer, bear, quail, grouse, pheasant, turkey, and other targets. This is probably the greatest concentration of outstate hunters to be found anywhere, and they appear without urging. Pennsylvania makes no effort to attract outsiders through its Fish or Game Commissions. And although near-by New York, Baltimore, Washington, and other great centers send heavy contingents, quite a few patrons of the state's many hotels and tourist camps during hunting seasons come from clear across the continent. Being an old state, accommodations are everywhere, and the great diversity of its game resources carries a direct appeal for almost every type of gunner.

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The native upland birds—bob-white quail, ruffed grouse, and wild turkey—are there today just as they were when white men first pushed westward from the Atlantic. Not in all the places, of course, not in as marked abundance anywhere, but still there in sufficient numbers to warrant hard hunting.

Enough grouse persist in the mountainous counties to yield an annual kill of around 200,000. In recent years the season's bag has twice slipped slightly below that figure, but others have exceeded it by more than 30,000. Enough quail responded to management measures in the southern agricultural counties to show a yearly bag of better than 100,000 from 1932 to '35. Hard going caught the little fellows the next winter, and recent yields have been down to as low as 70,000; but with the help of a comprehensive refuge system and widespread cover management there's hope of a comeback. Wild-turkey range is reduced to a few central and southern areas in the Blue Mountain chain; but in 1939, for example, the guns took 6,766 of the great birds, the biggest yield since 1915 and in a period when turkey hunting in general has been largely fading.

This item of turkey populations deserves a closer look because it is indicative of a certain persistence and resourcefulness which seem to be characteristic of Pennsylvania game policies. Thirty years ago the big bird was represented only by stragglers; its local range had shrunk, its habitat had been badly impaired. Refuges were established, and restocking with pen-reared birds was tried to bring the flocks back.

Now, as anyone who has worked with the species will assure you, the turkey is a headache for game-farm managers. He's hard to raise, and harder to keep wild once accustomed to coddling. Over a long period time and money were spent lavishly, trying this and trying that, blazing a lot of new trails and getting nowhere fast. Where other turkey states were either marking time and making mere gestures or else throwing in the turkey sponge, Pennsylvania kept plugging and finally, in 1936, hit on the wrinkle that appears to be part of the answer.

Eight mating areas were set up where hens in semi-confinement were exposed to wild toms. The resultant birds were bigger, stronger, and a lot wilder than any game-farm poult could ever hope to become. Today the number of areas is over twenty. Some of the eggs are taken for game-farm hatching, but most of the nests are unmolested and the broods sift back into the land of their sires once they are able to take wing. Maybe these mating areas have nothing whatever to do with the increased kill; but they mean careful protection of nesting hens from predators and other disturbing factors, and the Pennsylvania bet is that they are functioning.

Of the exotic birds, the ring-necked pheasant takes first and only place

in the Keystone State. Experimental work has been done with both Hungarian and chukar partridge in recent years. A few months ago the Commission decided to call it a day with Hunkies, and some time before that anybody would have been welcome to the remaining stock of chukars for the carting away. Such decisiveness is good to encounter. Pennsylvania, of course, has no monopoly on it, but in too many sections effort is being wasted on exotics which have no chance of establishing themselves.

The ringneck did very well in parts of Pennsylvania from the time he was first liberated in 1915. He reaches his best density in the southeastern counties, but he's also doing nicely in the southwestern portion of the state and up along the Ohio border. Right now he's in disfavor in some localities because of alleged crop damage; but the guns take a half million cocks, more or less, each fall, and perhaps the burden of local complaints can simply be charged as a part of that cost.

When you get to game animals in Pennsylvania, you could linger a while on cottontail production, which is virtually state-wide and has been running up to four million a year. And you could hold a session on squirrels, because a million or thereabouts go into game pockets every fall; and raccoon hunters would want to tarry over ringtail statistics, which show an average yield of 35,000 for the past decade. Pennsylvania bear hunters make up an enthusiastic group and account for 500 a year. But when you get to Pennsylvania deer, you sit down and light up and prepare to stay a long time.

The Pennsylvania deer herd was down to practically nothing in 1905. Deforestation, fire, market hunting, and probably a lot of other factors had combined to pull the population down to an occasional specimen.

In that year the first deer refuge was established on State Forest lands in Clinton County, one of the first—if not the first—state-sponsored refuges in the country. A few months later fifty deer were imported from Michigan, the first shipment of breeders introduced to supplement the native stock. In 1907 came the Buck Law.

By 1915 the kill was 1,287 bucks. Another five years and it was 3,000, and farmers and fruitgrowers in some sections were complaining of deer damage. Three years later the buck kill doubled and local herds were doing such crop damage that the commission declared a restricted open season on does in three townships.

The roar that farmers had put up over depredations wasn't one-two-three with the yelp that went up from hunters. While does were protected the hunting went from nothing at all anywhere to very good in spots, and the boys simply didn't want a single doe killed.

They almost had their way that fall. Only 100 licenses had been

authorized to begin with; doe-minded hunters bought most of them to keep someone who would as soon kill a doe as not from buying the legal right. Only eight does were taken, and the battle over deer management was on.

For five years the Commission tried this and that to reduce the number of does in troubled areas. The item of crop damage had rapidly faded into the background. The welfare of the herd itself had become the paramount issue, because the expanding herd was eating itself out of house and home and winter losses due to starvation were increasingly severe. Furthermore, bucks were becoming noticeably stunted. Nevertheless, the public just didn't want to go along with any reduction program.

The Commission tried a variety of doe-season regulations, and constables bearing injunction orders beat a path to its door. But in 1928 an antlerless deer regulation finally stuck; no bucks were legal, but 25,000 does and fawns were taken. It wasn't enough to check materially the herd's pyramiding, but it did demonstrate that every doe in the mountains wouldn't be dressed and hanging twenty minutes after she became legal game, which was the one common conviction of the opposition. In 1931, 70,000 antlerless whitetails fell, and in 1938, 171,000 more. To date [1943] over 700,000 antlerless deer have been taken legally, the record of starvation is down, objections have subsided to a whisper, the deer in those grand old mountains are healthier and happier, and the future of deer hunting seems to be assured.

The setup of the Game Commission was ideal for a scrap of that sort and duration. There are eight non-salaried, non-partisan commissioners whose staggered terms run for eight years. Their funds come solely from licenses, fines, and so on and will crowd two million dollars in good years. The Commission makes up its own budget and needs only the governor's approval. It also regulates limits and seasons.

The non-political field force, which is the great public contact, is drawn from lists of eligibles who have undergone written and oral examinations. These game protectors get thirty-seven weeks of training, thirteen of them in the field, before they go on general duty. The Commission maintains its own biological staff, but constantly calls in the technical brains of educational institutions as well. It goes to great lengths to make the findings of its researchers understood by the public. Organized sportsmen are taken into Commission councils when regulations are being formulated. All this adds up to public understanding, if not always unreserved public agreement, and, being so largely free from legislative meddling, the Commission can chart courses and go places.

Nearly one half of the state, or 13,000,000 acres, is in forest or wood-

land. Within the boundaries are 295 lakes with surface areas greater than 20 acres and a score more of better than 200 acres each. The mountains are the source of hundreds of runs which unite to make thousands of miles of fishable rivers. Trout or smallmouth bass water is found in every county.

But being a state of large population, much of the area is privately owned, and how to get to waters and game areas would be a problem had not provisions for access gone hand in hand with species management. As it is, the Department of Forests and Waters—which administers state parks and forests—controls 1,655,000 publicly owned acres, all open to recreational use except where refuges or parks are established. The Game Commission owns 727,000 acres bought with license funds, recently supplemented by Federal aid. The U. S. Forest Service has 450,000 acres. That makes a total of over 3,000,000 acres open to the public from now on, which is a nice nest egg indeed!

The State Game Lands—Commission holdings—lie in 61 of the state's 67 counties and are broken into 174 units. Within them are 208 refuges, accounting for 62,000 acres, while the balance is free range for the guns.

All the above, naturally, is wild or submarginal agricultural land, but the Commission doesn't stop there. Since 1936 it has been working on a long-time, big-scale series of co-operative farm-game projects, which now totals 80 managed areas involving 1,800 farms and 150,000 agricultural acres. Small refuges dot these projects and safety zones are established near buildings, but 100,000 acres are left open for the hunters. The landowner gets special protection for his fences, buildings, stock, and person when he signs up. Furthermore, he is consulted on the management practices to be put into effect, often has a chance to rear pheasants for a fee, and in other ways is made to understand that he's a sure-enough partner in a big undertaking.

What this has done to better farmer-sportsman relations in the state is indicated by the fact that, of the farms now listed in these co-operatives, fully one half were formerly closed to hunting, and that is something to consider! In 1940, the record shows, 48,376 hunters roamed these particular fields and lugged away over 81,000 pieces of game. It costs the state plenty, because marking and maintaining refuge areas on such a scale, arranging for food patches and what not and making a business of keeping game populations up by stocking where necessary, isn't paid for with buttons. The venture is still held to be in the experimental stage, but its prognosis, as a doctor would say, is good.

Then there is a string of auxiliary refuge projects with their adjacent hunting grounds, strictly a leasing venture, which has been growing since 1917 and embraces over 50,000 acres. Still another 30,000 acres are

classed as game propagation areas. No hunting whatever is permitted on these, but the surplus stock is trapped and redistributed.

To top off these facilities is a special chain of wildlife refuges and hunting grounds fostered by the Commission, but directly sponsored by sportsmen's groups. Last year they totaled 40,000 acres and are administered as are the other farm-game projects.

The Game Commission, of course, has no direct responsibility for fish or fishing. That's the function of the Board of Fish Commissioners, which is also doing a good job of administering well over half a million dollars of license money annually.

Again, publicly owned land plays a leading part in helping anglers get to where they hope the big ones wait. On the State Forests are about 5,000 miles of stream, half of them trout waters, all open to the public except where runs are set aside as a part of management policy. On State Game Lands are 1,850 miles of stream, of which 450 miles offer fishing, mostly trout. Another 500 miles of brawling water is included in the Allegheny National Forest. On public lands within the state, or waters owned by public-utility concerns and open to the public, the Fish Commission annually stocks 784 miles of streams and over 27,000 acres of lakes.

A recently launched program of acquiring even more water has given the 400,000 anglers who normally buy licenses new places to go without fear of being challenged. During the last biennium, 107 miles of stream and 598 acres of lakes came under state control, and Pennsylvania fishermen liked the idea so well that they commenced agitating for an increase of from \$1.50 to \$2.00 in the license fee, with the extra half dollar set aside for further acquisition.

The unique achievement of the Board of Fish Commissioners to date, of course, has been the Spring Creek Project. This two-mile stretch of stream was set aside for special attention in 1934, improvement devices installed, regulations for fishing set up, and a stocking program of unusual proportions inaugurated. Here a man (or a woman, because there's a special stretch of water for women) may go and, fishing with flies tied on barbless hooks only, have a better-than-good chance to tie into a brown or a rainbow that will give him an argument.

No special license is required, but any license holder may fish here five times during the season, which runs from May 14 to July 17. On the stretch set aside for men, the size limit is 10 inches; on the smaller stream, reserved for women, it is 7 inches. Ten fish may be caught during a day, but only two killed.

Judging from the steady increase in customers, the Board has hit on a device that wows them. In 1934, for example, fewer than 3,000 fishermen registered at Spring Creek. By 1941, nearly 25,000 were there. They

caught 18,566 fish and killed 7,680. The average length of fish taken away rose from 10.8 inches in 1934 to 14.9 inches in 1941. Opening day of this season saw a 23-inch rainbow and a 19-inch speckled checked in. Browns up to 28 inches have been taken in the past.

For a generation of fly fishermen who had virgin country to explore, fishing under such close restrictions as those at Spring Creek may not mean so much. But for the bulk of today's anglers, who can get steamed up over a few trout that pass the limit requirements by no more than a hair, it's something, brother!

The two Commissions take particular pride in one undertaking where their interests meet and overlap. This is the Pymatuning State Game Refuge, which is about to become a fish farm as well. This is a 25,000-acre reservoir area, constructed primarily for flood control of streams, extending into Ohio. The refuge itself comprises 3,670 acres and was established in 1935. It makes an excellent resting and feeding place for thousands of migrating wildfowl, and hundreds linger on to nest each season. Guns on adjacent waters naturally get the benefit of ducks and geese using the refuge during the open season.

In 1938 the Game Commission erected a decidedly worth-while educational museum on the property, the exhibits being primarily limited to displays of waterfowl and shore birds. In the collection are nearly 300 mounted specimens. It is estimated that there are 2,500 visitors at the museum weekly, and as many as 6,000 have been counted in a single day.

This is not, by any means, the whole story of Pennsylvania. Only the high spots have been touched. In a way, the Keystone State is an old story for many sportsmen because for such a long period of time it was almost alone in blazing conservation trails.

Some of its problems—such as deer management—have attracted special interest because identical conditions were plaguing other states. Some of its programs, such as the wholehearted co-operation with the Federal Government in land acquisition, have demonstrated to others how to do the seemingly impossible in this business of game restoration.

Since Pennsylvania really started doing a job with game and fish management at least a score of states have set themselves up in the business on a firm foundation, and many of these have achieved spectacular success in one or several specialties. In consequence the Pennsylvania standard of success is not the common gauge that it was even a few years ago.

But there's one bit of bright glory that can never be taken away from those Keystoneers: they were pioneers in the field and showed many of the rest how to do the job that needed doing for this precious outdoors that is America's.

THE BIRTHRIGHT AND THE POTTAGE

by Archibald Rutledge

NORTH CAROLINA has long seemed to me the most progressive of all the Southern states. And it is a great game state. It has a long front on the Atlantic, where congregate in the winter myriads of ducks and geese. Along the Roanoke, the Cape Fear, and her other coastal rivers there are deep swamps, the natural habitat of the wild turkey. The interior of the state has much of the finest quail territory in America. Westward, in the great mountains, there are deer, wild turkeys, and grouse. Few commonwealths have so many and so varied wildlife resources. The rivers and streams in the eastern part of the state used to teem with fine fish, and the mountain streams, than which there are few finer in America, used to afford some of the best trout fishing in our country.

Insofar as the game birds and animals are concerned, I believe that, because the sentiment of the hunters is in favor of the laws and because these laws tend toward conservation, the situation is favorable. But the once beautiful streams break my heart. Here is the Pigeon River, as noble a cold-water stream as there is in the East, utterly foul and polluted by tanneries and chemical plants. The French Broad is little better than a cesspool. The birthright of the people is gone, and certain men are profiting by this kind of spoliation.

I mention North Carolina in particular because it is a forward-looking state and its people are highly intelligent. Yet in the matter of stream pollution, which is stream destruction, there is no worse offender. This situation long made me wonder. I can remember those streams when it was a joy just to look at them, to bathe in them, to wander by them, even if one did no fishing in them. But the mere sight of them now is revolting.

Not long ago I was talking with some of the high officials of the North Carolina Conservation Commission, and I asked them plainly how such things could be in a state as civilized as the old Tarheel

State. I was told bluntly that behind stream pollution were financial resources too vast to be combated.

One of these men said to me: "We are trying desperately to remedy the evil; but it is hard to beat millions of dollars. The industrialists are good citizens; they are patriotic until it comes to the pollution of streams. Then they are selfish. As yet we have been unable to make them take a different course. We are working toward that end, but so far can report little progress."

Yet it is not as if the destruction of this natural beauty and wealth were necessary for industrial progress. Every industry could have its disposal plant. This should be a law, and no doubt in time it will be. Meanwhile, however, our common heritage is lost. I do not think that any man can lay claim to being a patriot if he makes his country, through the pollution of her streams, a poorer place in which to live.

What I say is not, of course, an attack on North Carolina. The very same situation prevails everywhere in our land. I found it especially true in Pennsylvania, where I lived for many years. It is true in Maryland and in Virginia, in Ohio and Indiana. The New World that Columbus found was especially rich in the number and the beauty of its streams and rivers. Now, even in regions remote from cities, they are little better than sewers. The contamination of water is a trespass against public ownership, and should be considered a crime of major moment.

There are those who claim that industry would suffer if it were compelled to keep our streams unpolluted. In certain cases there might be a slight temporary financial setback. But all of us, industry included, would be gainers in the end. Modern disposal facilities render archaic any excuse for dumping waste in streams and rivers and lakes.

The truth might as well be faced now, before it is too late. We often hear of "the development of our natural resources." Flowing water, without any development, is a marvelous resource, a part of our heritage, along with our once splendid forests, our matchless supply of wild game, our prodigious mineral resources. All are dwindling. But it is the pollution of our once lovely waters that should most concern the average American.

On Duck and Goose Shooting

The human animal is subject to a lot of amiable idiocies such as trying to knock a little white ball across the landscape, sliding downhill on sticks of polished wood, snaring fish with bits of tinsel and feathers, or going out to the race track to see whether, as the Chinaman put it, one horse can run faster than another. Not the least idiotic of these, it must seem to the outsider, is the instinct that takes men duck and goose shooting. Indeed, as one wife in a sour moment put it, it would be more sensible to equip the goose with a gun and let him hunt the hunter, since that would result in the bagging of the bigger goose! I have, therefore, included Virginia Irwin's "Ho Hum!" to the end that we duck shooters may smile indulgently at woman's want of imagination.

The others were chosen to illustrate the variety often encountered in this ancient sport. The standard method of going duck shooting in most parts of this country is to ensconce yourself in a blind at the water's edge and wait for the birds to come to you. Yet, much as I have indulged in that form of the sport, I seem to remember a lot of ducks I have shot in a completely "unorthodox" fashion, as Mr. Newell expresses it. For example, there was the pair of blacks that jumped from a pheasant swale before my pointing setter; there was the lone mallard that sat for half a day in the exact center of a small pond which was just over two gunshots across; there was the bunch of six blacks that suddenly— But here, I'm not supposed to write this book; just edit it. I think you'll enjoy the variety of the vicarious duck hunts you are now about to join.

UNORTHODUX

by David M. Newell

I WISH somebody would tell me why cowpunchers do as they do. I mean why cowpunchers get up two hours before daylight and sit around the stove waiting for it to get light enough to wrangle the horses. They did in Arizona. Every doggone morning, especially when it was very, very cold. There was no escape, either. It was get up or go hungry, and I like my breakfasts.

I remember the old Five P Slash ranch. A pair of lions had been killing Tom Wansley's colts, and I had been sent up to see what I could do about it. That was when I first learned about the cowboys' breakfast! The bunkhouse was crowded, so I had made my bed on the porch of the ranch house. Boys, she was cold! Wow, she was cold! I haven't lived in Florida all my life yet, but I had been down there long enough so that my blood was about as thick as good grade gasoline, and those crystal-clear nights in the White River cañon sure made me tuck my head down under the blankets.

Everybody used to turn in about half-past eight or nine o'clock, and I'd reluctantly pull off my boots and leave the stove. After I began to get used to the climate I learned to take off my jacket, and toward the end of the first winter I went so far as to shed both socks and my pants the same night.

After I had been at the Five P Slash for about a week, I happened to stick my head out from under my pile of quilts one night and a glad-some sound fell on my frosty ears. The full moon was just topping the rimrock across the river when I heard this most delectable of all sounds—heard it above the tumbling white water near by. It was the unmistakable whistle of strong wings beating, and it instantly transported me two thousand miles. Two thousand miles to the southeast, and they could have their coyotes and jack rabbits and mountain lions and early breakfasts. I was back in a blind in the islands, and ducks were flying. If you're a duck hunter, you'll understand. If you're not, you're reading the wrong story anyhow. As to the number of times I have sat in a

Florida duck blind and wished I were lion hunting in Arizona, I shall not speak. That, as Grandma used to say, is another story.

Well, anyhow, there I was in Arizona, with my neck stuck right out in the cold, listening to ducks going over. Lots of ducks! Breakfast didn't come too early that morning, I can tell you! I didn't say anything about my plans until after we had all sat around the stove for the usual hour and a half—waiting for it to get light enough to wrangle the horses. Then I got my shotgun out of my truck and began to stuff some shells into my pockets. Pecos Higgins roped a big strawberry roan out of the corral and came leading him past.

"Where ye goin' with that thing?" he grunted, eying my double-barrel with suspicion.

"After some mallards," I answered, grinning.

"Them old green-headed ducks that set on the pools down-river?" he queried.

"Sure."

"Well, don't bring none of 'em back here," growled Pecos.

"Why not?" I asked.

"We don't want 'em."

"Why not?" I repeated.

"Why, a feller give me two of them things one time, an' I picked on 'em every night for twelve nights an' they was plumb wore out an' I throwed 'em away. Don't bring none of 'em here."

"You and Dan Jackson will be the first ones to eat 'em," I laughed.

"Huh," grunted Pecos, walking away with the roan. "Two hundred pounds of prime beef hangin' on the back porch, an' the guy wants feathers. Huh!"

Sam Adams and I had a lot of fun that day. Sam was a Florida boy who had gone out to Arizona with me to help handle the pack of lion and bear dogs with which I was working. Unfortunately, Sam did not have a shotgun; so we planned our campaign accordingly. The ducks—greenhead mallards—were warier than we expected, and a campaign was necessary.

It was impossible to get within range by riding down the cañon. The ducks merely rose and flew a mile or so down the river to the next pool. The cañon walls rose sheer on each side of the river, and there seemed no way to get around the ducks. Finally Sam had an idea.

"I'll tell you," he said. "You take your shotgun and climb out on the mesa. Go clean on around and come back to the rim a mile down the cañon. I'll chase the ducks on down the cañon, and you shoot at 'em as they go by."

And that, as a matter of record, is exactly what I did. I shot at 'em as they went by! Did you ever shoot at ducks flying almost directly

below you? I hadn't, either. It's very disconcerting. At least a hundred and fifty greenheads passed within range. I was out on a great overhanging rimrock, and the ducks were underneath. I shot four times and never cut a feather. Sam shot once at a hundred and fifty yards with a .38-40 and killed two before they left the water. We went back to the ranch with two ducks. Pecos Higgins and Dan Jackson ate both of them. I might mention that I did the picking.

A real dyed-in-the-wool duck hunter is willing to try anything to get some ducks. That's how I happened to go skiing in Florida. Arthur Cuscaden told me about it. Arthur is a real dyed-in-the-wool duck hunter, and he found some ducks that needed attention out on the mud flats in the mouth of the Chassahowitzka River. Oh yes, there is such a river, but you call it Chessywiskey if you want to go there.

Anyhow, that's where these ducks were, and Arthur couldn't get at 'em. He fussed and he fumed and he fretted. There they were—hundreds of 'em. Pintails and widgeons and black mallards and a few canvasbacks now and then. And Arthur couldn't get at 'em. Finally he devised ways and means. You see, the water was only about four inches deep on these flats, and the mud underneath was about ten feet deep and very, very soft. A boat was entirely out of the question, and a man without a boat was out of sight.

Arthur devised ways and means. That's how we happened to go skiing in Florida. Of course it's ticklish business, but it gets results. A few of the old cracker moonshiners died of heart failure when they first saw us walking on the water, but now nobody pays any attention to us. We're just some more duck hunters, and duck hunters are crazy anyhow! We use ordinary snow skis, and we have lots of fun—as long as we're right side up.

Some of the best shooting I ever had in my life was out of a tree. I was standing with my back to the trunk of a small cypress, balancing precariously on a couple of limbs fully ten feet over the water and wrapped to the chin in Spanish moss. No duck that ever lived could possibly have mistaken me for any kind of man.

The result was very gratifying. Ducks poured in, whizzing within a few feet of me, and I had glorious shooting. The trying part of the whole affair was that I had such a limited range. I could only shoot at the ducks which passed directly in front of me, for it was impossible to turn without falling out of the tree. I like to think that that is why I missed so many!

The easiest duck hunting I ever experienced was in South America, far back in the interior of Matto Grosso. These birds had never been shot at, and they paid little or no attention to gunfire. There were several varieties, including a beautiful Brazilian teal which furnished very

sporty shooting. Muscovies were plentiful and much warier than the smaller ducks. They were as large as the domestic muscovy and delicious eating.

By far the most plentiful duck, however, was the *mareca*, or rosybill. This duck resembles a widgeon somewhat but has a bright pink bill. It gives a whistling call similar to the call of a widgeon, but there the likeness ends. Did you ever see a flock of widgeons sitting in a row on the limb of a tree? No? Neither have I, and I hope we never do. It's bad for the liver. These cockeyed rosybills, though, think nothing of lighting in a tree. It's exceedingly disconcerting to have a whole bunch of ducks fly up and light in a tree overhead to look over the situation. It's just not done where I come from.

It takes a man quite a little time to get used to scanning the trees for ducks, but it can be done. Duck hunters can—and will—do anything to get ducks. I do not mean to imply that it was difficult to kill these rosybills. On the contrary, it was the easiest hunting I have ever had, and I killed hundreds of them.

Let me make myself clear. We were several hundred miles from the nearest town. It was necessary to kill our meat, and to kill plenty of it. Fifteen or twenty hungry Indians can stow away a lot of meat in a very short time, whether it's deer, steer, pig, or duck. All kinds of game were very plentiful, and on one trip I shot seventeen deer for the men and the dogs. Even the dogs finally got so sick of venison that they would scarcely eat it, and I must confess that duck was a welcome variation to all of us.

I'll never forget my first duck hunt in Brazil. There was no blind and there were no decoys. Simply three men on horseback. Doc, the Indian, and myself. We rode along for a mile or two. Suddenly the Indian reined up his horse and began gesticulating and pointing.

"*Pato*," he said.

I looked. I knew that *pato* meant duck, and I was to find that in Matto Grosso *pato* is used only in referring to the big black muscovy. *Mareca* is the name of the ever-plentiful rosybill.

"*Onde?*" I asked.

He pointed again, and I finally made out four muscovies sitting in a tree. We started for them, but they flew before we were in range, lighting in another tree two or three hundred yards away.

"I believe I'll try to slip up on them," said Doc.

"O.K.," I said. "I'll prowl off over here to the east, and maybe I can flush some out of those ponds."

The ponds in question were shallow, of about eight or ten acres each, and, to my delight, literally covered with rosybills. At least five hundred got up in one bunch and flew directly over me, all whistling to

beat the band. I leaned back in the saddle and shot my pump gun empty, killing four ducks. The flock circled, apparently curious, and I began to imitate the peculiar whistling call. Immediately they turned and flew right over me again. Unbelievable as it may sound, I killed sixteen ducks out of that flock, and they circled me at least ten times before finally leaving the vicinity.

Doc, in the meantime, was having some grand shooting—if noise meant anything. I could hear his automatic blasting away at regular intervals, and I knew that he was finding plenty of ducks. Just as I picked up my last rosybill and was tying it on my saddle I heard a wild shout from across the marsh.

“Whoa! Hey! Whoa! Hey-hey! Whoa!”

Then I heard the sound of a horse lunging and plunging in belly-deep water. Shouting to the Indian to follow me, I spurred my horse out across the marsh. I was scared. I felt sure that Doc was snake-bitten, crocodile-bitten, or that his horse had thrown him and was dragging him. He continued to shout, and I could still hear the faint “chug-a-chug-a-chug” of a horse running in the water. It took me ten minutes to get across that boggy marsh, and when I got to the other side I found Doc standing knee-deep in the water with a sheepish grin on his face.

“Where’s your horse?” I asked, relieved to find Doc intact.

“Gone.”

“Which way?” I asked.

Doc pointed to the south and shrugged. “He started that way, but no telling where he is by now. He was really scared.”

“What ailed him?” I asked.

“Scared,” said Doc. “Ducks.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

Doc laughed. “Boy, that’s the scarest horse I ever saw. I’d killed a dandy string of those rosybills—about fifteen of them, I guess—when I saw eight or ten muscovies light in a tree. I got off my horse, dropped the reins, and tried to sneak up on the muscovies. I took a crack at them as they flew and killed one and was coming back to my horse when it happened.”

“What happened?” I asked.

“The funniest thing you ever saw. Just as I got hold of the reins, one of the rosybills came to life. I had tied all fifteen of ’em to my saddle strings, and this one was hanging right down in that old pony’s flank. It came to life and flapped its wings, and that pony quit the earth. Boy, boy, boy, he was scared! He threw ducks a mile high. I’ve picked up two, and there’s one over there. We may be able to trail him up by ducks.”

We found the horse eventually, and ten of the ducks, but Doc had to walk to camp. That horse had firmly decided he didn't want to pack anything else that day—man or duck. Doc was quite willing to agree.

“Why, if I'd been on that horse when that duck flapped its wings in his flank, I'd be going up yet! No more duck hunting for me. I'm through.”

But he wasn't. He went out with me again next day. That's the way with duck hunters. They're crazy.

HO HUM!

by Virginia Irwin

You don't have to be crazy to go duck hunting, but it helps. After spending nine weary hours under a bunch of old brush, technically known as a duckblind, I am prepared to meet in public debate any and all comers who challenge that statement. They can choose their weapons—the printed page, the speaker's platform, or the radio. I'll argue to the last word that there's a good dash of dementia in anybody's soul who rhapsodizes over the "joys" of duck hunting. And I think I can prove it.

For instance, there's the little matter of getting up in the middle of the night. Why in the middle of the night? Well, because by dawn you have to be in your blind, miles from the nearest sign of civilization, in some godforsaken spot that you reached by auto, horseback, forced march, kiddiecar, and dog sled. Noon, after it has warmed up a bit, won't do, and a nice, handy duck blind somewhere near home won't do either. The whole routine has to be as tough as possible, or you're not duck hunting in the approved manner.

Once you've done a Missouri midwinter imitation of Livingstone lost in darkest Africa and got yourself and your shotgun hidden away in a spot that would defy the sleuthing efforts of four bloodhounds and a flock of FBI men, your duck-hunting day has begun. Of course the idea is to watch for ducks and shoot them if they show up. But mostly you just stand and watch and stomp on the frozen ground of the duckblind to stave off freezing to death.

The wind whistles in from the river, and your nose turns into a numb knob. Your fingers and feet lose all feeling. Your back aches, and your neck gets stiff. But do you go home and find a warm fire? Not if you're a confirmed duck hunter, you don't. You just stay there, and hope, until 4 P.M.—ducks or no ducks. The whole thing reminds me of nothing so much as those East Indian religious fanatics who actually enjoy sleeping on a bed of nails.

My initiation into the ancient, honorable, and (to me) overrated sport of duck hunting was a thorough one. I was spared nothing be-

cause of my sex. Ready at 3 A.M., dressed in long underwear, boots, wool socks, corduroy pants, four sweaters, a lumberjacket, and a canvas hunting hat, I set out with my duck-hunting companions on a drive that ended with my being completely lost in dense woods some sixty miles north of St. Louis.

There, in a duck club, as the dawn was breaking gray and cold, we joined a dozen hardy duck hunters who were wolfing down a hearty breakfast. Warned that food was the staff of a duck hunter's life, I put away three eggs, two pieces of ham, and eleven biscuits. That breakfast was the only enjoyable part of the whole day.

From the duck club there was a two-mile walk along the riverbank to the blinds, and once in the duckblind to which I was assigned, with a bewhiskered gent who was to be my mentor, we settled down to the nine-hour siege. A few minutes after sunrise a bunch of ducks flew over, circled, and sat down among the decoys. My companion shot three before I could decide which was the business end of my shotgun. And that, my friends, was the end of the excitement. The rest of the day the ducks stayed up in the air, and no amount of cajoling on the duck whistle could get them to slow up and settle down.

I had heard for years that duck hunting is "superb sport." After trying it, my retort would be: "Duck feathers." Why, you can't even talk. Attempts at conversation are hopeless when you're cooped up in a duckblind with a guy who is suffering from duck dementia. I know, because every time I tried a pleasant word on my gentleman guide his only reply was, "Shhhhh! I think I see a duck."

For the ladies who have never laid eyes on a duckblind, I might mention that the accepted furnishings are two nails on which you hang your hats and a two-by-four on which you sit. Your feet rest on frozen ground and the remains of old box lunches eaten by hunters who have visited the place before you. About six by eight feet in size, and constructed of rough lumber put together only to support the brush covering and not to keep out the elements, a duckblind is decidedly not my idea of a cozy spot on a cold day.

After my safari into the wilds in search of the elusive duck, I have a new regard for my little three-room steam-heated apartment. By noon out in that duckblind I was recalling stories about how it feels to freeze to death. I thought, "Well, rigor mortis is about to set in." By four, I was sure it had. There was a pain in my back and a hollow feeling in the pit of my stomach. The lunch had turned out very unsatisfactorily. The fried chicken I had carried along tasted like cold grease, and the casserole of baked beans was frozen so hard that you couldn't even stab a bean loose with a spoon. Only a thermos of hot coffee separated me from complete collapse as the day wore on.

By two in the afternoon, my Spartan boudoir had begun to get on my nerves in earnest. I had already, for want of something more exciting to do, committed to memory the wildlife and forestry code that came with my hunting license. And so I fell to devising my own idea of an ideal duckblind.

Instead of the uncomfortable, cheerless and ugly thing that it is, my idea of a duckblind would be a little brush-covered bungalow, steam-heated, with hot and cold running water, furnished with a three-piece overstuffed suite and a chaise longue. I'd like Venetian blinds, too, and in the front wall, for shooting purposes, I'd have peeholes to poke the guns through when the ducks show up. The other three walls could be decorated tastily with Petty girls, floral prints, calendars, and wild-life illustrations.

My de luxe duckblind would be well stocked with books on woodcraft and nature lore. I would also have knitting, crocheting, and rug-hooking supplies on hand to while away those idle hours during which ye olde duck hunter ordinarily sits staring into space and dreaming of the ducks that haven't come in.

Finally, by planning such things as my de luxe duck boudoir, wondering if there would be any good sales at the stores this week, and arguing with myself whether or not to buy a new dress for New Year's Eve, the afternoon wore on. At last it was 4 P.M., the hour when the rules say you shoot no more ducks—even if you see them. The boys emerged from the six or eight other blinds down the river, and we all walked the two miles back to civilization. They, too, had shot some ducks. They were happy.

Generally speaking, my duck-hunting expedition did not add much to the sum total of my education. And as for actually learning anything about ducks on the trip—I didn't. I spent nine hours in that duck boudoir with three dead ducks, and I couldn't even tell you their names, first, last, or middle. All I know is that one of them had some purple feathers in its wings and an awfully sad look out of its left eye.

Of course I did learn that you call those red things you put in shot-guns "shells" and not "bullets"; that the thing you blow on to try to fool the ducks is a "call" and not a "whistle"; and that the wooden ducks you put in the river are "decoys" and not "phonies."

As for the spoils of the safari—I had three ducks given to me and the feeling that I'm coming down with pneumonia, pleurisy, and a double dose of the pip.

No more duck hunting for me. From now on I'll get my ducks, dressed and drawn, at the market.

GEESE! GET DOWN!

by Gordon MacQuarrie

FROSTY mornings on the Rock County Prairie of Wisconsin the wild geese fly to the cornfields from Geneva, Koshkonong, and Delavan lakes, and there are autumn ground fogs, so that those who crouch in goose pits may study the phantom billows and marvel at such morning magic. The endless squadrons begin coming to the stripped fields a little after daylight. Deliberate and majestic, like long, crawling strings in the distance, they float over the shrouded prairie and fill the sky with wild, haunting music.

So it was yesterday morning. Or did it just seem like yesterday morning? We shall not quibble. Time is of no importance where the gray honkers are concerned.

In the south, over the farmlands, ragged flocks of mallards traded back and forth. Straight north were wisps of clouds. They were lazy, streamlined clouds blown smooth by the night wind. If these things were not enough to occupy the watchers in the pits, there was the fat red sun in the east, rising lazily over low mists to flood the plain with that recurring miracle which we call daylight.

Piercing the fog at this witching hour were the tall silos of Wisconsin's richest farming country. Over there where the honkers were making wild music, a barn loomed. Yonder, in a gentle dip, smoke rose from a chimney and a farmhouse rode at anchor in the fog. Just to the right of it was the church steeple—it was a steeple until the morning wind rolled away the fog to reveal a windmill tower.

As all men know, this is a fine place for hunting, or for just watching the sun come up. Farmers are lucky people to be abroad on that lovely plain in the early morning. Near a field of tardy winter rye, Earl May of Milwaukee has spread his big cork goose decoys, cunning replicas, fashioned in the winter nights when a man's thoughts keep turning to last year and the year to come. With Earl in the pit was this reporter. Earl, who is a moose of a man but shoots a 16-gauge withal, paid tribute to the day's beginning and sized up the situation:

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"Those from the right are Geneva and Delavan honkers. The ones from the left are Koshkonong boarders. How many would you say were in the air right now?"

"Do you mean in sight?"

"Right. Within sight of us this minute."

"Two thousand—and that's a wild guess."

"I'll say three, and I don't care if we never fire a shot."

He leaned on the edge of the pit, dug almost five feet down in the heavy, rich soil of this famous prairie, and studied the tracteries in the sky as the geese trailed from water to favored cornfields.

"I'm leaving in four days to hunt deer. Going into the cutover back of Phillips. This is my vacation time. I'll get a deer—still-hunting, too. When winter comes, I'll be ready for the tedious months. We're lucky people, we Wisconsin hunters. Ducks, birds, geese, and deer.

"No sir, I don't care if I don't pull a trigger this morning. This gives me the same kick as seeing the first snow hit the hemlocks in deer season. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if there is not much doing today, either. There's hardly any wind, and smoke is going almost straight up."

The day before, Earl had dug that pit. He, with Ed and Frank Larkin, hunting farmer brothers, had dug it on a gentle, round-topped ridge in a 40-acre field. Aside from the bulging ridge where the blind was sunk, the field was almost as flat as a floor.

The brothers Larkin and Earl had brought the big farm truck in there and shoveled the dirt directly into it, so as to leave no telltale crumbs of soil sprinkled on the ground. They had been very careful not to trample down the earth and vegetation, and when the pit was dug they built a lid for it, cunningly, of light boards with stubble woven through its frame.

Ten feet away, it took discerning eyes to spot the difference between that pit cover and the field around it. To such extremes must one go to lure the canny Canada close to the decoys. They go further, do these painstaking hunters in Wisconsin's best goose country. They keep a short-handled rake in the pit blind and rake up the downtrodden grasses where they have been pressed down by boots. And woe betide the careless one who is so foolish as to toss an empty shell onto the ground outside the pit!

"That," says the veteran Earl May, "is almost as bad as a mirror on a field. A honker will see it at a distance, and the whole flock will turn. Several years ago I had a perfect pit on this prairie. My decoys are pretty good imitations, if I do say so. They were so good that some boys working a pit a mile away got jealous as they saw the geese avoid

their setup and come to mine. Those boys certainly queered my game until I got wise.

"Most of the geese coming to my decoys at this place had to fly over a little ridge of stubble in otherwise open, plowed prairie. All of a sudden the geese began avoiding me. They'd come sliding in with their wings set, but when they got near that ridge they'd climb out of there like someone had shot at them.

"Time after time they did it. I knew my blind was perfect. I suspected something in that stubble was frightening them, and kicked around in it. Finally I found—you've guessed it—a small hand mirror, lying face up, placed to flash a warning to those incoming geese. I took that mirror out of the field to a good big rock and cracked it in a million pieces with another rock.

"Don't let anyone tell you that breaking mirrors will bring bad luck. I had the best of luck after that!"

Black ducks, they say, are postgraduates of the school of experience. Some old baymen here in Wisconsin will swear a black duck has a sense of smell! More cautious heads will reply that it all depends on what kind of soft coal a bayman is burning in his pipe, and also how recently said bayman has been subjected to a thorough dry cleaning.

At any rate, black ducks are credited in these parts with being smarter than their near kin, the gray mallards; but in all truth, where the black duck's wisdom leaves off, that of the Canada begins.

"If we can't get any honkers to work the decoys," said Earl as the minutes passed, "we can spread some duck decoys in the cornfields. We might catch a greenhead or two in range."

But there was no hurry. It was pleasant to lean elbows on the edge of the pit and study the last of the morning goose flight, even though the birds were landing in cornfields miles away. There is a fascination in just watching geese. The year (1940) was the first in many that had brought Wisconsin some real goose shooting. Early November closings of previous years had found the Canadas just arriving on the prairies in the southern counties, so that 1940's 15-day extension was a joy to goose hunters, many of whom had not even dug a goose pit for several years.

With the extended season the southern tier of counties, particularly Rock and Walworth, saw long-forgotten decoys, solid and silhouette, come out of attics and barn lofts. Goose hunters looked again to their hardest shooting guns, and in the snug little farm-trading centers roundabout storekeepers told of No. 2s and BBs being once more in demand.

In all the years of the shorter seasons the flame had burned but dimly. And there had been many protests from farmers and sports-

men: "Please, just a few days' extension of the season on geese alone," for this is one of the few areas in Wisconsin where geese are a sort of autumn religion with the faithful. Old-timers like the Larkin brothers tell of lying in the snow on the ground with white sheets over them and the temperature around zero. They tell of the live-decoy days. There are domesticated Canada honkers on these prairie farms today that are known to be more than twenty-five years old.

The Larkin boys had one gander that they prized especially. It seems this bird got to be a member of the family, and Frank swears he house-broke him, like a dog. He stalked about the farmyard with a lordly air, allegedly afraid of nothing that flew or walked, including dogs, pigs, men, and geese. 'Tis said many an unhappy neighbor's dog, unacquainted with this goose's overlordship, was put to yelping flight as the old gentleman's pinions caught up with him.

"I'll bet that gander could have broken your leg with his wings if he had caught you right," Frank Larkin recalls.

In the hunting seasons of those old days the patriarch really came into his own. Frank says the old boy was as disappointed as any hunting dog at being left behind. Wild birds lighting out of range of the pit were handled beautifully by the old chap. He was never tethered, for he would not attempt to escape. He would amble slowly over to the shy strangers, lick the biggest gander in the flock, and bring the whole band back with him—in range!

Several years ago he was shot by a skulking pothunter. Ed Larkin heard the shot and saw the trespasser making off across the flat fields. The man had the brass to slay the goose in its own yard.

On the prairie you can see a man for miles. Ed Larkin knew the country and he knew the roads. He went into the house and put on a pair of skintight gloves, good for holding the knuckles together in a scrap. Then he stepped into the farm truck, drove discreetly down this road and that road, and finally headed off the thief.

Neighbors recall the event as a satisfactory settlement of all issues involved. And the old goose? What of him?

The Larkin boys gave him decent burial. Eat that old friend? I should say not! You don't know the Larkin boys!

Talk rambled on as the sun rose, the fog thinned, and the Larkin boys started the new combine to rattling in a distant field of soybeans. Earl watched half the horizon and I the other half. The sun grew warmer, The wind picked up. It was to be a warm day for late November in Wisconsin.

Abruptly I sensed Earl's languor change to frozen intensity. Often this sudden change in a companion of the blind is sensed before it is seen. You may be sitting there back to back, not touching, and it

happens. A halt in the middle of a sentence, the quick stamping on a cigarette, a sharp intake of breath—this is the unspoken language of the blind.

The transition came in seconds' time. I followed Earl's eyes and saw the moving thread in the sky that was taking a different route than the other moving threads had taken.

"Down! Down! We're going to get shooting!"

Sweeter words are not spoken in goose pits. We carefully pulled the light pit cover over our heads and watched the oncoming birds, first by tilting the cover a little, and then, as the birds neared, by staring straight up through the minute holes in the lid.

The geese were honking like mad. Earl's cork decoys were doing the trick. Let no man declare that well-made cork decoys will not draw Canadas. The flock came over us about a hundred yards high, made a wide swing in back of us, and then set their wings and zoomed straight over our heads at the decoys. There is no other spectacle in all wildfowling like this!

But at the moment we had little time to think of the miracle of flight which hung over us. A man who hunts is often thus a victim of mixed emotions. There is the breath-catching sight of great birds and there is his hunter's heart skipping beats. Earl May is a veteran of the goose pits, but that morning he trembled as with the ague. Later I mentioned it and he retorted: "How about yourself? I heard your teeth clicking above the clatter of Ed Larkin's combine!"

It is indeed a shame that so few sportsmen go to the pains of preparing for geese. It does take work. Pit blinds carefully made. Faultless decoys. Far-shooting guns. And long, cold waits. But it is worth it to see those tremendous birds, wings stiffened, black legs straight out, come sailing overhead.

At such a time the very air seems to become a heavier medium than the air that ducks zip through. How could it be otherwise and support such heavy-bodied flyers? Coming in like that, especially after the hunter has worked on ducks, they give one the sensation of entertaining the winged hosts of another planet.

The approach of wild geese to a blind is one of the neatest optical illusions in nature. The geese just keep on coming. You think they are one hundred yards away, and they are two hundred. You think they are fifty yards away, and they are one hundred. There is an illusion in such flight that upsets the calculations of even the veterans, and especially will it upset the hunter keyed to ducks. I have seen this illusion carried out even in motion pictures in which wild geese seem to fly straight into the camera lens interminably, getting bigger and bigger.

The geese, about fifteen of them, were over the decoys, hanging there, it seemed. I saw Earl's right hand dart upward like a snake and fling aside the lid of the blind. He grunted something which must have been intended for "Now!" but sounded more like "A-a-ark!" pronounced through clenched teeth. I saw his little 16-gauge flash to his big shoulder and felt sorry for him with that peashooter. But he likes the gun and picks his bird.

Three times the 16-gauge barked, at the same bird, which tumbled. And then Earl was yelling: "Shoot! For God's sake, man shoot!"

Fortunately, as he yelled, he also removed his right foot from where it pinned down my left foot in the crowded blind, and then I had room to stand and operate the double-barrel 12-gauge.

At the open barrel feathers flew. The goose was getting 'way out when the tight barrel caught him. Earl May swears that goose was one hundred yards away by then, that it was just a stray No. 2 buck that clipped its right pinion, that the fall of thirty yards to the frozen prairie was what really killed it. Suffice it that at this moment the Larkin boys shut off the combine in the soybean field a half mile away, and Ed said later he heard the bird hit the prairie.

Pure luck! Two geese, when we might have had two apiece with heavier armament and a little more care in arranging ourselves in a cramped blind. But two corn-fed geese can be quite a load to haul in from the prairie, and they can take up a lot of room in a pit blind, too: Both were Canadas, mine about 8 pounds, Earl's close to 12.

Genial Ed Larkin came down to the blind shortly after to declare he never saw such awful shooting. That morning this farmer-sportsman released a dozen cock pheasants of his own raising, so that they might go forth and replenish their kind in the neighborhood. While he was completing this job, not far from our blind, Earl May caught sight of a new convoy of Canadas working toward us. Ed sought the nearest cover, which was in the pit. He got in the bottom of it, and I tell you we literally stood on his back in the crowded blind.

There was Ed Larkin, scrunched down between us, cussing Earl for having such big feet, and there were eight sociable honkers making that long, stiff-winged toboggan slide into our decoys. I recall that as Earl let go with his 16-gauge Ed yelled, "Give it to 'em but get off my hand!" And I remember that once again I got my elbows over the rim of the pit, and by that time Earl had one down and running and I said to myself, "Here's where I make a double!"

But again the open barrel merely dusted feathers, and it took the close barrel to knock him down. I vowed by all that was holy to level nothing but a 10-gauge or a super 12 at them next year.

They can be hit. They are not such elusive targets by any means. But the thing is to hit them hard and make them stay hit.

Never shall I forget Earl legging it over the frozen prairie after that runner. The bird took him a half mile, through fences, across a creek, over plowed fields. When he returned, red-faced and perspiring, with 10 pounds of Canada draped over his shoulder, I struck while the iron was hot: "That 16 is all right for ducks, but not for these birds. I'm none too confident with the 12."

"I love that gun like a brother, and I'll probably never change, but I believe you're right," he replied.

It was nearly noon. The November sun was showing how kindly it could be even four days before the deer season. Ed Larkin returned to the combine in the soybean field. Earl and I stood in the blind and talked. It is a great part of hunting, this talk. Nothing was moving except ducks, and we were in no mood to stage an anti-climax duck hunt. So we stayed out the shooting hours in the pit, reaching down now and then to stroke the fat breasts of four great black-legged Canadas.

"I'll be doggoned if I know what a man would do with more than a couple of 'em," Earl remarked.

I left Earl in the Larkin yard that night, with the combine closing in swiftly on the small square patch of remaining soybeans. Earl would hunt a few more days there, then haul out for the deer woods, 350 miles north. The next morning he would be out there with Ed, and they would see the eddying morning fog and the windmill that looked like a church steeple and the great gray geese trading over the plain to the feeding places.

"I hope you get a buck," I said, leaving.

"I don't deserve one after this," he answered.

I drove home. Not swiftly, for I was already two hours late and the supper I had said I would be on hand for was long over when finally I arrived, cold and hungry. I put the car away. I hung hunting clothes on the proper hook. I put the 12-gauge in its corner.

The lady who tolerates me said: "Huh! You should have gone duck-hunting. Now we'll have to buy a Thanksgiving turkey." Then she added, exercising the right of all women to scan the timecard: "We had a swell supper, but all I can give you is leftovers. After all, you're two hours late. . . ."

She was sitting in a chair in the living room, bent over some mysterious chore with a needle which we goose hunters never quite come to understand. I retrieved the two Canadas from the vestibule by the kitchen door and, while she sat there with her back to me, tossed them over her head to her feet. *Thump! Thump!*

Let it be reported that she dropped the needlework in the chair. I know, for later I sat on it and felt the needle. But that was long after I had cleaned up on the finest late-evening emergency supper that any goose hunter ever had—and no leftovers, either, gentlemen.

DUCK EXPRESS, LIMITED

by *H. L. Betten*

As a rule, the Californian enjoys calm, sunshiny days and shirt-sleeve temperatures for his duck shooting. Widespread reclamation has necessitated the artificial setup in the main. This has taken practically all of the rough stuff out of wildfowling. Here the average club shooter growls fiercely if he has to walk more than three hundred yards from a parked car to his dry sunken tank or barrel. Pond shooting on the preserves is mostly at short range with fowl in second or in low gear. Of course, even so, it is not difficult to miss apparently soft marks.

Duck shooting at Weiber's is decidedly different. "Long" John Weiber is a relic of the ancient tribe of market hunters once numerous in California. A tall, rawboned North German of powerful physique, the years have marked him lightly except for occasional twinges of rheumatism. John still loves his gunning, and year after year, while his great delta farm is being irrigated, goes on a veritable duck spree. Fortunate is the man invited to join him when the ancient natural pass which bisects his lands is briefly restored.

John, by the way, has an utter contempt for pond shooting over decoys. His axiom is: "The faster and higher they fly, the harder they fall." And the flight ducks which go on speed jags along the air lines of the old flyway sure do smoke it up.

Last year, after a long layoff, Jupiter P. got to work in earnest. He flooded our broad valleys and scattered fairly numerous wildfowl to the four winds. While preserve shooters raved, quackers and geese found abundant food, water, and loafing grounds far from the haunts of the maddened gunners. Nevertheless, when John eventually issued marching orders, I felt certain the old-timer had an ace or two up his sleeve.

I quickly relayed John's message to the Baron, an old accessory of ours. It was storming at the time, and the well-seasoned Briton, who is no spring chicken, protested fiercely. "Don't think I'm balmy enough to risk pneumonia in this beastly weather," he shot at me with fine

sarcasm. "Old John must be out of his head, wanting to shoot at a time like this. Er—how soon would we have to start? Infernally short notice this, old man."

"Stop moaning. Get your duffel together pronto and meet me here within two hours," said I. "Time, ducks, and Long John Weiber wait for no man."

The delta looks sodden and gray as the car slithers and sideslips along the dirt road which is a short cut across John's broad acres. Rain slaps against windows and the car groans in protest at the fierce hammering of the gale. The Baron sits hunched up, silent and apprehensive as the chariot threatens frequently to swerve off the slick elevated byway into the ditch below. I, too, miss the old bluebird weather and am in the dumps a bit myself.

Suddenly a flock of pintails looms up through the mist. I stop the car, and we watch them as, with powerful wingbeats, they progress slowly, very slowly, into the teeth of the gale. Other flocks follow, making heavy weather of it as they are buffeted by the wind. Whatever the impulses behind this movement, the fowl seem to face the breeze with keen delight, as if glorying in the strength which enables them to cope with the storm; certainly they do not challenge it through necessity.

This is grand natural drama. No matter how often you review such action, it holds you spellbound. We have no thought of slaughter—tomorrow is the appointed time for that. But we feast our eyes on the sight, and gloom vanishes as if by magic. After all, the stage setting is perfect. This is duck weather, as we knew and loved it in the old days. And so, in an exultant mood, we drive on to John's.

In the morning, rain falls and the southeaster continues to blow fiercely as we leave John's comfortable quarters and board an open truck. With skid chains all around, the asthmatic Model T coughs its way confidently along slippery roads and out across a sodden field where a heavier car must have sunk to the floor boards. It is cold riding thus, with hard-driven raindrops pelting our faces. Ears sting and eyes water as John comes to a stop on a well-drained high spot and orders us on afoot.

A brisk walk of a quarter mile or so and we reach the trough of the pass. The depression is studded here and there with clumps of wolf willows, and water stands in the hollows.

"It gives a good flight after a while," advises John. "But this early it will be slow. Sprigs are not so many this year, but so many mallards and gray ducks I have not seen for a long time. We shoot only big ducks today—never mind teals and spoonies."

We take stations cross-wind and about one hundred yards apart,

John in the center, and proceed to build shelters from tumbleweeds. In fifteen minutes we are ready. Meanwhile the inevitable sneakers pass tantalizingly close while the gun lies yonder. When the blind is firmly anchored and I am all set for action, I experience a blank half hour. I fancy I hear the muffled report of John's big ten now and then, but am not sure; I cannot see him, as vision does not extend more than fifty yards through gloom and mist.

At length I hear the crazy laughter of white-fronted geese somewhere down-wind; they sound very close, but I fail to see them. Their jangling seems to slip gradually to the side and grows fainter and fainter, then ceases altogether. Minutes after the communistic gabble dies out I hear the anxious notes of a stray seeking to join his vanished company. I answer him call for call; and, throwing caution to the winds, he sails straight in along my vocal beam.

Suddenly the goose looms up, big as a caboose, through the curtain of rain. Simultaneously, or sooner, he spots me, hisses his surprise, and throws himself back on his haunches with frenzied whishes of powerful wings. On the instant the blue tubes slip up fast from behind, a charge of sixes smacks the big goose plumb in the middle with a powerful "sock," and he thumps the ground.

With long intervals between, flocks of mallards and widgeon, an occasional squadron of pintails, and now and then a lone gadwall or a pair of those solitary birds show themselves momentarily at distances too great to warrant shooting. Once, during a lull of the wind, I catch the dull "boong, boong" of Big Bertha and wonder how John is making it.

Not all the flight fights the gale. There is a sudden crackle of wings to windward, and while my eyes search the watery sky a trio of mallards darts overhead with the speed of arrows. They startle me so that I hang fire mentally and send a wild, belated shot after them as they fade out of sight.

Now comes a lone duck—a big duck—headed my way. It creeps up slowly, very slowly against the buffeting wind. A hen mallard, I guess, but quickly withdraw that and call it a gadwall—which it is. A heavy gust flings it to my left, so that it is thirty yards or so out when it comes abreast. Then a sudden frenzy of the gale holds it practically stationary in the air. This is just too easy.

I carefully measure off a good three feet of lead (an extravagant amount, I believe), touch off the brimstone—and nothing happens. That gray duck doesn't as much as bat an eye or wiggle his tail. Zounds! Close he is; no need to hurry. I measure him coolly for a knockout and let drive with the second barrel. Again an undeniable clean miss—not a feather ruffled. It doesn't seem possible, but there

he goes. And for the life of me, I don't know how or where I went wrong.

By now the beneficent influence of the initial shot and kill has vamoosed, and I commence to grope and guess wildly at essential leads. A very bad half hour with both fast-flying and slow-moving targets results; I'm mighty glad that dense curtain of vapor screens my horrible exhibition of marksmanship from John's eyes and leaves me to wrestle unseen with degradation and despair. Halfheartedly I cook up alibis for personal consumption, but the plain, unvarnished truth is that I'm in a slump.

At length I fortunately get a break and see the light. A large flock of widgeon, every muscle of powerful wings strained to the utmost, slowly worms its way up-wind. They fly in a V instead of the usual crescent formation. When fully abreast, the nearest birds are perhaps thirty-five yards from the gun. I swing evenly a full yard ahead of a conspicuous drake and fire. He proceeds unscathed, but a duck four or five feet rearward of him bumps squarely into the core of the shot charge and crumbles. It is almost unbelievable that such an amount of forward lead is required to tag fowl moving at a snail's pace against a gale. But whether you swing the barrels evenly an apparently preposterous distance ahead of the mark or overtake it with a fast swing, a large lead is demanded.

A gadwall follows the widgeon over the top, affording a quartering shot. With a swift, sure swing I send the tubes well ahead of the gray drake and let drive. He seems to bounce sideways under the impact of the sixes and falls dead as a wedge.

Super leads are also the right prescription on hard-driven birds that sizzle by down-wind with the proverbial speed of bats from Hades. The experienced battery shooter knows he must hold far in advance of consistently fast-flying deep-water ducks, such as canvasback, broadbill, and redheads. But the heavy leads required in battery gunning must be at least doubled on gale-driven wildfowl.

I demonstrate this fact by holding the width of a county—more or less—ahead of a drake mallard intent on going places and folding him up neatly. I repeat the performance by singling out and smacking down the lead duck of a pair of gadwalls. The salient points of that slowly learned but easily forgotten lesson—lead; more lead; still more lead—come back to me. It cannot be given concretely; the scale must be elastic. But one thing is certain: unless you resort to wild, blind shooting, it is mighty hard to lead the feathered comets too much.

At this stage the warm rays of success again shine upon me. What though the wind whistles shrilly through the breastwork of tumbleweeds, skies are murky, and sullen showers pelt down? It's a fine day

nevertheless; this is old-fashioned duck weather. I decide this is a great old world after all. I make the further sage decision that duck shooting is a great and princely sport, and damned be they who cunningly contrive to legislate it off the boards. I wonder how John and the irrepressible Baron are making it; I wish them well, the very best luck in the world.

Eventually the gale moderates and skies lighten a bit. Rain still falls spasmodically, but now only in halfhearted showers. Soon John's shelter is clearly visible and also the Baron's.

There comes a definite lull in the flight when the board of strategy gathers at John's stand to gossip, compare notes, and reorganize forces. John has cracked down a number of fowl. The Baron has only two in the bag—long ones at that—and complains bitterly about the inferiority of his ammunition and about this and that, but never a word about deficient marksmanship.

"Yah, when a duck can't swim, then the water ain't good," is John's sarcastic retort. "You hold the gun right, little geezer, and the ducks they come down."

There is a lot to the old-timer's contention. Too often we blame the ammunition when our holding is at fault. All the power that modern science can cram into a shell avails us nothing unless leads are right; when they are, you don't require super-super shells to knock high-flying wildfowl for a goal. That has been proved beyond the possibility of a doubt, but still we persist in falling for that psychological influence of "big bump" loads.

In the heyday of the 10-gauge many a crack shot confined the shot charge to a bare ounce. Today we attempt to crowd two ounces into a ten—to no good end. The fact is, shotgun ballistics far outstrip our holding ability.

Although it still lacks an hour of noon, John's thoughtful suggestion that we boil the billy and eat a snack receives a hearty "aye, aye." Out of his haversack come the ingredients. Dexterity has come from long years of experience on native fens and Western marshes. No thermos bottle for him. The coffeepot is filled with water from a convenient pot-hole, a small bundle of resinous wood from the rucksack serves as fuel, a dash of turpentine from a tiny vial sets it ablaze, and in spite of the drizzle we sample scorching hot coffee in a jiffy. Afterward we replenish the fire with stubs from a dead willow and wax reminiscent as we watch the glowing coals and absorb the pleasant heat.

John tells of myriads, actual millions, of wildfowl that once thronged this same thoroughfare, long before he took possession. His eyes take on a faraway look.

"Geeze so many they are countless," he declares. "A farmer has a

great field of young wheat or barley at night, and by morning all is gone—tough to be a grain farmer those days. Ducks, ducks, ducks—everywhere. When they fly, it is like big black thunderclouds, and the noise they make is like thunder, too. Flocks and flocks of sand-hill cranes and great white whooper cranes and swans are there. Often at night I can't sleep from all the noises. It is worst when big flights come suddenly from north, or when something in the air makes them uneasy. Then every bird is yelling his head off, like he's gone crazy. Sometimes, when noise is the loudest, I think I gone crazy myself. Then they go 'whoom, whoom, whoom'—flock on flock, thousands and thousands in each. They twist in the air like waterspouts, and it sounds like ship's canvas tearing in hurricane.

"At last they leave, all together, and after all that noise it is too quiet and lonely. Soon I wish they come back or others will come so life and sound is in the sky again. And those days others come quickly to take their place. Now not many come, and then only for a week or so when I irrigate. Maybe it is only ghosts that come back.

"All over America it is the same as here. Everywhere they drain the water away so ducks cannot breed or even live. How can water birds live when is nothing but dry land? I do this; a million other farmers do this; the Government do this. Then they wonder why are not many ducks, and they blame the guns. Bah!"

I know that Long John says truth; I too have seen this vast delta, with its fifty or more large islands, once constantly subject to tidal and flood overflow, drained dry as a bone. The back of my hand to so-called reclamationists in general.

The Baron tells about the enormous numbers of wildfowl once seen on the Fraser and Skagit deltas. Then he blandly adds that Lord Stoke on Trent, or somebody, once killed so many ducks during a heavy flight along the Fraser that it was impossible to put them all in one pile. John makes no immediate comment, but about a half hour later he questions the accuracy of that statement and insinuates that both his lordship and the Baron are natural-born liars.

Thus we gossip and yarn for an hour or more. It helps to relieve the collective burden of some two-hundred-odd years that Father Time has laid on our shoulders. We have participated in the golden age of gunning. And that's something they can't take away from us, those ringing memories.

The wind veers, and the back of the storm is broken. Now great cumulus clouds chase the thunderheads into the fastnesses of the distant Sierras and all troops of the southeaster are in full retreat. Old Sol gets a hammer lock on gloom, and a snappy breeze from the northwest gains strength; somewhere down the line it disrupts a pintail

congress, and a steady flight develops. Flocks buck the wind at heights just within the deadly range of a close-shooting twelve.

We seek new stations, the general line of flight having moved southward along the trough. A flock approaches head on; the setup looks easy. I pull ahead of a big bull sprig with a foot-long spike and touch off with ample lead—so I think. No go. A clean miss. The second blast likewise, for I senselessly increase lead. The intended victim, soaring and winging almost straight upward at the moment, presents an entirely different aiming problem from two seconds before. Holding a foot or two ahead of his beak, to compensate for the rise, advance, and shot driftage, would have done the trick.

The next flock finds me ready with approximately right answers. I swing possibly ten feet ahead of a drake. Still not enough; he slants down, a sure sign he is hit too far back. However, when the flock rockets, I hold fairly close to a rising bird and smack him solidly with the core of the shot charge. The fact is, all the shallow-water or puddle ducks are "springers" once they are alarmed.

The Baron yells approvingly from the stand to my right when I jerk a brace from on high shortly after with a perfectly timed one-two, as deadly as a dynamite left and right from old Fitz's murderous maulies. But his own range finder fails to function. I drift over his way to inject some unsought advice, and find him in the dumps.

"Damnation, I'm hitting on only one cylinder," he admits gloomily. "It's the bally ammunition—the makers have conspired against me for years. That blooming clerk, too, who sold me this stuff; I'll tell him ample when I get back to town, the blighter."

"Here, take some of my shells. And let me have a few of your duds," I propose. Of course I aim to belittle the old codger with some of his own stuff. "Lead 'em plenty when they come full tilt; hold close to and above 'em when they soar," I add magnanimously.

To hit is history, and the Baron promptly annexes fame by smacking down birds with commendable regularity. On the other hand, I don't do so well with his alleged duds. For one thing, I forget that acrobatic puddle ducks often slip backward briefly while doing a spiral.

The duck flight falls to a whisper, but we linger on. John pays me a visit, and talk turns to geese and their present scarcity. Soon after, as if to confound our pessimism, a flock of honkers sweeps down-wind with measured wingbeats, a sure sign they want to light. At the right moment John sounds the clan call. It brings a quickening of wings and an answer. The flock makes a hairpin turn.

The veteran crouched beside me chatters seductively as the big geese come head on—right in the bag, it seems. But when they are still seventy yards out, they start a sideslip. Too late, however. As they angle

away we cut loose. Thump! Thump! Two hefty honkers hit the ground with soul-stirring bumps; a third wobbles away a hundred yards or so, only to collapse suddenly as his strong heart fails him. The Baron, too, gets lengthy cracks at the survivors and topples one.

The coup climaxes a fine day, and very wisely we call a halt. Some tall talk, and we plod to the truck with our spoils.

Not much later the Baron and I hit the homeward trail. Again the car weaves crazily along the miry crossroad; once more we stop midway. The sun has sunk in glory behind dusky battlements of the Coast Range, the vast delta is wrapped in shadow, the sky seems void of life. But at length, at a distance, a belated flock of pintails cleaves the air with eager wings. It is the final esthetic touch needed to perfect the sporting scene.

THE BLACKS OF COFFEE LAKE

by Charles E. Cox, Jr.

THE rain increased as Gayle halted on the popple ridge. On ahead, a ragged line of young mallards cleared the rusty tamaracks and with soft, fussy talk and occasional flick of wing against wing pitched into an unseen pot-hole. There were no other sounds after that but the drip of rain in the dark cedars flanking the big swamp.

We knew at that moment that summer was over and done. True, it was the first week of September and the last day of trout season. But our rods and our abbreviated, many-pocketed fishing jackets were the wrong accouterments on that ridge above the swamp. Even as we stood there a keener wind seemed to swing into the north; the rain chilled, and above the somber, suddenly autumnal earth a second wedge of mallards came. We listened to the high, thin swish of their approach until the rhythm broke at guttural signals into a shrill, fine song of descent. They pitched in with the first-comers.

"Looks like we've got something here," Gayle said.

I coiled my nine-foot tapered leader and put it away. The snap of the fastener on the round aluminum box was a click of finality and assent. I knew what was in Gayle's mind, all right. He stared off across the tamarack tops toward the rain-darkened Udell Hills, and he was making a mental map—estimating distance, orienting roads.

"How about the old Pole Bridge?" I suggested.

"That's the place," Gayle agreed. "We could put in there and take the boat out at the High Rollway."

"A long float," I said, "and a half-mile carry to the car when we take out, but that's what makes it good. If it's too easy, other fellows would have floated the river before now."

We must have been figuring on something like this all that September day. Trout fishing was poor. We had been restless. I would glance back from the bend in the stream and see Gayle standing on a bar looking into the sky, his head half turned as though listening.

At noontime we decided to explore the mouth of Bear Creek. Gayle had heard that the last quarter mile before the brook entered the big

river swamp was firm underfoot and open enough to fly-fish. It wasn't a good idea. But we blundered on over popple ridges and through cedar swales until at last, standing there with early dark not far away, we knew why we had come.

"October the first," Gayle said. He counted on his fingers. "Twenty-four—no, twenty-five days until the season opens. We'll put the boat in at the Pole Bridge and take out at the High Rollway Grade. A box of 7½s for the right barrel and 6s for the left. Right?"

"Right," I said.

It was black in that hour before dawn—black and fretful with rain. But that's right and proper. It isn't fitting for the first day of duck season to arrive with a bluebird sky. Even though the northern flights still gabble in their nesting grounds, the opening hours should hold gusty promise of wilder weather to come.

"We've still got a good forty minutes until shooting time," I said as Gayle turned out of the sandy ruts into a clearing and shut off the motor.

The Pole Bridge, sagging with age and blackened by ancient fires, spanned the dusky water entering the swamp. We lifted the boat from the car roof and carried it down to the water, returning for guns, lunch, and a sack of block decoys. Fog trailed through the treetops on a fitful wind. The light was coming—a drab steel-gray.

"Forty minutes! You can't crab about forty minutes when we've waited so many days." Storing the blocks in the bow, Gayle broke the seal on a box of shells.

I made a resting place for my gun, supporting it with a rolled jacket. "I'll take the first turn at the oars. But don't forget that when they get up, I'm going to put the helm hard over. You crabbled about that last year, but it's better than shooting through your hair."

"Come on," he whispered, glancing down the wood road. "Let's get around the bend—somebody else may have figured this the way we have."

We didn't know how many miles of river stretched ahead of us when I pushed out into the slow, brown current. The big swamp withheld such knowledge. That's what made it good. We knew that eight miles, or maybe ten, as the crow flies, the old log grade crossed the High Rollway. In between, the slow river eased away into the swamp, dividing at times into many lesser channels. Sometimes the lesser channels broadened into pot-holes.

Wind didn't reach us on the stream. Below the clearing, marsh grass closed in and the boat drifted without sound. Wet leaves padded down. The drip of rain became an undertone that gained pattering crescendo on gusts of wind.

Somewhere to the south guns boomed, and Gayle half turned in his seat and grinned. But our boat moved on around the bend—a second bend—a third.

“Maybe they aren’t on the river,” I whispered huskily. “Maybe they’re back in the swamp holes.”

A grassy bar with a mud-flat point blocked the bend ahead. The river seemed to end abruptly in a meadow of golden cattails. For the tenth time I tested my reach from oar handle to moisture-beaded barrels, so that the motion would be all in one piece when the right time came. And then, as my head came up, we heard the soft gabbling quack of a hen. It came from across the mud flat at the end of the cattail meadow where the river doubled back.

Beyond the point a trickle of river ran off into the grass. The boat turned in a gust of wind. On the mud flat a downy feather fluttered like a beckoning flag and settled again into the ooze.

My eyes followed the gurgling course of the lesser stream winding away into the cattails—and stopped. Snaky heads raised above the wind-broken grass. Gayle shivered. I felt that shiver run through the boat.

Silence for a moment, and then, in one vaulting leap, a dozen blacks were ten feet high and roaring straight up into the gray sky. My practiced hand whisked from oar to gun and missed the grip. Straight overhead were orange webs and the white underwings of big-bodied mallards. Gayle pulled a straggler on the right flank, and I shot fast—straight up—and missed.

Seventy feet out the flock veered right. Leaning back with my face to the sky, I slipped the barrels under a crossing pair and pulled. Their heads snapped back—they hit the open water in the wide bend, throwing up twin geysers of spray. Beyond them a third duck lay stone-dead. Beyond that a fourth paddled in an aimless midstream circle and ceased all motion even as I looked.

Gayle broke his gun and faced me, watching the smoke curl from the barrels. “Nice going,” he said, his voice too calm.

All at once my back was tired. Far off in the west, where two black specks faded into invisibility, a crescent of blue sky showed. The rain was over.

“That straight-up shooting reminded me of my kid days, when I used to slingshot sparrows off telephone wires,” Gayle said. He ruffled himself like a wet hen and stretched his legs. “I’d get right under ’em, and you could see the pebbles outlined against the sky as they whizzed by. I was a very consistent sparrow slayer in my kid days. Man, oh man, but this old world is a good place to live in!”

The drifting boat approached the four motionless birds, and we

reached overside for the long, sleek necks. They were purple-sheened—big-bodied. We took a long time gathering them in.

To the south guns boomed again ten or twelve times.

"Some of the boys on the Burley Point," I suggested.

We changed places, Gayle talking quietly as we eased by each other in the boat, just as though it weren't a ticklish stunt to change horses in midstream.

"Funny thing about duck shooting. You never know which is the best—jump-shooting them like this or taking them over the decoys or walking them up in an open marsh." Seated in the stern, he gave a little experimental push on the oars and eyed the next bend. "The swell part of it is that when you're jumping 'em that's best. Let's go."

We felt sure that there would be no ducks in the next stretch because of our bombardment, so we hurried on and jumped a pair in less than a hundred yards. They piled out through an opening in the cedars and were gone without a shot. After that, for an hour we didn't see a bird.

The river began to change. The small channels of water that ran off through the cattails increased in number. The main current became a scent twenty feet in width. And then we ran a fast, gurgling chute through a thicket of swamp elm and came out on a grassy flat, where the water widened into a small coffee-colored lake.

At the lower end of the lake a small flock of mallards fanned up and faded away into a wavering line against the crescent of blue. Singles jumped out of range to left and right, circling and disappearing over the tamarack. Midway of the narrow lake Gayle ran the boat ashore, and we got out.

"Blocks?" I questioned.

"What do you think?"

"Well," I said, blowing tobacco grains from the reed of my caller, "jumping 'em is best when you're jumping 'em. But decoys—I always did like decoys."

He shouldered the sack, heading for a point. I slid the boat into the grass and followed. We cut alder poles for a blind, and Gayle made the set.

"Nothing but an opening-day duck would look at those battle-scarred pieces of wood," he said as we crawled into the blind. "One canvasback drake, one bluebill, and four mallards. They're part of my memory book—sort of good-luck charms. I brought that 'can' home from Texas fifteen years ago. Used him as a doorstop and even as a paperweight when my prodigious labors warranted."

"The bluebill?" I prompted.

"From the Mississippi, where they call 'em BBs. I can look at that

big one and see the Texas coast as clear as life. And the BB will always bring the smell of that Old Man River houseboat. Nothing smells like the inside of a houseboat except another houseboat."

We squatted on dry grassy hummocks and ate lunch. The clouds burnt out, and hazy sunlight warmed the marsh. Far off in the upper sky a gabbling string of geese loafed along south.

Finishing a sandwich, I sat on the back of my neck and watched a hole in the blind above the blocks where a hovering gnat, three feet away, looked like a mallard at a hundred yards.

"You know," Gayle said, "I'm sort of glad I'm getting old." He hesitated. "That is, I'm glad that I look at things differently than I did when I was younger.

"Last spring I read an article about the failure of American public shooting. Conservation departments are just high-powered license salesmen according to this writer's piece. They put out publicity like oil-stock salesmen and sell hunting licenses at a dollar a head, when in reality there isn't any shooting to be had. This author said the South had the right idea and always had had it. Game went with the land. To get shooting you leased the shooting privileges.

"Well," he concluded, rearing up and fishing for cigarettes, "when I can't go out on my own two legs and have fun with a gun or a fishing rod, why, they can have it. When that time comes, I'll collect butterflies."

There was no crowding here in the big swamp. No game wardens, no publicity. Distant guns occasionally grumbled, but they were too far away to break the stillness of the coffee-colored lake. Insects droned a symphony in the golden grass about us. I blinked sleepily, my eye still on the hole in the roof. The hovering gnat had picked up a couple of friends.

"Get down!" I whispered. "Douse that cigarette."

We squatted on our knees and heard the rhythmic "swish-swish-swish" of passing wings. They drilled away over the marsh and returned.

"Cagey," Gayle grumbled.

Low above the first rank of cedars they swung and came toward us.

"They won't pitch in," I said. "Let's take 'em this trip over. On your mark." I paused. "Get set. Go!"

When we raised up, they flared like a bomb breaking into three equal fragments. The left-hand bird dropped at my first barrel. I swung for the leader. He flinched—recovered and drove on. Gayle shot, and the bird spun into the grass far behind the blind.

"Two on the water, stone-dead," Gayle called after me.

I was plowing through the heavy grass. Fifty yards from the blind, I

stepped through a spongy trap door into three feet of ooze. A good long reach ahead of me the crippled black crawled snakily for a clump of cattails. I could blow his head off if I didn't miss and blow a hole in the big dark body.

"Here he is!" I yelled.

Gayle nabbed the long shining neck as it faded into the grass. As he stood erect, holding the bird triumphantly aloft, he sank downward to his belt buckle. The triumphant gesture and the slow descent with flapping duck in hand were very dramatic.

"What are you doing?" I said. "Playing Houdini?"

Groveling on my belly, I worked my legs free, unloaded my gun, and passed him the end of the barrels. Paddling like mud puppies, we squirmed back to firm ground.

At one o'clock we gathered our decoys and journeyed on. The river became a labyrinth of channels, shrouded darkly at times with cedar and hemlock. Sometimes, back in the cover, ducks pounded out. Twice grouse flushed from the bank and crossed the stream in a dizzy double turn. The channels converged again, and a reunited river turned north.

"When do you figure we'll hit the High Rollway?" I mused aloud.

"We won't ever hit it going north. Look there to the left," Gayle pointed.

Beyond the border of river alders a hay meadow rolled away under the sun. It was a good quarter of a mile long and half as wide. Easing the boat into an opening, we stepped out.

The meadow was firm underfoot and the grass short. Occasional puddles reflected light. As we walked away from the riverbank a jack-snipe flared dizzily, cursing us with a rusty, petulant cry. We retreated to the boat and pocketed all of our 7½s.

"It's a dirty swindle, this public shooting," I said, and turned away to laugh in silence at Gayle's mud-dabbed lower half.

Both of us looked like things that crawl out from under rocks in the spring. We started down the river side of the sunlit meadow, guns ready. Another snipe leaped out, and I missed him with both barrels. Two more bailed out of the grass as I broke my gun, and a third popped from under Gayle's feet. He shot twice too.

"I'll tell you what's the trouble," I said, experiencing the mental agility of all great alibi artists. "We're all geared for jump ducks, and we're overshooting these babies."

"You mean we're not geared," Gayle chortled.

After a hundred yards of walking in a straight line toward the far end of the meadow, my barrels were hot to the touch. I had three little feathered tidbits in a shell pocket, and the sun was a bare handsbreadth

above the pointed hemlocks, the High Rollway an hour ahead on the river—or maybe two, or maybe ten.

The stream became a dark tunnel after the sunlit tawniness of the open field. I pushed out into the main current and quickened my stroke.

Two bends later we heard ducks. The fuss of an amorous drake and the squawk of an irate hen came distinctly through the quiet aisles of evergreens. The boat coursed down a straight channel into an open pool, and on the far side four mallards leaped through the sun-moted gloom and out to the open sky. One straggler offered a possible shot, but as Gayle's gun came up a single bounced from behind a lichen-covered log on the right shore. I put the helm hard over as the barrels swung. At the crash another single leaped.

"Come up here in front," Gayle commanded as I pushed over to the two big drakes on the water.

My watch, mud-caked and possibly wet inside, insisted that it was half-past three. Thirty minutes to shoot.

The cedars below the pool moved back on left and right, and we were in open marsh again. It was a mild autumnal afternoon now. Small white clouds drifted in the west, and the dome above was October's best bright blue. Birds called from quiet reaches of the swamp. The drip of the oars came with soothing regularity.

A grassy island divided the slow current, and half adream, I noted that the minute hand of my watch had moved to three minutes before the hour. And then, as we slipped abreast of the island, a greenhead drake stood twenty feet away on the lower tip of the shoaling bar. All that day I had wished for that: one gallant greenhead among the husky blacks. The low sunlight bathed his gaudy dress, and the clean collar about the slender throat gleamed ermine-white. The trim head came high. A dark eye probed deeply into mine.

Sometimes I go soft inside. I can't quite explain it. But there have been moments when a rising grouse in the morning sun has touched such a dramatic glory within me that the gun refuses to come up—the triggers just won't press. It was like that now. So help me, I'm glad it happens sometimes. We had all the meat we needed. The weather was warm for keeping game.

With a great leap the drake breasted the golden tide of the setting sun. Forevermore I'll see him like that: clearing the tops of the black cedars, beating upward into a flamboyant sky.

Turning around in the boat, I saw that Gayle was grinning at me. "Where the h—— do you think this High Rollway is?" I asked.

He shook his head.

The sun lowered, and under the wing of shadows night sounds began.

Cool air came drifting with the age-old odors of the swamp. The current chucked throatily, and a muskrat furrowed an arrowhead of ripples in the gloom.

"Now you feel it," Gayle said softly, "the big swamp."

But it was an uncomfortable feeling as the dusk deepened into dark. Owls talked back in the woods. A shrill, choked scream put the hairs up on my neck.

The river was the only way out. We knew that a man could blunder about for hours before reaching the popple ridges that joined the sand roads. If the High Rollway failed to show, we were in for a night fire on a low, sodden bank. The river divided again. The boat twisted and bumped on hidden logs. And then we cleared a bend, and the high sand cliff of the Rollway gleamed ghost-white.

Gayle took a long, deep breath.

Before us stretched a half-mile blunder through the dark to my ancient car, parked at the end of the grade. Boat, ducks, decoys, and guns. We stepped out on warm sand and gained the crest of the bank and met a fair new moon rising above the ridge. That's a good-luck sign by the ancient law.

OPENING DAY ON BARNEGAT

by C. Blackburn Miller

TO QUALIFY as a successful duck hunter, one must have the nerve to take it, the ability to hit ducks, and a patience that surpasseth all understanding. I can lay claim to none of these necessary qualities.

Sitting still for long, dreary hours in rain-drenched clothes has never held any especial appeal for me. The number of feathered corpses that have born testimony to my erratic aim is far exceeded by those myriad fowl that have winged their way to safety in spite of my utmost efforts. I also weary of watching the tide flood and then reverse itself every six hours, nor is the contemplation of a bunch of withered sedge any panacea for my boredom.

I have watched, with admiration and amazement, men who would warp themselves into blind or battery and then, with compressed lips and staring eyes, scan a collection of black dots moving rapidly across the distant horizon. A single word or motion on my part at this critical point would immediately call forth harsh warnings and invectives from those whom I had once called friends.

Duck shooting is a pastime pursued by mortals whose heads are in the clouds and whose feet are in the mud. Men who might sleep through a sermon, or listen unperturbed to a new low in their favorite stock, become electrified with hysterical anticipation at the sound of a single quack.

Despite my unsympathetic attitude, I am frequently lured out into some dank and saturated blind with a friend named Sam Bonnell. Thus enters into this yarn the author of much of my misery.

Sam's enthusiasm is as contagious as the mumps. Ten minutes in his company, and the horizon of the future is densely populated with ducks, the sun always shines, and the wind is invariably from a favorable quarter. It was this enthusiasm which persuaded me to open the season with him last fall.

Predawn of opening day found us tearing along the dark roads in the direction of Barnegat. As we left the main highway and turned east to-

ward the bay we were greeted by the pungent smell of the marsh. Estuaries reflected the light of the moon, and the salt meadows stretched away in the semidarkness. I looked up at the clear silver moon sailing in a cloudless sky, and even my limited knowledge of duck lore told me that this would not be a good day for duck shooting.

Duck psychology is closely akin to that of man; neither cares to go to bed on such a night. Instead of dozing peacefully with head under wing during the quiet moonlit hours, old squaws go bustling off, seeking some haven where the black ducks hide, hoping, no doubt, to bring back some toothsome gossip which can be bandied about. Sprig and widgeon band together to go places, urged on by the witchery of the moon. Broadbill and coot explore new feeding grounds, while brant and geese, on tireless wing, are silhouetted against the stars. Dawn finds them hurrying back, fatigued and slightly ashamed of their nocturnal escapades, with the sole idea of sleeping it off out on the calm, unruffled bosom of the bay.

Dragging my thoughts away from this dreary trend, I turned to the Duke. "Did you bring the lunch?" I inquired.

"No. The guide always provides it. I threw in a sandwich apiece, however, and there's coffee in the thermos."

Another ten minutes and we drew up at a long, low pier at which were moored several motorboats. An empty car dozed dismally in the shadow of a shed.

"Where's our guide?" I asked.

"He's to meet us here at four-thirty."

"It's twenty minutes to five now."

A low rumble greeted my ears. I instinctively looked to the east, fearing a coming storm. The horizon, however, was clear. The sound was repeated, this time with a sort of snarling vindictiveness. I was mystified. Sam strode to the apparently empty car, rattled the handle, and said, "Cheerio."

The rumbling ceased with a strangling rasp, the door opened, and an angular figure appeared. It was Olsen, our guide. Owing to the fact that his alarm clock was by no means reliable, he had taken the precaution of sleeping in his car so as not to keep us waiting.

We stowed our luggage aboard his garvey, slid from the slimy stringers, and were soon chugging down the watery lane leading to the bay. A little wind from the south breathed upon us and tiny waves slapped against the bow. To the northeast blinked the old lighthouse of Barnegat Inlet, and in front lay a faint illumination over Harvey Cedars.

After a half hour's run a low, squat island loomed out of the darkness. It was a naked affair with neither brush nor reed to relieve its contours.

A hundred yards long, perhaps twenty wide, this quaking strip of meadow sod was to be our realm for the day.

In from the shore line some thirty feet was a capacious box of red cedar, sunk to the sod's level. This was the blind into which we lowered ourselves while Olsen chugged away to conceal the powerboat. Soon he returned with a sneak box heavily laden with decoys.

While we waited for the light to break in the east I listened to the mice prowling in the salt hay which lay about our blind. A faint flush lightened the sky and a bank of rose-colored clouds appeared on the horizon. Overhead sounded the whistle of invisible wings, while far out on the bay a lone goose called. Sam snapped his ro-gauge together.

"All set," he said.

At this point Olsen returned, concealed the sneak box, and eased down into the blind beside us. It was very warm, even for the first of the season, and I felt myself perspiring profusely in my wadded armor. I heard a low, menacing hum. At first the sound puzzled me, and then I discovered that it was caused by swarms of mosquitoes, a rare occurrence during the duck season. Sam was prepared for this invasion, however, and, going into action with a spray gun, soon repelled the horde of murderous insects.

Suddenly the sun showed a rim of raw gold above the dunes across the bay. The muffled report of a gun sounded from the vicinity of Loveladies Island, and a band of widgeon, coming from nowhere, skirted our decoys. These were followed by a wedge of broadbill which appeared overhead, set their wings, and came down toward the stool. We held our breath and crouched low. Evidently suspicious, the birds flared and disappeared into the blue.

"You may remember that I told you there was game on the bay," said the Duke with a satisfied smile.

As we watched several flocks flying southward there came a sudden flurry of wings and a duck banked obliquely over the decoys. My gun was not yet at my shoulder when Sam's ro-gauge roared. The speeding fowl executed a somersault and slid for ten yards.

"A fat broadbill, that," commented Sam.

Olsen manned the oars and eventually returned with an evil-smelling sheldrake. Sam looked at its sawbill and expressed annoyance. Suddenly we noticed that a single was coming in fast.

"Take him," said Sam.

The duck turned in. It was a drake broadbill. He curved out, and I saw the sunlight gleam on his black head. The barrels covered him, and I fired. The bird never wavered. I fired the second barrel, with the same result, and watched him until he became but a mere speck across the water.

High in the air a lone sprig winged his way. It was apparent that his destination was elsewhere. Too high for my 12-gauge, he also seemed out of range for Sam, but the long barrels glistened in the sun, swept forward—and there came a booming report. The sprig folded up in mid-air—some shot that.

Then there came a lull in the proceedings. As the sun mounted higher it became perceptibly warmer. My friend, in a spirit of exasperation, threw off his coat and eventually his shirt. Just at this moment a brace of widgeon came in sight. I saw the Duke throw his gun to his shoulder, and at that precise instant a large greenhead fly came winging in over the decoys, cleared the edge of the blind, and lighted on Sam's ribs.

The bite preceded the pressure on the trigger by the fraction of a second. The gun went off, as did the ducks, and with a howl of pain Sam slapped his bare side.

Small flocks of sprig, forming a continuous procession, flew by, but evinced no interest in our decoys. Our guide became so pessimistic over the cold indifference of these ducks that he frequently omitted to crouch low in the blind and contented himself with muttering invectives at the speeding flocks.

I have heard it said that wildfowl have no color sense. This may be true, but I firmly believe that they can distinguish definite patches of light and dark, such as are found in the coloration of broadbill decoys. This variety of ducks stools well, and I rather think that it is because the coloring of the decoys is of such extreme contrast that similar species are attracted to them. The contrary appears true, however, in the case of sprig and other varieties where the decoys are necessarily more neutral-tinted. Fast-flying fowl overlook them and pass on.

Sam drew my attention to the north, where we could see large flocks of ducks flying close to the water. They were apparently heading our way, and unless something occurred to make them flare they looked easy money to me. We crouched low and peered nervously over the edge of the blind. The guide was also in a tremor of anticipation. The ducks were looming larger.

"Get down! Here they come!"

Without even looking, I crouched low and gripped my gun.

"Now let 'em have it!" said Sam, rising.

I stumbled to my feet and saw a large flock of ducks just circling over the decoys. This time we picked our birds and shot with care, and we had the satisfaction of seeing four ducks fall.

"We're in luck. They were widgeons," said Sam, ejecting his shells from the breech.

I did not place much importance in Olsen's derisive smile until he returned with our toll. They all proved to be sheldrakes, much to our

disgust. Just how we managed to select the only worthless ducks from that entire flock is completely beyond my comprehension.

There ensued an inactive period in which the sky was devoid of game of any description. At such a time patience is in demand. The board on which you sit assumes an adamantine solidity and you long ardently for a cushion. The tide gurgles monotonously, the reeds sway in the breeze. The sudden appearance of a lone crab in the water awakens your keen interest. You watch its vacillating progress over the mud of the bottom until it disappears beneath a bed of weeds. A great opportunity is thus presented to commune with your thoughts, but these are occasions when one's mental processes seem to solidify and as a result you just sit and ache.

"Look over there."

I followed Sam's gaze and saw a flock of geese. They were a mile away, winging southward. Olsen emitted a sound that was a mixture of a strangled hiccough and a falsetto bellow. A glance assured me that he was in no apparent pain, and then, as the ghastly cry was repeated, I realized that he was calling the geese. They were strung out against the sky, and from their slow flight I judged them to be very wing-weary.

In spite of our guide's most ardent efforts, the flock struggled on. Others followed them in long, wavery lines, but they were either too distant to hear our guide's clan call or were too shocked at the utterance to come any closer.

Our attention was diverted from the geese by a sudden commotion in the decoys. In their midst was a single cock broadbill, and he seemed intent on currying immediate favor with his new-found but stolid companions. He paddled quickly about, investigating each and every one, and seemed thoroughly mystified that his advances were not returned. How he ever got there without our detecting him was a riddle that I could not solve.

Sam stood up and waved his arms, and the duck looked at him with a curious stare. Olsen, the guide, cursed him hoarsely. The duck turned his back. I made a ball of mud and threw it at him and then he scurried off along the surface of the water. As he rose beyond the decoys we both opened up on him and he all but sank from the amount of lead in his body.

Our next callers were in the forms of three green-winged teal which came cavorting into the stool. They came with their usual disregard of formation, intent only on getting there as quickly as possible. A swift glance exposed the sham of our decoys and they prepared to depart as swiftly as they had come.

We blazed at them with both barrels, and succeeded in tipping one

over. It was not much larger than a good-sized robin, but at least it was an edible duck.

It was well along toward three in the afternoon, and there was not much time left to shoot, but there's been many a touchdown scored in the last few minutes of play. We saw what appeared to be a fair-sized flock of sprig bearing down upon us, flying close to the water. We ducked our heads and waited. A shadow fell across our blind, and to our ears there came the soft whirl of motors. Looking up, I saw a Navy blimp cruising languidly overhead. The ducks, frightened by the monster, flared and raced for the open sea.

To the south appeared another blimp, and coming up over the dunes across the bay was still another. This was the beginning of the end. The three dirigibles cruised over the bay the entire afternoon, and it was not long before there was not a single wildfowl left on Barnegat.

As we sat there in grim despair Olsen drew my attention to two ducks flying low and quartering the wind. Their course, if they held it, would bring them in just over the outer fringe of the decoys. The leading bird was a black duck and that which brought up the rear was a ubiquitous sheldrake. Here was my chance, and there was murder in my soul. The black duck increased its lead until a good twenty feet separated the pair. Sam, seeing that there was but one good duck, never even cleared for action. It was in the bag.

The time had come. I arose with elastic ease. Throwing up my gun, I aimed behind the blackie and swept the barrels forward in the required arc. The gun belched its deadly hail. The black duck flew on to ultimate safety, but the sheldrake fell, a limp corpse. I detected subdued mirth on the part of my companions.

With but ten minutes left for shooting, we agreed to call it a day; our luck couldn't change in the small margin of time left. Instructing Olsen to bring the boat, we unlimbered our guns in grim silence and shoved them in their cases. Standing up in the blind, we looked out over the surface of the bay and heard the shrill whistle of myriad wings.

A flock of broadbills circled overhead, swept nothward, and, turning, came right at us. Automatically we reached for our gun cases, but it was too late. The ducks passed us in rhythmic formation, the rush of their wings filling the air with that sound which only a duck hunter can appreciate, and then they were gone into the shadowy distance.

The bow of the garvey bumped the meadow sod. We climbed stiffly aboard, collected the decoys, and set our course in a northerly direction. I sat on a box in the stern, staring glumly at the white wake.

As evening approached, the wind, instead of dying out, freshened until the spray splashed over the garvey's deck and settled on us in chilling drops.

"I smell gasoline," said the Duke.

"You got any extra gas in a can?" asked Sam.

"No, it's all in the tank," our guide answered.

"There's a lot in the scuppers. I can smell it."

"There ain't none in the scuppers. It's in the tank."

The engine coughed, stuttered, and after a final gasp stopped utterly. We swung broadside to the seas. Olsen went forward, unscrewed the cap, and peered into the tank.

"She bane empty," he said.

"Empty! What do you mean, empty?" Sam asked.

"I mean there ain't no gas in her."

"And you have no extra supply on board?"

"Not none."

"What'll we do, then?"

"Well, I guess we'll pole her."

I looked over the flat stretch of salt meadows to where the lights of Forked River were already gleaming in the dusk. The wind was still blowing steadily against us. Olsen produced three poles, and with these we began the laborious work of shoving our long, narrow craft through the waves. It was backbreaking work and there were times when, owing to a sudden gust, we seemed even to lose ground.

We worked in silence. There was no lighthearted raillery, no poignant jests, but just a grim, unforgiving silence. Twilight gave way to night and in the darkness we poled steadily on, the village lights seeming as far off as ever. Twice powerboats passed us, but in the gloom they failed to see us, because a short circuit had put our riding lights out of commission. The noise of their engines prevented their hearing our hail.

After nearly two hours we rounded the point of the river, and here we had a favoring wind which helped us materially. We finally reached the pier, and it was fortunate for me that we did so, for I could not have wielded that pole another fifty yards.

Dragging our weary bodies up on the dock, we assembled our scanty assortment of game, stowed our duffel in the station wagon, and rattled away into the night.

LOUISIANA BUGGY RIDE

by *Van Campen Heilner*

WEST of New Orleans lies Bayou Teche, and west of there lie Lafayette and Abbeville and the Evangeline country, and south of there lies some of the greatest duck and goose shooting in the whole world. This is really a terrific country, just marsh grass and mud—mud about a hundred feet deep, it seems—and more marsh grass and mud stretching on and on until lost on the horizon.

It's easy to get lost in, and some people have and were nearly eaten up by the mosquitoes. But the muskrat trapper knows it like the palm of his hand and can go anywhere. You come across him in the lonely wastes, running his trap line, with a sack thrown over his shoulder and maybe a staff in his hand. These fellows must have webbed feet, I'm sure. Even they have to locate their traps with long poles stuck up in the marsh that they can see for miles. Here and there a rat house, here and there a lake or a small pond, and all over the country, like smoke, 'steen thousand ducks and a billion blue geese.

Those blue geese make it like no other country in the world. You've never seen anything like it in your life, and you never will unless you go to Hungary or Patagonia or maybe the Sacramento Valley or one of those places where there really are geese. But here there are actually about six million, and that's a lot of geese in anybody's language. The ducks are just a nuisance.

In the first place, you have to pass through New Orleans. And that's a nice place to pass through. You can also pass out there as well. There's some of the finest wining and dining in the world there and some of the prettiest gals. I think that's where the term "Southern hospitality" must have been invented.

After you've gotten out of there, which is sometimes pretty difficult, you head west through places like Morgan City, the shrimp capital of the world, and you're in the Bayou Teche country. A little farther on you get to New Iberia and Lafayette, and you're surrounded by some of the hottest pepper sauces in the world. It brings tears to my eyes to think of them. And then you head south to Abbeville, and from

there still farther south until you hit the Intra-Coastal Canal at Morton's Landing. And here on the dock you meet Doc Young, the sage of Youngsville, and probably Mark and Purvis and Lulu, and you get into the boat and shove off for the beyond.

It's a long ways to camp. The marsh there is nearly seventeen miles wide from the mainland to the Gulf, and the canals twist and turn, now through high grass, now through prairies stretching on and on like the sea. Once in a while you pass a trapper's shack. They move out there for the trapping season from the mainland, and they bring everything with them—family, chickens, dogs, a pig, and firewood. Their frail pirogues are tied up along the bank, and you have to slow down as you pass or you'll swamp them.

You reach camp, and after supper you roll in. You've had a hard day and daylight comes early.

Daylight comes early, and your duck blind is twenty miles away! That means you must be in it before daylight. But fortunately you've got a boat that makes twenty miles an hour, and you can make it in just about an hour if you step on it.

You shove your pirogue into the blind just as the sky is turning gray, and you can hear the whisper of countless wings overhead as the ducks start to move. You can see shadows passing by, but it's not quite light enough to shoot, although it will be in a few minutes.

Now you see something that really looks like a duck—four of them, in fact—and you let go. Down comes one with a tremendous splash, and the panic is on.

It's getting light fast, and you can see a long distance. There are fowl moving wherever you look. Pintails, teal, mallards—lots of them—and an occasional sprinkling of blackjacks, and every so often spoon-bill. Quite an assortment.

And that looks like a bunch of canvasback! They are, too, but they aren't coming your way. They all seem to be pitching down into some place about a mile away. You'll have to look into that later. Must be banana water lily or something there that attracts them.

You decide this morning you'll shoot only mallards and let the others go by. Tomorrow maybe only teal or pintail, and then you'll have a whirl at those cans.

A distant sound like the baying of hounds or the ringing of thousands of bells comes down the wind. Ah yes, the geese! You'd forgotten all about them. They're away off to the south'ard, near the Gulf. You strain your eyes and can just make out on the horizon a dark mass twinkling in the rising sun and then dropping slowly back into the marsh. So that's where they are! Or some of them, at any rate. That's a trip in itself.

Pretty soon you have your limit, and it's back to camp for a little shut-eye. There are quite a few deer on the ridges, and if you have enough ambition you might try for one before supper. Or maybe you just loaf around and do a little serious reading. Just before supper you climb up on the water tower for a look around.

You seem in the middle of a vast plain. On all sides the marshes stretch away into infinity. Here and there fires are burning in the distance—set by trappers to make their task easier. And, from all over, ducks are settling down in the marsh. Ducks as far as the eye can see. A lone wedge of geese passes over, very high, bound for the Gulf. It's a wild and lonely country, and at that moment you can't think of another place in the whole world you'd rather be.

The next day you decide to make a try for those geese. That's a trip in itself, a regular safari, and it needs preparation. Lunch, water, shells, decoys, skeeter lotion—and most of all a marsh buggy. A marsh buggy is something like no other thing on the face of this earth. It's the motor and chassis of a car, but the wheels are like the paddle wheels of a Mississippi steamboat—smaller ones in front, and bigger ones behind. But it sure covers the country. Not fast, to be sure, but, like the old story of the axle grease, it "gits there just the same."

Sometimes, if you've got a gang, you hitch a trailer on behind to carry the duffel. The passengers perch on front, any way they can. I've seen 'em when they looked like the cable cars in San Francisco.

Your marsh buggy is about twenty miles away, and when you get there she may be on the wrong side of the canal, depending, of course, where the geese are using. But you've got them pretty well located. They are away down near the Gulf at the western end of Mulberry Ridge.

This time the buggy is on the right side, and you don't have to ferry her across or make a long detour. You pile aboard, and after a few false starts the old engine starts to purr and you're off. Nothing stops her. The highest reeds fall before her, and the deepest mud doesn't faze her in the least. It's slow going, but you're getting closer to those geese every mile.

Pretty soon you see some small bunches, four or five, flying about over the marsh and settling down again. More, and more. The main body must be in that direction. And then you come through some tall grass, and on the other side are about a thousand geese, all sitting on a burned-over patch filled with new green grass and water. You move pretty close, and they get up. And then a larger bunch, which you hadn't seen, gets up beyond them. All of a sudden you see a terrific sight. About fifty thousand geese get up in a body with a noise that absolutely deafens you. The sky is filled with whirling, flying masses of

geese. You've never seen anything like it. And you won't anyplace else.

They all take off for the Gulf, and for the next half hour you can see them streaming away and gradually settling down 'way out near the beach. You go to where the main body was sitting, and the grass is clipped as close as a putting green. You hunt around until you find a muskrat house, place your duffel on it, set out your profile decoys, secrete yourself in some near-by reeds, and settle down to wait.

You don't have to wait so very long, maybe a little over a half hour. And then a small bunch starts back. You whip out your goose call and give them a few high-pitched notes. They circle, slowly and very high. Then they start to swing, and each circle brings them lower and lower. But there's an old whitehead leading them, and suddenly he sees something he doesn't like, jumps swiftly into the air, and they are gone. Oh well . . . As you're thinking that one over you turn around, and there are two geese very low, right over the tops of the reeds, almost on you. They sail right in, like chickens coming home to roost, and you collect them both.

Then, by gosh, on the horizon, all the geese in Louisiana are headed right for you. Great heavenly day! They look like a hundred thousand strong! But as they get closer you see they are made up of a great many flocks, some small, some large. Which will reach you first?

You strain your neck until you get a crick in it. There are two flocks now which are a tossup, both low and within range. One is led by a big snow goose, and that's the baby you'd like to collect, but maybe the other flock will reach you first. There are about three other flocks that are "possibles" too, and behind and above them, all the way to the Gulf, are thousands more, all headed your way.

Well, you can't have your cake and eat it too, and, besides, remember a "bird in hand." Just about then the flock with the snow goose leader is almost over you, and you raise and let them have it—one, two! Your first shot is a clean miss, but the second one connects, and down comes old white boy himself, over and over and over to strike with a tremendous splashing thump on the far side of the decoys. All the geese within a mile flare and start to climb, but they're coming and coming. He's dead, so there's no need to pick him up. Ten minutes later you hear a high, shrill honking and turn around. Here comes a single that looks and acts as if he were lost and looking for company. He is, and when he sees your set he sails right in, but it's the wrong kind of company and bad luck for him.

All too soon you have your limit; so for a while you just sit there and watch them and maybe take a few pictures. It's a wonderful sight—no doubt about it. There seems no end to the geese now; they're all over the horizon wherever you look, and flocks are settling in the marsh

all about you. More flocks are circling above them and coming down in great spirals. It's time to pick up and get out. There are getting to be too many geese and, besides, you want to save this place for another day.

You hail your marsh buggy, load your geese and duffel aboard, and chug off through the marsh. The near geese get up, but they don't go far—just settle down again to another flock. The old buggy wheezes and flops along, steam pouring out of her radiator. You have to stop at a reedy pond and fill her up, and as you do a bunch of big mallards springs quacking from the edges. But you let them go in peace.

You turn and look back. The geese are still coming—it looks as though from the end of creation. They'll be coming until dusk settles down over those great coastal marshes.

Far to the north you can see two big fires burning. Camp is twenty miles away, but long after the geese are out of sight you'll still hear them, and that night when you hit the sack you'll still see them. You'll always see them in your mind's eye, hear their high-pitched double note floating down from the blue, and count the days and the weeks and the months until once again you crank up the old buggy and chug off toward the Gulf.

Blue geese do that to you!

On Grouse Shooting

In the Foreword to this book, I state that most men are devoted to the particular kinds of shooting native to them. I am no exception, and count myself lucky to have lived most of my life within an hour or two of excellent grouse covers.

But the grouse is not everybody's bird any more than the brook trout is everybody's fish. I like to think of the two, however, as somehow symbolizing the top virtues of the twin sports, fishing and shooting. They both require and develop their own absorbing techniques, they both lead you to friendly or inspiring countrysides, and they both end up on the table (when you get 'em!) as food of ambrosial quality.

It is not all of fishing to fish, said Sir Izaak Walton; neither is it all of shooting to shoot, especially if the object of your shooting is the ruffed grouse. There's the study of the bird itself, its surprising lack of conformity to any behavior patterns you may think you've worked out; its explosive, dramatic rise and uncanny ability to escape (or, as I often like to think, slither through) shotgun patterns; its apparent intelligence in putting obstacles between itself and the gunner or, when occasion and cover demand, its disconcerting boldness in springing up and thundering right at the gunner's head, often passing a mere barrel's length away—I have actually felt the wind from a grouse's wingbeats as he hurled to safety behind me from a rise two yards in front of me! And; finally, there is nothing I know in the realm of sport more satisfactorily amazing than to score a clean kill on a grouse in full, swift flight—to see that streaking bomb suddenly explode in a cloud of feathers seems to me not less than a miracle of conditioned reflexes!

GROUSE—IN SPOTS

by William J. Schaldach

FROM the Connecticut River westward to the bold ridge of the Green Mountains, in east-central Vermont, the topography of the land is as rugged as the character of the natives who till its stony soil. Hills, valleys, gullies, ravines, knolls—in any given square mile, except in the river bottoms, it is difficult to find a piece of strictly level land large enough to make a respectable bean patch.

The dream of every farmer is to own a level place someday, a farm where a man can “plaough and harra” without eternally teetering on the edge of 45-degree slopes. But he never does. The time may come when he will get restless and sell out; but you can lay a bet on it that his next farm will be even hillier than the one he gave up.

Secretly, the Vermonter is proud of his rough land. He may curse the hills and gullies, but this is just on the outside. He places his house away up on the side of a hill, where he will have to fight snow and ice in the winter, mud in the spring, to get to it. He will scorn a site convenient to the main road and, if necessary, build himself a road to some remote spot higher up—where the air is better. Handicaps are right in his line; he invents them when they don't occur naturally.

Beside a pleasant little brook a couple of miles from our place there is a farm which had always appealed to me. Its Cape Cod type house, the neat barns and outbuildings, chicken runs, turkey pastures, and acres of gently rolling fields all hit me as being ideal from a farming standpoint.

I spoke of the place one day to my neighbor, mentioning the various points. He listened respectfully, slowly and methodically working on his cud of eatin' tobacco. When I stopped talking, he continued to ruminate in deep thought. Finally he shifted his weight ever so slightly, tilted his chin almost imperceptibly, and spat with vigor. A large katydid received the full broadside and went sprawling from its perch on a timothy stalk. Then came the reply, brief and to the point: “Mite sheltered.”

When we first moved to Vermont, some five years ago, and bought
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a run-down, hillside farm—with all its topographical inconveniences and handicaps—I knew that we were coming to grouseland. Here in these verdant hills, away from the push of metropolitan population, a man could have things pretty nearly his own way. Practically no posted land, a long open season, and a daily bag limit of four birds. Woodcock and an occasional pheasant thrown in. What more could a man ask? It was going to be almost too easy, I thought; but I was wrong.

That first season was an eye opener. It was a good bird year, but the setter and I traveled many a weary mile up and down incredible hills to gather a very modest bag. At the end of the first week I wondered whether it was worth the effort.

Then a good friend from the next town came over to visit. He came just in time. Being a keen and efficient grouse gunner, one well schooled in the science of perpendicular hunting, he taught me the facts of life—as they concern that rugged character, the Vermont “pa’ttridge.”

The essence of his philosophy was that grouse are found in spots. Now, there are many of these spots. Some of them are handy, and others are downright inconvenient—like the top of a hill that rises abruptly a quarter of a mile from the plain; that is, it would if there were a plain up here. Never tackle anything like that, he explained; you might get exhausted. He shivered a little as he said it, and I could see that he had once been through what I was facing.

The thing is, he went on, to hunt alongside the ridges, making your ascent on a long, easy slope. Look for the pockets and feed runs. Learn these places and revisit them from day to day. Birds will be in there sooner or later. No sense in making a mountain goat of yourself. Let the birds come down to a reasonable place where a man and dog can travel. After all, you haven’t a pair of wings like a grouse, nor a set of lungs like a smithy’s bellows.

It was eminently sensible, and only after I had started to profit from this sage advice did I realize that it was the system I had always followed in other hilly lands—Michigan, the Adirondacks, Connecticut. I realized, too, why so many chaps from the cities came up here, got utterly bushed, collected few birds, and went away swearing that it was the vilest grouse grounds in the United States and the Canadian provinces put together.

That was five autumns ago. Though we have had our share of the grouse disease for at least three seasons, I can go out almost any time and hunt profitably, and with the minimum of physical effort. Steep hills no longer hold any terror for me—I let ’em alone.

To hunt grouse with the greatest efficiency, one should really study his country and memorize every detail of its physical conformation.

He should know where a patch of blackberry, thin poplar, and birch makes up into a long narrow run adjacent to hardwood cover. Early in the morning and again late in the evening it will pay to investigate such places, for birds will have moved out of the timber to feed. Very often the casual hunter will pass up such spots and travel through what looks to him like orthodox cover—only to find it totally empty of birds.

To a greater extent than many gunners realize, the ruffed grouse is a wanderer. He travels, within a limited area, over considerable territory in the course of a day. If the weather is settled and birds are on the feed, they move almost constantly, except for little siestas and dusting parties in sandy spots.

Not all of the traveling is done afoot. In many cases birds will fly a considerable distance from cover to reach a desirable feed run or pocket. Living, as I do, in grouseland has its advantages. Not only does one have his sport close at hand in the open season, but there is an added thrill in "dry hunting" the birds during the rest of the year. Here on the farm, grouse are a part of our daily lives. It is late April as I write, and through the open window of the studio the muffled beats of a drummer float in with gradually accelerating rhythm.

Twice last summer my wife had to jam on the car brakes, around the curve of our road a hundred yards from the house, to avoid hitting a grouse which insisted on dusting there. I sometimes move birds near the barn, which stands out on a knoll at the edge of the mowing.

From this you might conclude that we live in the midst of cover. Actually the nearest heavy cover is a patch of pines and hemlocks over two hundred yards from the house. The road is a main thoroughfare, with autos passing regularly. There's a lightly wooded ravine, on the left of our farmhouse road, containing young hardwoods, poplar, berry bushes, and clusters of wild grape, all forming an excellent feed run, but inadequate as permanent cover.

Dozens of times throughout the year, both summer and winter, we flush grouse from the patch of grapevines near our private road. They fly straight and fast across the deep valley to the shelter of the pines and hemlocks. I know that they do not travel back to feed by foot, because there is a swift and deep brook intervening. And one afternoon toward sunset I saw a large bird sail into the ravine from the pines. It was a grouse, dropping in for supper.

Throughout the land, wherever there are grouse, the birds' habits are much the same. In a large tract of hardwoods, pines, and other typical cover there may be from one to half a dozen feed runs or pockets. These may be so lightly grown up as to be passed by the casual or inexperienced. But they do not fool the veteran. He visits them all and

collects, oftener than not. To catch a bird in thin cover, away from heavy hardwoods and other shelter, is the cream of grouse hunting.

One such spot will always be remembered. It was a patch of sumacs and red cedars, with goldenrod and blackberry in thin patches, on a sunny hillside in Connecticut. John Holman and I used to visit it regularly, and it was invariably good for a pair of birds. The shooting was open but extremely fast, and I recall many exasperating misses—besides memorable hits. The country that surrounded this pocket was heavy cover, and as soon as the bird was shot or chased out of the pocket it would shortly be replaced by others. Locate such places, and you have found the best that grouse hunting has to offer.

Grouse in spots—it's a good principle to remember, whether hunting in strange territory or in strange stamping grounds. For, crazy as the grouse may seem to us, he has his own peculiar philosophy, and his tactics follow a rather definite pattern. This pattern matches up fairly regularly in Michigan, West Virginia, and the province of Nova Scotia.

Next to definite feed runs and pockets adjacent to hardwood or coniferous cover, I'd vote for alder country. Much of New England and the East in general is clothed in acres of alder patches; and when, in late October, you catch the biddies in such cover, the sport is apt to prove interesting.

Here in our hills we have many tracts of upland alders. These occur on gullied hillsides, and the gunner's progress is a matter of up and down, in gentle undulations. Birds usually break through the hollows and bore through the twisted alder trunks in a manner to put a man on his toes. It is not the toughest kind of shooting, for the birds usually lie well to the dog.

On wet, raw days, particularly toward the end of the season, the grouse gunner may have to look for his quarry in the gloomy depths of a stand of pines, hemlocks, or spruces. Next to fly-fishing a brushy stream, I know of nothing to try a man's soul more desperately than hunting grouse in heavy coniferous growth. A bird bursts out of a pine top directly overhead. Due to the heavy, damp atmosphere and the closely knit canopy of branches, the acoustics are perfect. The bird roars away with wide-open throttle. The commotion sounds like a five-ton truck with a leaky muffler.

You can see every spot on the bird's breast, but, barring a miracle, it won't do you any good. Before you can raise your gun six inches, the bidy will have disappeared through the interlocked mass of branches. The best you can do is to throw out ahead and let 'er go.

Once in a hundred tries this works. If you have patience and plenty

of pin money for shells, there is no harm in it. But most of us will prefer to go home, sit by the fire, and wait for the weather to clear.

Plugging the pines is nerve-racking, and usually fruitless. But at least it is not monotonous. For sheer boredom, few occupations can compare with traveling through miles of semi-open hardwoods in quest of grouse. Everything looks alike, and from the beginning the cards are stacked against the gunner. Grouse are undoubtedly there, but they can see and hear man and dog hundreds of yards off and are fully prepared to make a hasty departure.

Hardwood tracts are the living quarters of the grouse. From this headquarters the birds spread out to visit feed runs and pockets at mealtime. The wise gunner applies a bit of human psychology to his shooting and profits thereby. The best time to talk business to a man is at the luncheon table; don't call on him in the privacy of his dressing room.

Getting back to tough spots again, there is nothing like hill climbing to harden the muscles and sinews. But one does not hunt long in Vermont—or most of the East, in fact—to discover that a little of it goes a long, long way. Especially when a fellow is a decade or so past the last draft.

Early in the season a good proportion of the year's crop of grouse is undoubtedly high up on the ridges. This is especially true in a heavy beechnut year. Beechnuts are to grouse as corned beef and cabbage to an Irishman. Once the birds get the beechnut habit, they rarely become interested in anything else—until they have their fill. And the largest and most prolific beech trees invariably grow on the meanest and highest of ridges.

The canny gunner, therefore, will simply regard this as an interesting and somewhat useless fact. He will wait for the sharp frosts of late October to chase the birds down into the feed pockets and runs, where a fellow can hunt with some dignity—and a margin of safety for his heart and lungs.

Grouse in spots! We have covered most of the standard situations in which birds may be found with fair regularity. But grouse hunting is not mathematics. Two and two do not necessarily make four; often as not they make five, or sometimes nothing at all. That's where the fun comes in.

The charm of upland shooting in New England lies in the diversified country that a man's boots will tread in the course of a day's tramping. To be on the lookout for birds wherever you are is a pretty good plan to follow. I have mentioned flushing grouse from the edge of our barn, standing in an open mowing. There is nothing peculiar about that, for I have flushed grouse on several occasions near other people's

barns. An abandoned farm may be a deficit from a realtor's standpoint, but to the grouse hunter it holds vast possibilities.

Many an overconfident bird has jumped from a berry-grown cellar hole with nothing between him and the safety of cover but thin air—a hundred yards of it. How sweet it is to roll one in such a setting—especially after a string of misses. And those old apple orchards—how you get to love 'em! There, early in the season, the chances of flushing a brood of young birds are extremely good. If you are slated to make a double, here's your chance—provided you keep cool and don't get rattled.

Grown-up stone fences; "islands" of sumac, wild cherry, and grapevines in the middle of pastures and mowings; clumps of birch or poplar, standing off by themselves—these are all possibilities, unorthodox as they may seem. They are all investigated by the thorough grouse gunner.

During my five years' residence in grouseland I have had more opportunity to study and observe the habits of birds than is granted to the average hunter. While I enjoy rolling 'em here and there in the fall, I am not at all sure but that the pleasure of observation in the closed season is not equally as satisfying an experience. One can look at the bird more calmly, for one thing, if he knows that it is not his job to throw chilled shot at it in flight. From a standpoint of drawing this is a big advantage, and I have been able to make many sketches from memory of birds observed during the summer and winter.

Some things I have discovered, too, that do not seem to check with what we read in natural histories. One of these concerns the strutting of the grouse. As with many other species of birds, the absurd antics of the male are mating maneuvers. The cock grouse puffs himself up and spreads his ruff to a semicircle, his big fan opened full. In this awkward state he dances a ridiculous little step—which apparently goes over swell with the gal friend.

From all that I have read, this takes place only in the mating season, early in the spring. But last fall a friend and I were driving along a wood road near the house. We saw an object in the road and made it out to be a grouse. It proved to be a bird in the full strutting position, and was absolutely oblivious to the presence of the car, which was driven to within twenty-five feet.

My partner got out and attempted to take a motion picture, but, as so often happens, the light was inadequate. When flushed after some ten minutes' observation, two other birds went out. These were probably young hens. We assumed that the cock was also a young bird, practicing for the following spring.

Viewed in that light, the above incident was not really unusual. But

last February, as we were driving to town, my wife spotted a full-grown bird, with a very large fan, engaged in strutting, right alongside the main road. We stopped the car, and again the grouse paid no attention to us. We watched for fully five minutes. Two days later the same bird was at it again. There was no other grouse near, so the love motive had to be ruled out. We concluded that the bird was bored and took that means of passing the time away.

There has been much talk in recent years concerning disease and scarcity. Seasons have been shortened and restrictions clamped on. But when the thing has run its course—whether there be hunting or not—old pa'tridge always comes back, in numbers. He's a tough fellow.

FIRST DAY! LAST DAY!

by Arthur R. MacDougall, Jr.

BACK of our town, at every point of the compass, are relics of New England's early expansion. Up from the "crowded seacoast" towns came the first of the farmer pioneers. The easiest way to explain this migration into northern Maine is to say that the men who cut and burned patches of virgin forests, who threw the stone heaps together and piled the meandering fence walls, were land-hungry.

The years between are not many, as history goes, but these rocky, hillside farms are now something of an enigma. The axmen and their spinning wives are gone. A softer generation wonders why they came to this land of early frosts and light soils. What pushed them out into the wild lands? Were they simply land-hungry peasants? I think not, for they usually built their heavy-timbered homes on the hilltops.

The casual motorist, driving over the black road along the upper Kennebec, sees no hint of these hundreds of thousands of acres of old cleared land beyond our town. The hills that hem us in appear to be heavily forested. He does not know that there are wandering roads—forgotten aimless roads, like the old Canada Road and the Lake Road. These roads are gullied or grassed over, and often choked out by alders and birches. In twenty years, while men go on building cities, instead of homes on hilltops, these old roads will be obliterated, and only the native who has a long memory will be able to follow them at all.

There are roads to nowhere that creep back to old deserted farms, where the wild things—bear, deer, and grouse—appropriate unto themselves the last fruits of man's toil. The old, storm-twisted apple trees stand there. Round about, the grass is brown and thick. The pine and fir, the spruce and silver birch on the hills around toss their seeds into the wind, and the heavy mat of nobody's hay makes an ideal nursery. Scattered aimlessly, the wild seedlings of the proud old Baldwin, russet, and pumpkin sweet grow everywhere.

These old fields are now the scene of an interlude. The wild is foreclosing, taking back its own. But during the process, as protracted as

a case in the Chancery of *Bleak House*, the relics of the pioneer farmer stand.

About the old stone heaps, out of fence corners, anywhere and everywhere, the wild thorn plums grow. Add to these the black cherry, the wild apple, the frost grapes, and the mushrooms, and the picture is about complete. Here, from the ruffed grouse's point of view, is a land that flows with milk and honey in the summer and fall. And when winter comes, there are birches on a thousand hills. These are his for the budding. Here, from the point of view of *Bonasa umbellus umbellus*, are abundant production and protection in the wake of man's retreat. There is, therefore, no cover in all the range that is more to the ruffed grouse's liking, nor to the hunter's.

First Day! The hunter's capacity to enjoy the brief open season has been whetted by the long closed period. There is an element of inevitable sorrow that comes to a man as he grows older. One by one the simple raptures of youth are subtracted. He no longer awakens in the dawn of the Fourth of July with a delightful feeling that something enjoyable and adventurous is about to happen. He no longer hangs his stocking with a pure emotion of expectation. Santa, too, passes into the limbo of things that were real once but are not now.

When I was a small boy, an old lady said, "Young man, you will live to discover that anticipation is sweeter than realization." Alas, she was right concerning most of experience. But boy, she never went pa'tridge hunting!

To begin with, when the day is fair, October in the uplands is more than a man could ask for. There are the lazy cloud shadows on the mountain ranges, the dream-thin veil of rain-faded lavender that is thrown with careless extravagance over all, the last aromas of ripened fruits, and the still air bereft of the insect hum of earlier fall. One feels, with a full heart, that October offers more than the cynic allows there can be in earth's repertoire. On such days I am never able to avoid the feeling that I am failing miserably to take it all in.

This morning we started out at an uncomfortable hour. The ruffed grouse leaves his habitual roosting place at the first light of day. His breakfast table is set before sunup. There was a heavy, rolling fog in the low spots this morning. The world was damp and chill. The gray-tagged goldenrod and various weeds along the Mahoney hill road were drenched with heavy dew.

We topped the bare ledge of the height of land before the sun had burned its way through the gray east and, throwing the engine into second, slid down the hill into the valley of Johnson Brook and drew up at the crossroads. At this point there is an old cellar hole behind some ancient lilacs, and out in back there are a few apple trees. I

scouted around this lot while my neighbor explored to the right of the road.

While trying to look before and aft at the same time, I flushed a woodcock out of the thick brush growing around an ancient crab tree. The jaunty little cuss dropped into the cover of an alder run. I still maintain that I would have hit him if the sun had not been in my eyes.

If we had had a dog along, we might have rooted him out of those alders. But I can forget that dud, for while I was hedgehogging through and bent over in the act of pushing aside a particularly crooked and obnoxious sapling, six grouse boomed out of an apple tree I had never noticed before. It may be that something of joy drops out of this hunting when one knows just where every apple and thorn plum grows, but I'll bet I never forget that location again.

I stood there, amid the alders, which grew as thick as the proverbial hair on a dog's back. Dodge back and forth as I did, I could not catch sight of a bird until one old-timer filled in a space of sky about four inches wide. Of course I snap-shot. That space will henceforth be somewhat wider, for I mowed off a three-inch section of alder as though it were a mere wisp of straw. I did find a few feathers, but they must have grown on the alder. Maybe I can use them to build a trout fly I have in mind.

After the futile blast I stood still, straining my ears to catch the tell-tale patter of a bird's running feet in the dry leaves. It is not difficult to mark down the flight of a partridge, even though you cannot see the bird, but they have a vexing way of running from a rod to half a mile after they land. This time I did not hear a sound after the roar of swift wings died. So I advanced cautiously into the new sector beyond the alder run.

At the farther edge I saw a large yellow birch that had certainly passed its hundredth birthday. Since there was a half-open pasture beyond, it seemed probable that one or more of my birds had alighted in that tree. I paused to study the top, but could see no birds; so I walked on under the birch. The old pasture hillside beyond was patched with gray birches of the thick, scrubby type.

My neighbor's double-barrel gun roared in the thin morning air. It startled me a little, since I had been intent on my own affairs. It also jumped the old hen bird that had been sitting about eight feet above my head. Without commotion she slid off like a mail plane with engines warmed. Although she exercised nice judgment, she exposed herself for about one tenth of a second.

Guess I'll make a lot of those brown flies. I want to rig up some floaters for our trout, which go crazy over caddis flies in the late summer twilights.

And by the way, don't get it into your head that I didn't look over that birch before I walked under it. Talk about rabbits in a magician's hat! How about partridges that start up from spots where there were none? After picking up my first bird, it seemed logical to be illogical; so I walked back to have another look at that yellow birch. Now I can hear somebody chortle, "What? Surely you didn't expect to find another bird in that tree!"

Ah, young fellow, partridge hunting consists of what one does not expect. Certainly I did see a young cockerel in that very tree. He was standing on a short stub of a limb, close to the bole of the tree. If he had not stretched out his neck and thereafter bobbed it up and down, I should probably never have seen him. He did not show a sign of leaving. Fancy that in these days!

Any old-timer in this country will tell you that there is just one thing to do under such circumstances: take your bird where he sits. But, of course, the old-timer thinks in the terms of a rifle. He expects that you will cut off the bird's head with a well-placed ball. Maybe that's another matter for the Marines.

I had a 16-gauge in my hands. For a few moments I stood still, ready to yell "Pull!" the next second. But when it became evident that this young fellow was not going to leave his peg, I reached down to pick up a bit of dead limb that I intended to heave at him. When I stooped, that illiterate cockerel took off like a loaded bee. Of course he had been waiting for just that: to catch me off guard. Hurrah! Of all the birds that ever swallowed a cherry stone, the ruffed grouse gets the applause.

I fired before I could straighten up, muscles being slower than intentions. He would have lived to cackle about that dodge, which his father must have pulled off many a time, if I had not held a pump gun in my hands. I'm going to tie up a lot of those brown flies.

Last Day! The October rains have beaten the leaves from the hardwoods. Only the oaks, rare in this country, and the beeches keep their tattered banners. While I have been thinking over the first day and the last day, and all the days between, two lines come to me from the limbo of well-said thoughts we half forget and half remember:

But I'll keep my gray goose feather
For the day when you tire of kings.

I will not undertake to tell anybody what those lines mean. Maybe the gray feather is a symbol of simple pursuits and pastimes, of old elemental pleasures. At any rate, I shall keep the memories of upland days.

My friend, Milford Baker, and I put in the last day together. Start-

ing late and leisurely, we headed for a section of abandoned farm lands over in the southeast corner of Bingham. We considered taking a dog, but decided against it, for the same reason, as we saw it, that a man decides to use barbless flies and lighter tackle. I realize that the above is heresy, but let it stand.

While riding along the narrow dirt road it occurred to me that October was done with her shouting, in scarlet garments, up and down the hills, November was in the offing. The frost had cut the life out of the world. Once, along the road, I caught sight of the south side of Moxie. It was wind-blown and covered with early snow. But the sun hung, all the afternoon, in the western sky, like a benevolent proprietor loath to close his booths.

Milford and I left the car on the Solon-Brighton Road and started afoot, over an abandoned road. Down in a bit of hollow, behind another cellar hole, we saw two hardy apple trees. There was a fairly clear approach to these trees from the north, but on all other sides the alders and gray birches stood rank and tall. There was no point in marching down upon those trees through the open grassland, for if there were birds feeding there the wise-heads would be sure to depart into the alders without offering us a shot.

"Tell you what, Mak," said Milford Baker. "You go down around this piece and then work your way through the alders. Whistle when you're all set, and I'll come at them this way."

Of course I was some time working my way through that tangle; but when I reached a point where I could see the back side of those apple trees, I whistled. At that moment I doubted that there were any birds so easily outflanked at the tag end of October. A few moments passed, and I could hear Milford coming down to the trees. Soon I heard him stop. Then he called, "Nothing doing, Mak."

Well, that wasn't a bad start. Not at all. As the small boy said when he returned from fishing, "We didn't get as many as we thought we would, but then we didn't expect to."

I was in the act of lifting my right boot over a twisted alder when — Sure, you can anticipate the rest. With an altogether unnecessary roar of wings, a nice bird left the trees under which Baker was standing. I looked up through the alders and saw one lone bird at an altitude of about fifty feet. It was obvious that it planned to clear my sector. I elevated my gun and fired, like a man shooting at a star.

Once I heard a veteran of the Civil War tell in sober tones how the crack shot in their camp fired at the North Star. Somehow I have never been able to get that old veteran's point of view. Obviously he felt that he had witnessed a momentous event—a mere man who dared to shoot at the North Star! It seemed to me, as a mere boy, an exceedingly fool-

ish piece of business. Shooting at that partridge, high over the alders, brought it back to my mind.

"That about ends this show," laughed Baker as I emerged from the alders.

Turning our backs on this old clearing and swamp, we walked up a road—to a block of farms. Trees and brush had crowded in upon this road until it was a mere trail through the heavy brush. It was impossible for us to move in the leaves without causing as much noise as a pair of elephants. Doubtless that accounts for the fact that we did not find a single bird under or about the several apple trees at the edge of this strip.

"Partridges must be pretty well thinned out," I said at last.

"I doubt it," replied Baker. "If you could have seen the wild flushing they pulled off last week, you would feel sure that they'd last forever. We scared up ten birds along this stretch of road."

Finally, when we had passed the last apple tree and started up the easy hill to the crossroads, I saw, from the corner of my right eye, an old drummer running along a fallen brown ash. At the moment that partridge disappeared from my view, I tried to inform Baker, who was walking a few steps behind me. But before I could speak, the air was full of the always startling sound of wings. Baker swung about and fired, and I heard the thud of a dead bird, followed by the rapid flutter of wings in the dry leaves.

"Number one," said Baker, dropping his bird into a canvas pack.

At the top of the hill there were old fields on either side of the road. I wandered off to the right, and Milford turned to the left. All this section was new ground to me, and I had no idea where I might, or might not, find birds. Pushing my way through a clump of young firs, I waded out into a bank of the last purple asters and on into a patch of blueberry bush.

Did you ever pick blueberries on the last day of October? I picked a few. But although they seemed hard and firm, they were insipid. Even at that I should have been on my guard, for as I started on a single grouse took wing. With that same old uncanny judgment, she picked the shortest route to safety—flying at a right angle, I fired and missed. The second shot had to be a fast one, for she was already at the brush. It seemed to me that she went on, but the grouse hunter should always stop and look.

Considerably disgusted with blueberries in October, I hurried to the spot where the bird had disappeared, and there she was, with her heels in the air. I began to feel assured. There were birds in "them hills." Also, there were shot in my shells—a matter I had doubted for a moment.

I followed down an old stone wall. Between the stones grew the blackberry, wild cherry, and thorn plums. It was a most inviting setting for the grouse, but they were not at home. I came up to the cross-road from the northwest corner of this old plot. Along this road, between it and the field, there was a strip of second growth.

As I walked along the road toward the corner I kept my eyes straight ahead, because these old roads are often visited by grouse in the late afternoon. Evidently a thundering big cock watched me pass and then lit out on the field side. He flew along the edge of this cover, but I was unable to see him from the road. Then, without rhyme or reason, he burst out of the roadside cover and swung across the road. It was a long shot.

I was considerably satisfied with my gunning. Then I turned to see Baker behind me. His face wore a grin. We turned off the road to climb a half-barren pastureside, until we came to the outer fringe of a block of old pine. My attention was attracted by a small fir that had been broken over. It proved to be the only precaution a would-be bear trapper had taken to ward off wandering bipeds. Bear traps make me indignant when set in such a fashion. So I began to air my opinions.

"A man should not be so cussedly careless," I began, and a partridge that had been watching us from a near-by pine flew off like a streak of brown from a painter's brush. Grouse just will not play this game by any rules except their own.

Now, it is not easy to pull one's mind from bear traps to a partridge in a small pine—especially if the bird will not stay put long enough to complete so difficult an operation. Consequently, I did nothing for the first twenty seconds but watch that bird's flight with a stony satisfaction. But when Baker's gun roared after the joker, I managed to get the situation in hand, as the fellow said after a mule had kicked him down for the second time. Nevertheless what happened after Baker's shot was too much for me. That bird banked like an ace in a "dogfight" and, sliding around to the left and up, went on its way.

As I had been saying when interrupted, "A man should not be so cussedly careless." Anyhow, I went over and sprang that bear trap. And if the man who set it reads this, the Editor will give him my address upon request.

Since the sun was low and the west a wash of thin yellow, we turned back over the road we had previously traveled. Perhaps I was still a little fussed over that bear trap or the last shot of mine, for I could not see the bird that Milford tried to point out. He said that it was standing in a bunch of bluejoint grass by the roadside, but all I could make out was the bluejoint.

However, I saw it when it hurtled out for a short flight across the

road. *Whang!* Milford had little time in which to shoot, but I saw that he had stopped his bird. Then came what a neighbor of mine calls "a gosh-awful commotion," and a second bird flew out of an apple tree above the spot where Milford had seen the first one.

"Ha!" I muttered as I picked him up. "You tried to put one over on me, didn't you? Maybe you liked blueberries too."

"Not so bad for the last day, eh?" grinned my friend.

"And we're not done yet," I said.

So, feeling like a boy tramping home with a string of fish, we started down the road, with the late sun at our backs. Only once we digressed, to visit an old apple orchard. As I carefully approached a likely looking tree on my side of the field Milford's gun again broke the stillness.

I did hope there was a shot for me in that twisted old tree. But I discovered no hint of life in its thick-grown branches, mixed with the shadows of the wood. At last, satisfied that there wasn't a grouse for me, I relaxed my attention and yielded to the impulse to dream a moment. Old wild fields like that affect me with vague emotions. At my left a fir reached up, straight and spire-like. And the sky seemed so low that I could fancy the fir's tip had pricked it where a dull red light flowed across the clouds.

I tucked my gun under my arm and turned to go. And then, as a fitting climax to a great day, the last grouse burst out of the very tree I had so carefully scrutinized. I caught a brief sight of him, black against the sky. He had six feet to go before the little fir would have covered his flight. I pulled on him. There was a swift moment when I felt that I should apologize for shattering the quiet of closing day. But my bird pitched into the fir and, tumbling over and over, fell through it to the ground. The last day was done.

POOR MAN'S PARTRIDGE

by Pete Barrett

BACK in the days when I wore short pants and my hunting consisted of shooting gray squirrels with a BB gun, I knew a man who ran a hardware store and had the reputation of being a real hunter. We called him Old Pop. He was tall and thin, with a shiny bald pate and a pair of knowing blue eyes behind spectacles.

During the open season his store was mecca to us. He managed to take a walk with his gun nearly every day, and he always left the results in a bushel basket behind the skate sharpener in the back room. Many's the time I entered his store to make some trifling purchase, with the real purpose of getting a look at the game in the back room.

There was nearly always something in that basket. Birds mostly—duck, pheasant, partridge, woodcock, and even quail. Quail were plentiful in our locality then. But Old Pop had a favorite. It was the ruffed grouse of our Eastern States. If there was only one bird in that basket, the chances were that it would be a partridge.

He always paid the grouse homage by lifting them from the basket first, and he had a pet expression that he'd use. He'd hold up a bird, smooth its feathers, and say: "Beautiful, isn't he? That's the poor man's partridge."

For a long time I wondered about this, until one day he explained himself. He said he never could afford a really good bird dog and, failing that, he preferred to hunt by himself and find his own birds. It was more fun that way, because it took personal skill and he had more of a feeling of real achievement from finding the birds by himself. So, in his Scotch way, he called them the poor man's partridge, but I never agreed with him on that point.

Before we moved from that town, I got to go hunting with Old Pop once. It was, as a matter of fact, the first time I ever took a gun in search of grouse. Two things stand out in my mind about that hunt. The first was the number of birds my friend found. It seemed he was always walking up on them and had fired before I ever got my gun up.

The second was the complete fool I made of myself when a shot finally did present itself. A bird flushed from a bush just ahead of me and flew in a straight line until it went out of sight. I had thrown my gun up, let off the safety, and broken the piece—even letting the cartridges fall out—at the first roar of the departing grouse!

Later I retraced my steps and explored again the covers he had shown me that day. I found very few birds, and the next time I saw Old Pop I told him that someone had shot out our hunting grounds. He smiled and said I was probably at the wrong place at the wrong time.

It was quite some time before I realized what he was talking about. Being young, I had a great deal of energy, which I spent crashing through brush in search of the poor man's partridge. Now and then I would kill a bird, but it was luck more than anything else. Instead of my finding the birds, they were finding me.

Let me explain. If you put three men to hunting a cover, all good snap shots, only one of whom has hunted grouse before, I'll lay all my ready cash on that man to make the most kills, by a good margin. It won't be because he is used to the kind of shooting that this tricky speedster offers; it will be because he will know where to expect the birds to flush from, and just that bit of knowledge will make all the difference.

A man will wear out boots and breeches year after year; and if he is not particularly observant and doesn't think, his wife won't be cooking much game for him—not partridge, anyway. He is the man who thinks a ruffed grouse is just a bird that roars from cover when he least expects it.

He doesn't know that his quarry has, to a certain degree, a regular diet and set of table manners. He doesn't know that a grouse will often run and run and run before getting up. He doesn't know where to look for them during certain kinds of weather and after certain kinds of weather. He doesn't even know that the birds very often have a pattern of behavior that will vary from day to day. He just doesn't have any conception of the bird as an individual, and thereby he is lost before he starts.

One of the first things to take into consideration is the diet of the partridge. He loves seeds, berries, wild fruit, buds, and many kinds of tender greenery. Look for him along old fences where bittersweet spreads a scarlet cloak to cover the bare skeletons of ragged, wild grapevines.

Nearly everyone has tried deserted and overgrown orchards with success. The partridge were after the seeds in the fallen apples, and sometimes they eat the punky flesh of the apple itself. When you kill a

bird, open him up and see what he has been dining on. I think a grouse is better for being drawn in the field anyway.

If you make a habit of doing this, it will open your eyes, for sometimes a ruffed grouse will eat some strange things—hemlock needles and black-birch buds and acorns that are split open on the ground. One of the strangest of all I discovered one fall when we had all the signs of an early winter, even to a blanket of snow covered by sleet, which seemed to eliminate all ground feeding.

I had decided to hunt the swamp of a farmer friend alone. It was a grand place, with all kinds of cover and feed, even to a few gnarled old crab apples on a rise at the west edge. I stopped to talk with Mr. Mead and learned that he had walked through the swamp the day before to repair a boundary fence. "The partridge," he said, "seemed to be all along the stream."

Disregarding this, I tried my favorite apple-tree slope first, and then tunneled under some cat briers to get to a sort of open amphitheater of climbing grapevines. No grouse and no signs of them. Next I walked through a favorite stand of young swamp maple. This brought me to the stream, and I began to follow it.

I hadn't gone twenty yards before I moved a bird. Farther on another grouse jumped. This was almost too good to be true. I looked about for signs of food, but could see nothing. The ground was bare, except for some scrub brush. Around a bend I got my third and last bird and, marking the spot it flew from, I returned with the partridge and drew its innards. The crop was stuffed with short lengths of bright green leaf. I rubbed some between my fingers, smelt it, then looked hard at the edge of the stream. The bird had been eating skunk-cabbage sprouts!

Ordinarily I like to go after partridge in a leisurely manner. For one thing, it is a lot quieter than busting along at a good clip, and this makes quite a difference when the leaves are dry and the birds gunshy. Also, if you take it easy, you should be able to manage yourself so that you are never caught off balance climbing over a log or going through briers. I wish I had a box of shells for every grouse that jumped me at an awkward moment.

Try stopping every so often. Frequently partridge will sit tight if the sounds of your progress are steady and not too noisy, and will even let you pass them by at close range. But when you stop, they are apt to get nervous. Finally they can stand the strain no longer, and up they get. This will happen often enough to pay dividends, and give you quite a superior feeling to boot.

However, there is one type of cover that I like to push through with speed in mind rather than stealth. I find it on abandoned farms

mostly, where there are a lot of stone walls somewhat in disrepair. The cover will consist of birch or maple or any sparse stand of young timber. It should be sparse enough so that you can see ahead fairly well, yet heavy enough to hold birds.

This may sound like a rather arbitrary set of conditions, but with some variations I don't think you will find it too uncommon. The point is this: if you can see ahead pretty well, the birds can and do see you coming. Unless they have been shot over unduly, I think the poor man's partridge will run ahead and skip over the low places in the walls.

I have seen them do it lots of times. So rush them. Crowd them to the walls, and then you stand a fair chance of frightening them into flight. In this case, if the birds are going to fly at all, you can be almost certain it will be just ahead of the walls, and you can concentrate your attention where it will do the most good.

This business just mentioned is only one phase of the successful gunner's system—picking out in advance where you are going to look. In every bit of cover there are some obvious places which will never produce birds; so don't look at them twice. Strangely, a whole lot of people do, though. Keep looking ahead and try to figure out where the birds will fly from the cover you are about to penetrate. The chances are you will be wrong more than half the time, but your reflexes will be in top shape because you are expecting action, even if it doesn't take place just where you thought it might.

I have found that a whole lot of hunters don't seem to know where to look for partridge when it is raining. They go through the same old covers time and again, rain or shine—only in the rain they don't fare so well.

They keep expecting birds to roar from sopping windfalls and ground soft with sodden leaves. Nothing happens, and a certain amount of cussing begins. As the rain is trying to get down the shooter's neck, or beat in his face, he has his head hunched and so directs most of his vituperation toward the ground.

Hunting grouse in the rain is no fun; but if you must do it, don't waste too much time looking earthward, for your birds are probably in trees. They like evergreens if available, and I for one quit when there are lots of spruce or hemlock handy. The partridge nearly always see you first, they are hard to spot, and they have a nasty habit of departing with the silence of owls, putting you on the wrong side of the tree.

Things aren't quite so bad if the cover holds only deciduous trees. In this case the partridge very often huddles close to the trunk, and will sit and sit in the rain while you walk by. Sometimes they will as-

sume grotesque positions, and I have seen them almost flattened against tree trunks with their necks and heads stretched straight up. Hunting partridge in the rain is no fun at all.

The day after a rain offers a problem too, which is helped a good deal if the sun is shining. I know experienced hunters who will steadfastly refuse to try heavy cover after a rain, no matter how plentiful the birds were there before. They work patchy, open cover.

If I were to try to make a rule, I'd say: hunt light covers where the sunlight streams through trees to dry, grassy places. I've been told ruffed grouse like to sun themselves after the woods have been well wetted down, and I've hunted these places with fair success on many occasions.

I once happened to get within about fifteen feet of a partridge sunning itself on a little open knoll in a stand of white birch. I wasn't hunting, and I stood and watched for several minutes. The bird preened itself and strutted about in the sun, weaving and bobbing like a pigeon. Occasionally it spread its tail into a fan, and it made several soft sounds that sounded more like an animal in pain than any kind of song. It seemed to be having a fine time until it spotted me. Then it was off with a roar.

I spoke before of behavior patterns. A good example is what happened one day when I was hunting with Ray Holland—not for the poor man's partridge, however. Ray's dogs were finding birds for us, until we got to one particular cover.

We were ascending a long, sloping ridge which spread at the top to form a wooded flat place the size of several football fields. The ridge was dotted with a few great oaks and tall, dead chestnuts. A nice stand of white birch stretched ahead of us. Now and then the dogs would make game, only to break and make fresh casts. It was obvious, from the way the dogs were acting, that grouse had been there recently.

We had gone a hundred yards or so when Ray said: "Did you hear that? I could swear I heard a partridge!"

I didn't hear it, but kept my ears open. A little farther on we both heard the next one take off. We heard it plainly, but saw no bird.

The dogs kept making game and breaking. One or two more birds moved and we never saw them. We were almost to the top of the ridge when Ray spotted a partridge. It was about seventy feet above the ground and going fast. Apparently it had flown from one of the high trees. We craned our necks then and soon saw another grouse. It definitely flew from one of the big, dead chestnuts.

What they were doing up there we don't know. What's more, they appeared to be flying ahead to other big trees. We worked the whole

flat area, but didn't move a bird from the ground, although more got out of the trees. It was crazy, and all the birds in the area seemed crazy; so we left. That is rather an extreme example of partridge behavior, but the main point is that it was carried out *en masse*.

In one section of hilly country I like to hunt, the birds will sometimes show a very marked preference for one type of ground. Most times they are spread out fairly evenly along the hillsides and the little valleys in between. But not always.

So Harry and I split up—he takes the slope, while I try the bottom. Usually we come out about even. Then a day will come along when Harry will be doing all the shooting and I won't see a thing. After a while he'll yell: "Looks like a hill day, Pete. Come on up!" And it will be a hill day. Just why, I don't know. I just know enough to keep out of the bottoms that day. Sometimes you will find two or three birds acting out of the ordinary. Then watch out for their fellows; chances are they will be doing it.

Be really on the alert when you hunt the poor man's partridge. Mark, if you can, the spot where each bird gets up from. Then walk over to it and take a good look around. Try to find out just why the bird was in that particular spot. See if there is a weed with an abundance of seeds, or if the ground appears to have been scratched up, or if there is a good supply of a particular type of food close by.

Perhaps you startled him from one of his favorite sunning places. Or did he jump from ahead of an obstruction too large to run around? Many times there is an answer to be found if you look for it. Compare it with other places you have examined in the same cover. Then look ahead for similar spots.

Don't forget to draw your birds and look in the crop. It's messy, but often valuable. You'll find there will be a new purpose in your hunting, and it won't be just to see if you can hit them. There's quite a thrill to finding the birds yourself, instead of blundering along and letting them find you—which is, of course, much to your disadvantage.

When the grouse are not too plentiful, but you've got your share—then you know you've done a real day's hunting. That's why I like to hunt the poor man's partridge.

GROUSE OF THE WESTERN SKY-LINE

by Hamilton M. Laing

THE ruffed grouse of Eastern woodlands has been called king of American game birds so often that most hunters believe it. Few, however, seem to realize the wealth of other American grouse. There is one to fit into every characteristic habitat of the continent: ruffed of the deciduous forests and woodlands, mainly of the East; pinnated of the grassy prairies, now, alas, mainly a memory of the older generation; sage grouse of the dry plains; blue grouse of the timbered Western mountain slopes; spruce grouse of the Northern coniferous forests; ptarmigan of the arctic tundra and above-timber barrens of the Western mountains.

The *North American Check-List* shows nearly fifty species and subspecies of birds of this group. My own province of British Columbia claims about sixteen of these, the Northwest being particularly rich. How many are known to the American hunter? About 10 per cent.

There are two reasons for this. Most of these birds live in too hard and tough a habitat to be available to normal legs and average opportunity. Also, any grouse has to be educated to the gun.

The blue grouse is best-known in the Western skyline country. No matter which branch of his wide-scattered family is represented, he answers fairly well to his name because both males and females have considerable blue in the underparts of their coats. The old cock is very dark, almost black above, especially in the sooty or coastal race; the hen is brownish with black markings above. The sexes are very unlike both in color and size.

The blue cock is a big fellow. Measured alongside the largest of the grouse, the huge capercaillie of the Old World, which is as large as a bald eagle, the blue may seem small; but after handling our quail or ruffed grouse or sharptails, a blue cock at three pounds or over seems a bouncer. The hen, of course, is considerably smaller.

The life history of all our grouse is very interesting, and the blue
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grouse particularly so. Though a bird of coniferous timber, he seems always to like best the half-wooded country. This applies to both branches of his family: the dusky and the darker sooty race. Even the latter, though a bird of the heaviest forests of the Northwest coast country, will be found in the more open and broken sections, and this either at high elevations where the trees grow thin near timber line or at sea level where timber is small and sparse on the rocky ridges.

Everywhere the blue is mainly a bird of the high range. He spends the fall and winter high, coming down only for the breeding season in spring and summer. I know him best on my home range of Vancouver Island, where his every move is common local knowledge. Within the last twenty-five years the heavy timber has been logged from most of the eastern slope of this vast island. Some huge slash fires have swept it, and the burns are growing up now to such deciduous forests as alder and willow, with a sprinkling of conifers. But instead of bringing doom to the grouse, it gave him a vast new kingdom in which to multiply tenfold.

"Hooters" and hens sail down from the interior mountains in March and April. By the end of June, however, most of these amorous males have turned back to the hills. By the first of September many of the hens are taking their broods over the same route, and by October the burns are deserted. The mid-September shooting season really lasts for only about ten days. But what days!

In October you must leg it up into the hills to at least 3,500 feet where, on the more open ridges bearing salal and huckleberries, you may find some blues. But blues in the timber are apt to tree; wing-shooting is difficult.

Here, as well as high in the Coast Range or the Cascades, you may meet the birds on the skyline through much of the year, especially the males. Their migration being altitudinal, they work from the low burns or open breeding ground to near timber line, and through July, August, and September may be found close to tree limit. Strangely enough, the males may be heard hooting ardently here, up to 5,500 feet, as late as September 1, but I have never been able to learn of females with chicks at such high elevation. In winter a tree dweller and needle-eater, scorning the ground, the blue grouse makes his stand at about the elevation at which he finds dry snow.

The old males really are the "dumb clucks" of their kind. They are not sporting birds. With the exception of their first season, they have missed the education derived from the gunning season at low elevation, and on the lonely skyline they seldom are molested. When disturbed, they usually fly up to a perch and pose stupidly. The proper weapon for them is a .22 target pistol or a light rifle of same caliber.

These birds seldom repay the leg work necessary to find them, and in the skillet they are apt to be tough. If they have fed extensively on the alpine huckleberries, and left the tough resinous needles alone, they are at their best. The young generation taken in the burns are splendid birds on the table.

Skyline blue-grouse hunting is a different game from that of the low elevations. In the burns where there is much ground cover, you put your dog to work and may be as orthodox as you like. In timberline country you may hunt from horseback and, dog or none, flush your birds into the trees. If potting a hooter is against your creed, you may flush him and see what you can do about it. You will find that a big blue thundering downhill—he always goes that way—will give you one of the hardest of targets. When he starts going places, he is no slouch.

Skyline questing for blue grouse allows a new factor in the game: the horse. A good saddle pony in ridable country is a de luxe element for the hardy and makes hunting possible for those who lack the legs for mountaineering. This high hunting is the opposite of lowland hunting. In the latter, shooting skill is more important than finding; on the high ridges, finding is everything and four good equine legs can cover more hills than two. Much of the alpine range of the sooty grouse cannot be ridden; most of that of the dusky relative eastward is more suitable for mounted hunting.

Whether high or low, the blue grouse does not furnish the same brand of sport as the ruffed. But there is hope for the blue. Of a certainty he is learning. Give him time. As a boy I hunted ruffed grouse with a rock or a bow and arrow.

Another less-known grouse of the Western mountains is the Franklin's, or fool hen. This bird is a Western edition of the better-known spruce partridge, a close cousin of the North Woods. Common names for birds, like nicknames for people, are apt to fit, and "fool hen" befits a bird generally reckoned to have the least sense of the grouse.

We are most apt to meet the Franklin's grouse in the forest of lodgepole pine or similar half-open growth. There is that unmistakable thunder of a high-speed round wing beside the trail, and a smallish grouse whirs up to a perch. Considerably smaller than our familiar ruffed, the sexes again are more unlike in plumage than is the case of any other of our grouse. The handsome male is largely jet-black and white with a crimson comb—a very striking bird. The female is rich brown above and heavily barred below.

Like most of our grouse, the sexes (adults) shun one another except during the short mating season. If you are riding the trail in September and flush a covey of five or six, you will find no sign of

the male parent, but will perhaps note that both sexes and ages are unlike. The young cock now shows only a sprinkling of the solid black on face, neck, and chest, and the young female differs somewhat from the mother.

Though the fool hen is recognized by the British Columbia Game Act as a sporting bird, he makes little claim to favor. He is one of the laziest of birds. He chooses the middle elevation of the mountain and stays there, getting up no farther than the alpine fir where timber is still fairly good. There is little of altitudinal migration, even for nesting.

The cock is the most lackadaisical thing on the mountain. Rout him from the trail, and he takes to a perch, usually low, and scans you with the eye of boredom. If feeling particularly energetic, he may say "*Cuk-cuk!*" I have shot him with his crop full of the stiff needles of alpine fir—ten feet from ground that was blue with huckleberries. He is always alone.

So little seems known of his love-making that there is the suggestion that he is a laggard even in love. Only the hens in the springtime can get that faraway look out of his eye, and they probably have to corner him and remind him of his duty to his country. As late as ten or eleven o'clock in the forenoon I have killed one without a vestige of food in his crop. He is never fat. Most of his life is spent in just sitting.

As in the case of the blue grouse at high elevations, the Franklin's hen and young of the year offer the most opportunity for sport. There is evidence that they can learn. After the first flush they quickly grow wilder, hiding in the thickest boughs and flushing unseen. Even the old cock on occasion may show that he knows tactics.

Last fall I flushed one of these chaps time after time in low fir clumps, and not once in half a dozen rises did he offer a shot. Nor could I ever see him on his perch. His fade-out in the shadows is sheer black magic. So a certain amount of wisdom must be granted him. It is only in the presence of man that he is a fool. He must know how to handle his many natural enemies; otherwise these birds would have perished a thousand years ago. His trouble is that his one stock trick of taking to a tree, which fools his four-footed ground foes, is of no use against man and gun, and he has too little contact with man to become properly educated.

Like all grouse, the Franklin's fool hen can fly fast enough for anyone. To get the most out of him, try flushing him from the trees and stopping him as he darts away through cover. You will get angles and speed enough and usually an obstruction or two, and before long you will wish for a light gun with a short barrel and a pattern as wide as a barn door.

As a sporting bird the fool hen's worst feature is not his stupidity, but rather his inaccessibility and scarcity. Coveys usually are small, often only two or three young reaching maturity. They are seldom numerous enough to repay the leg work necessary to reach them. As for the flesh, it is toothsome enough, but, just as with the blues, the old needle-eating cocks are suitable only for a hungry man on the trail. The young in their first fall, raised on tender greenery and finished off on berries, are quite a different matter.

Up above timber, where the last outposts of alpine fir or hemlock or pine are but dwarfed mattings that hug the cold slopes, we come to the realm of the real alpinists of the grouse family—the ptarmigan. These birds are lovers of arctic conditions. Stretching across the northern part of the continent from Ungava to Alaska and even out to the Aleutian Islands are two similar races, the willow and the rock ptarmigan.

These are as typical grouse birds of the arctic barrens as are the sharp-tails or pinnated grouse of the southern prairies. Though both come down well into British Columbia, finding their choice habitat at high elevations in the mountains, neither reaches the United States. A third smaller species, the white-tailed ptarmigan, follows the Western mountain chain throughout both countries, sticking to the last fringes of vegetation, far above tree growth.

Though all three ptarmigans appear to be snow-white in winter, the willow and rock really have blackish tails at all seasons, whereas the whitetail is always what his name implies. But in summer or early-autumn plumage the willow and rock wear red-brown coats and white underparts, the wings being always white, whereas the little white-tailed relative is a gray and white bird, always with white wings. Beautiful creatures all three at any season—but is there a grouse bird that is not?

Because of the climbing involved to reach his skyey home, the white-tail can scarcely ever become a sporting possibility, but the other two races are birds of another feather. I have hunted the rock ptarmigan across the grassy tundra of the Aleutian Islands and found the bird about everything I could ask. More recently I have chased the willow across the rolling open alplands of the Rainbow Mountains of British Columbia and had a grand time.

All ptarmigan are very nimble on the wing—they must be to escape their foes in the open. Of the three, the willow is the best game bird because he sticks where there is enough cover for him to hide and lie well and therefore flush to the gun.

So I sing the praises of this red-and-white partridge of the skyline at 5,000 feet, where he bursts out of the low fir mattings or the stunted

willow fringes of the cold rills and, with a throaty "crocking" and white wings flashing, gives the hunter a real thrill and a run for his money. He has the speed of the wind and the curves of a screwball and knows the wing tricks of all the grouse.

He is the only one I have seen with sense enough to burst up from cover and instantly duck down behind it, then speeding off low, keeping a screen behind his tail. He is so full of curves and angles that he doesn't know anything about the shortest distance between two points. And he has a raucous voice, a jeering "crock! crock!" that is as disconcerting as the gibes of a ring-necked cock that has put one over on you. I prophesy that he will someday be as famous as his red grouse relative of Europe. I like him and vote for him, and I want to chase him again across the alpine meadows.

In the oven or skillet, ptarmigan flesh is good—best, of course, from young birds in the early autumn before the snows hide the tender leafage, seed pods, and berries that comprise their food. There is less difference between old and young, I have found, than in the case of fool hens. If you have no recipe for these chickens of the hills, here is mine.

Always, if possible, cook old birds together, and young the same. Also, always hang well, four days at least if the weather is cool. Skin or pluck your bird, according to circumstance, but plucking is always better, as it retains any fat. Most of outer wing may be snipped off. Draw and wash according to shot damage, but wash as little as possible. I have seen birds so souseled in water that a good part of their flavor went downstream. Break the body across the back, detaching the legs, then separate them through the backplate. Split the breast end of body lengthwise into halves.

Have the frying pan hot enough so that the grease begins to smoke. Roll each piece of bird generously in flour and fry quickly as you would a steak, browning, then turning the pieces. Reduce the heat a bit and smother the meat in thin-cut onion rings, one medium onion or half a large one to two birds in the pan. When in about half an hour the onion is nearly done, add a few spoonfuls of boiling water and cover the pan. Simmer gently, adding salt and pepper and a little more water as necessary. The whole operation takes less than an hour. You simply can't stand it any longer—now let nature take its course.

WHAT IT TAKES

by A. B. Sanders

I DON'T know just how many seasons I have chased ruffed grouse up hill and down, backward, forward, and crosswise, but the interest on the national debt for the same period would be considerable. Many men have shot more birds than I; but when it comes to missing, I bow to none. I have missed them in sunshine and shadow, in rain and in snow, over land and over water, at five yards and at fifty, with guns and in clothes that fitted and that didn't fit.

I have also hit a few. Those few have always made me feel that there never was a wing shot like me and that I probably knew more about grouse, their lives and times, their manners and morals, and their circumvention than any other man alive. The remembrance of some of those hits and the plump, smug feeling that accompanies the remembering are among the satisfactory things of life.

For the shooting of grouse is not like the shooting of other birds. The feeling that bounces back to you, radar-like, when the shot that you fired at a grouse has hit its mark is wholly unlike the feeling you get when you hit a duck, or even a woodcock. Maybe it's something like contacting royalty, though I wouldn't know. If you care to call him the king of game birds, it's all right with me.

Once upon a time I thought that, since grouse were killed with guns, guns were the most important, if not the sole, requisite for the sport, and that if a man did not have just exactly what the experts prescribed he had better trot right out and get one, or else go hang himself. I no longer think that way: I've seen too many shooters happy with what seemed to me to be the wrong guns.

From what I can gather by eye and ear, more grouse are killed with open-bored 12s than with any other one kind of gun, and certainly it will take a lot of beating; but lots of fellows seem to feel that their 16s, 20s, 410s and maybe something else are just what to do the beating with. They may be right, at that. Anyway, they get birds. Two men I have shot with preferred full-choked 12s, one using an ounce of 9s and the other the superest load of 6s he could find. Both got birds.

The best brush shot I know uses a fairly wide variety of 16s and 20s. One of my father's cronies of forty years ago used a 10-pound double 10-bore with hammers like hare's ears, and he brought home more birds than anybody will probably ever bring home again, which is also true of my father, with his 16 of the same vintage.

A professional trap and exhibition shooter once told me that he used a wide-open 20, while the lady with whom I hunted for some twenty-five years used a 32-inch 12 which was choked within an inch of its life. Both were pretty well fitted, for the former used to shoot like chain lightning and the latter just the opposite.

She was never fast enough to be a good brush shot with any kind of gun—although plenty were tried—but on the long, open shots that come up a few times per season she swung those long barrels with deadly precision and without hurry, for she knew she had plenty of pattern to do business out there where the bird was. As for the pro, well, I never hunted birds with him, but I would have hated to bet heavily on the bird that arose within twenty-five yards of that cylinder 20. Conclusion: you can hunt grouse with any gun, provided it is the right gun for you—one you can hit with.

Another notion I entertained once upon a time is that if you went into the country where there were plenty of birds, and could shoot straight, you could get birds. Well, "it ain't necessarily so." Naturally your chances are a lot better if the grouse are there than if they aren't; but the gunner's chances for a shot are better in a familiar cover holding three birds than in an unfamiliar cover holding six.

If a cover is bounded on one side by a rocky fastness or an extensive blowdown, it is a moral certainty that each bird found will head for that sanctuary ultimately, if not on the first rise, and the hunter who knows about it will so work the ground that he will get a chance or two. But how about the fellow who is working the ground for the first time? Unless the cover is pretty open—more open than those I know—he won't know about the blowdown or the ledge until he has been led to it by the birds themselves.

Sometimes a cover is cut in two by a stream on one side of which the birds feed, while they live on the other for no reason apparent to the newcomer. He may, of course, get a shot in the process of learning, but he'll get more shots on his next trip.

There are spots in this world where grouse just naturally like to be, and for no reason that I ever discovered except, perhaps, that they are pleasant places. They contain no discernible feed, no water; and as for being pleasant, they are no more so than many another place that never was known to harbor a bird. Yet year after year such places are yielders. But how is a fellow to know about them unless he is taken

to them or stumbles onto them by himself? And how is he to know on his first trip how the birds will fly? After hunting a piece of ground a few times, over a couple of seasons, he will know how the birds are apt to fly, unless confronted with something which gives them time to change their minds.

Grouse always seem to have a good idea of just where they are going if disturbed, usually right back where they came from; and if come upon from any other direction, they will retreat according to plan with dispatch and pretty much in safety. Even if come upon from the same direction, they will sometimes follow the plan, but with less safety, especially if not well screened. If, however, you hear one talking and stepping around, it is ten to one he will flush in such wise that you can't see him, yet alone get a shot.

Many times I have stumbled onto grouse, blocking their planned escape route, and had them walk first this way, then that, and turn around and mutter and get flurried, exactly like a hen or a pedestrian in front of an oncoming vehicle. They look very silly. When they do take off, it is in the very safest direction available, and I believe that is just what they do whenever they have time to decide upon a change of plan. In the main, however, they can be depended on to do just about what they have always done in a given cover under given circumstances.

Once I was hunting a cover new to me but not to my companion. I flushed a bird without seeing it, then he flushed it the same way.

"Hey!" he said. "Are you any good at crossing shots?"

I looked modest.

"All right, then. There's a river at the end of these woods with an open space this side of it. Next time this bird gets up he'll cross that river. Get down there and get posted. I'll give you ten minutes."

I did, and it clicked.

Another time I was in a cover I knew well with two companions. We raised a bird which went into a ravine. I knew about where he was and that when next flushed he would fly up the ravine and across a road, and that he'd give the man in the ravine no chance at all; so I sent my friends up to the road and later flushed the bird. That clicked too. Scores of such incidents could be cited, but there's no sense in laboring the point merely to justify the conclusion that knowing the ground is a considerable asset to a grouse hunter.

I wonder if the haunts of the grouse and the lack of attention to detail on the part of his pursuers have not enhanced his reputation as a tough target and a great tactician. He's fast, all right! He's the fastest thing on earth away from the gun. By the time you hear him roar he has gone ten yards, which is usually all he needs to place several

cords of timber between himself and a charge of shot; so it takes fast shooting to cut him down. Yet if he is flying in the open—and I don't mean planing downhill on set wings like a bat out of hell; I mean flying—he is a no harder target than is a passing duck.

The point is that he usually isn't just plain trundling across the meadows. Instead he's boring holes through spruce and alder thickets or flurruping leisurely along on the far side of a cedar thicket, zooming from a birch limb down into a bunch of balsam or tearing down a fence row and ducking back into it just too late for you to stay your trigger finger. Of course that trick of sitting tight till your back is turned is smart, no getting away from it; nor is that the only trick an old cock of five seasons' experience has in his bag. Still, if he lived somewhere else—in the middle of a billiard table, for instance—he could hardly play his tricks with such telling effect.

Inattention on the part of the hunter has helped many a grouse to pull a fast one. There is no doubt that a hunter who isn't gathering birds takes to gathering wool. He takes to regarding scenery and song-birds as such, instead of as background for grouse. He gets to thinking about what he'd do if he were President, or what he wished he hadn't said yesterday afternoon, or of something even less creditable. Suddenly he becomes aware that he hasn't heard his dog's bell for some minutes and has no idea where he heard it last, or is snapped out of it by an explosion like a bomb as a bird lunges through the birches without risk of being hit by his belated and hurried shot charge.

A bird is pretty safe from a man who is thinking of something else. One time while I was hunting on high ground with a companion we saw a dozen or so black ducks. We followed their flight as they circled and veered and tacked, and finally saw them disappear into the woods at the head of a small pond in the valley. About fifty yards above the pond there was a pool in the inlet, probably ten yards in diameter. That's where we were pretty sure the ducks had pitched down, and we decided to stalk them.

One bank of the inlet was wooded; the other was open pasture, with nothing in it bigger than a sapling with a two-inch trunk, which would hardly serve to conceal us, especially me. Through the dense woods was our only course, so we took it, crawling and pussyfooting through spruce, alders, and creepers, with a cocker named Pepper keeping to the rear under protest. Five yards from the pool we could hear the ducks paddling and chuckling but could not see them. In trying to get closer we made a noise, and up they went with a roar. We could see the scurrying forms through the branches, and we opened fire. It rained ducks—we assumed.

We assumed it because it ought to have rained ducks, but it developed that we had no other grounds whatever. Pepper plunged in with great enthusiasm, encouraged by our shouts. He swam and splashed all over the place but retrieved no ducks. Our shouts became less encouraging, more mandatory. Finally, all loaded for cripples, we ourselves, waded in and went to beating the bushes and rushes.

When we could find nothing, we stopped chiding Pepper and, standing pocket-deep in October's chill black water, looked at each other in uncomplimentary tones. Right then there was a roar, and from the skinny, bare branches of that two-inch sapling, not ten feet above our heads, burst a grouse, heading for the timber. He had stayed right there in the front row through all the shooting and the shouting, till the excitement had died down, then put on his hat and gone home. We sent a total of five futile, harried, misbegotten shots after him, then resumed where we had left off, looking at each other. Neither of us could think of anything to say.

From that fray the only one of our party to emerge without discredit was Pepper. Which brings up the subject of dogs. I rather wish it hadn't. Still, plenty of people who don't know about dogs have a deal to say about them, so I may as well put in my nickel's worth.

I do know that real grouse dogs are scarce as hen's teeth, and have been for a quarter century at least. The fault does not lie with the dogs or their breeding: it lies with the 30-day seasons and the scarcity of birds which produced them. But there are many who are pretty sure grouse cannot be shot without dogs and, anyway, it would be no fun if they could. I know one man who, I verily believe, questions that a bird shot other than over a point is a bird. I know another fellow who is happier without any dog whatever, even when the woodcock are in. Says he'd rather hunt birds than dogs. Gets a lot of birds, too.

I have owned only one good dog, and he wouldn't have been rated good by anyone but me, I guess. He was very good on woodcock—not the best, but good—but it was not until his fifth year that he helped me to many grouse. About then he apparently decided that the only way he could introduce birds to the gun was to drive them to it, and that is what he did. It was unorthodox, but it suited me; and for the rest of his life I got more shots, and probably more birds, than during any other similar period.

In finding dead and crippled birds, however, I helped him out as often as he helped me. If a grouse hunter can mark down shot birds as well as a Southerner can mark down single bob-whites, he won't leave many for the hawks and skunks. And he can do it if he will train himself to retain a mental photograph of the kill and not get to thinking about his wife's sister. A good dog is a great asset, but the

fellow who has one is not a bit likely to offer it for sale cheap, first offer accepted.

In my native Vermont, grouse and woodcock are hunted at the same time, God and Washington willing, and I have always observed that the dog owners get more woodcock than grouse, like to hunt them better, and pay more attention to them, whereas the two most successful grouse hunters I know hunt dogless from choice. This would seem to indicate that it is easier to come by a good woodcock dog than a good grouse dog, and that no dog at all is better than a poor one.

But dogs, guns, marksmanship, lore, and experience, important as they are in making up the sum of a grouse hunter's equipment, are as nothing if he lacks one seldom-considered asset: legs, and what it takes to keep them going. Legs are what carry you through the matted hardhack, the creeper-laced alders, and the poplar blowdowns. Legs are what carry you up one hogback and down another until on maybe the fifth or sixth rise you finally get the shot that transfers the wise old cock from the air to the back pocket.

Many a long day of heartbreaking failure has been turned into a red-letter one in the last brief hour of October sunlight just because a hunter or two had the legs to lift them up the hill one more time. And they didn't know it! They didn't know that in twenty amazingly short years their experience and skill wouldn't be worth ten cents on the dollar, simply because their damned old legs wouldn't carry them through hell and high water any longer.

But it happens to grouse hunters just as it happens to ballplayers and boxers, and then is when they realize that those things which are clothed in pants and boots merely because it is the custom of the country were really the cornerstone of the whole edifice. Real, honest-to-goodness grouse hunting is a man's game. A lusty young giant of twenty-four who has recently taken up skiing told me he liked it because he was lazy! "That's right," he said. "You get towed up, then you slide down. I've been at it all day, yet I have put forth no more effort than I would have in two hours' hunting in the Hillside cover."

I would like to own a certain custom-built gun I know of, and I'd like to shoot it as well as its fortunate owner. I'd like to have the greatest surviving grouse dog and to know as much about birds as he does. But I rather think I'd settle for the legs of yesteryear.

On Woodcock Shooting

In my salad days I once ran a long streak on woodcock. Perhaps eight or ten birds consecutively found their way to the table via my right barrel. With the tendency of youth to generalize on insufficient evidence, I began to think there was nothing much to woodcock shooting save finding 'em, flushing 'em, pointing the gun and pulling the trigger, picking 'em up and plucking 'em. Came then the rude awakening. The next dozen birds behaved very differently—instead of fluttering lazily up to the tops of the alders of scrub birches and hanging there a long moment while you centered them in the pattern of nines, they streaked off low, corkscrewing in and out among the branches with incredible speed. I simply could not get my gun on 'em at all!

And that is part of the charm of woodcock shooting: the utter unpredictability of the birds in the way they're going to fly, and the necessity on the part of the gunner to be ready for each bird as an individual problem.

But that's only part of the charm. The rest is in the bird's habitat, the moist, fall-smelling alder runs he leads you into, the bright birch uplands; the excitement that grips you when you know the flight is on and maybe fifty birds will be strung along the next quarter mile of alder-fringed brook. Perhaps more than any other game bird the woodcock symbolizes in his delicate brown body the essence of what autumn means to the bird shooter.

GHOSTS OF THE ALDERS

by Victor Macomber

TUCKED away among the sand hills at the foot of the Adirondacks and well hidden from the searching eyes of bird hunters lies Rainy-Day Cover, an outstanding example of what an early-season woodcock bed should be. Beginning at the upper end with a narrow brush-lined brook, the valley opens wider and wider as it progresses, filled to each edge with tall, mature alders.

Cattle from the hillside pasture on one side have summered in the thicket, cutting it into a labyrinth of little paths and trampling the tall weeds and goldenrod into the rich black dirt. On the other side little valleys, also choked with alders, radiate back onto the bordering hill. Some peter out to open, rank-grassed meadows; others persist until they connect with the heavy green timber beyond. Little islands of poplar and white birch have sprung up on this hill, offering protection from the wind and a warm southern exposure. Subterranean springs seep out of the hillside to trickle and soak their way to the mother brook.

Here are combined all the requisites for raising native birds. The side-hills guard the valley from the cold, raw winds of the west, east, and north. Vegetation bunched here and there through the alders provides sites for hidden nests, and the floor of the bed is rich in moisture and food even after the first frosts have bitten deep into less fortunate locations. In short, it is the dream of the woodcock hunter come true.

Opening day was ushered in by a great red sun gently pushing through frosty mist to bathe the quiet valley in rosy light. The unreal glory of autumn foliage, contrasting with the silver-tinged edges of brown grass and alder leaf, was suddenly unimportant.

Point! Old Dan, just inside the cover, came to a rigid stop, but the urge of the frosty air made him overstep his bounds, and out of range a bird flushed low across a small arena and out of sight. We ganged up to run down the little fellow, but no amount of hunting could disturb him, so on down the valley we progressed. Still no birds.

Heading back again to the other side of a small road that intersected the valley, I arrived at the spot where the first bird had been flushed

about the same time that old Dan reached there. He quartered back and forth and suddenly froze. Bill, Charlie, and Jack were deep in the bed, and before they could arrive at the point a nervous bird flushed low and fast, ducking and darting down one of the little pathways. It was a pure snap shot, and the result was exceedingly dubious.

Only when old Dan followed cautiously did I know that the first timberdoodle of the season had come to bag. That was a strange situation—three dogs and four men, cutting and crisscrossing over that little spot, had failed to dislodge the bird. The dogs are tried and true, their noses are good, yet that tricky little fellow had sat tight and escaped detection.

Back in the big cover were many unmistakable signs. White splotches of chalk markings were everywhere. Little round holes in the ground attested to the heavy feeding which had taken place the night before. The dogs were quivering with excitement and making game, moving quickly but cautiously from the stream side to the upper edge. Suddenly they came to a point, and then was enacted one of those little pantomimes so frequent in the search of the timberdoodle that makes the bad, bold hunter red in the face and sends him groping for alibis.

Bill and I were nearest the dogs. We had found that when birds are spotted near the edge they will frequently flush out into the open and along the edge before ducking back. As Bill walked up the point I stepped out to the border of the thicket. The bird flushed, but instead of a characteristic corkscrew, twisting to the tops of the bush, he also found some little passage that took him straight at me, standing up there on the edge of the open. With the speed of light he almost ran into me, wheeled, and in a trice had cut down into the heavy brush of the valley.

Two ineffective shots split the morning air. With broken gun, I reached for another shell, and at that inopportune moment a second bird, which had been sitting quietly within three feet of where I stood, vaulted from his hiding place with the characteristic twittering and followed the leader back into the bush without even so much as a salute from either one of us.

After that we organized all the hunters inside the thicket, save one who kept to the edge and in the clear. This has a twofold advantage, for at those birds flushed out to the edge this man will more frequently than not have at least a snap shot before they drop back into the alders. If he doesn't, he is in a position to mark them down for future reference.

Frequently birds that are being hard pressed in the cover will fly to the very edge of the thick stuff and will not move unless stepped on or pointed by a dog, and when flushed often leave the bed across the open

for some other retreat. Such an occurrence took place shortly after the episode with the double.

A bird had flushed wild from the center of the bed, but no one had seen it. Following the contours of the valley, I had moved slightly beyond the line of scrimmage—in fact, too far beyond—and, on checking up positions, retraced my steps. You can imagine my surprise when out from a little thorn-apple scrub, which I distinctly remembered for having driven one of its needle points into my leg, popped a deacon-billed woodcock. As straight as an arrow he cut into the open for one of those little poplar islands. His flight had been so precipitous and so rapid that when the charge of *gs* caught up with him he rolled for at least six feet after hitting the ground.

For the next hour, during the time the early-morning mists were being worn down by an ever-mounting sun, we found on every flush that the birds were flying straight and true for some predetermined spot, for all the world like frightened grouse. There was none of the turning, twisting, rising flight into the clear before striking out on a direct line. Every shot was fast and tricky; but as soon as the sun came out clear the whole character of the rise changed and again reverted to the crazy zigzag flight of a woodcock so often seen at midday.

Why they are so erratic is a matter for surmise. Perhaps it is due to the fact that they are primarily night flyers, and with the large dilated pupils their vision in bright light is probably nearsighted, requiring a quick change of course as each obstruction presents itself. Strength is lent to this theory when you recall that early in the morning or on overcast days, when the light is poor, birds are inclined to make a straight getaway. To the uninitiated seeing and shooting at his first woodcock at midday, the sport will be a pretty tame proposition; but let him hunt these ghosts of the alders throughout the open season, and his pride will fall in proportion as his ammunition bills rise.

For a display of sheer cussedness, undependability, and temper-trying tactics, pick a cloudy, wind-swept day on a poplar slope, an ancient apple orchard, or an alder path when the flight is in. Load yourself well with ammunition, and let not the fumes from last night's potions dim your eye. You may have more open shots than on native birds, but your targets will have developed wing power to spare and they waste no time in putting it to the best of use.

Be not overconfident that a missed flight bird will be marked down, flushed, and tried for again. Out of the number of native birds flushed and missed, one may find a majority that will fly but a relatively short distance and then pitch back into the alders, thus giving the hunter another opportunity to recover his loss.

With flight birds it's a far different story. All too often, especially if

the day be cloudy and a spanking wind blows out of the west, Deacon Woodcock will rise far above the treetops and vanish from the county. It is almost axiomatic that flight birds are here today and gone tomorrow. Dropping into a warm slope among birch, poplar, or apple, they rest from their night labors, feed a little, and prepare to hop off the next night if their barometers speak of heavy weather in the offing. The alder beds should not be entirely overlooked, but do not waste too much time on them unless the slopes prove barren.

Strong in flight, they will test the skill of an expert. There was that last bird in Rainy-Day Cover. Wild as a March hare, he stood for but one point, from which he neatly escaped by a lightning-fast getaway into the bush. Three flushes—one directly at my head, one wild and out of range, and the last meant to separate himself from his tormentors forever—ended with a lucky shot at the top of a high wineglass elm. One hour and eight shells had been spent on that little chap, and our faces were all red.

When the flight birds are in, it is a lucky man who can change his entire attitude and look upon them as a wholly different breed of game. Think fast, step up that draw, and accelerate your swing, or, brother, you'll just punch holes in the air.

I hesitate to mention the smart little chap that, though driven down to the very end of the last piece of brush, apparently settled on the edge and then disappeared from the face of the earth. Neither keen-nosed dogs nor thrashing men could arouse that bird into flight. Where he had gone only his director of traffic knew, but it was a complete and efficient fade-out. Perhaps he whizzed out to the center of the open fields beyond, there to await the retreat of his tormentors. They do that, make no mistake.

A year ago Bill and I had returned from the alder beds and had picked up the two dogs, left at home, to give them a workout on the pheasants near the airport. The hill was open and completely barren of alders or other brush. Our guns, pursuant to law, had been left behind, for the ringneck season was not yet open.

Just at dusk, as we cleared the topmost point of the hill, out into the evening sky hopped a woodcock, then another, then another, their whistling feathers making sweet music in the air. From whence they had come, or what their errand, goodness only knows. In all probability they had moved from their feeding and were preparing to hop off for the sunny South as soon as dark had settled. Even the dogs had been taken unawares and made a poor pretense at a point.

The bird dogs I have known generally have little trouble in catching the body scent of the woodcock. It must be relatively strong and correspondingly distasteful in the mouth of the retriever. Time and again

I have seen Patsy, the Irisher, and Duce, the Briton, both excellent retrievers of grouse and pheasant, pick up a bird, drop it, shake their heads with much lip-lifting and snorts, then by a series of pickups and drops finally deposit the bird at their master's feet. They simply don't like it.

Dan will point as sturdily as a statue; but when "Dead bird!" rings out after the shot, he is liable as not to give the grassed bird merely a passing sniff and then move on to new discoveries. Duce, one fine evening, figured out this dilemma to a nicety, and this account was eye-witnessed, and not hearsay, though I must admit that I questioned even my own eyesight.

The setting was perfect. Bill, Charlie, and I were returning from the day's hunting through a narrow, shallow valley spotted here and there with alders and goldenrod and hiding a serpentine brook that meandered from side to side. Charlie, at the far edge, flushed a bird which flew directly down the skirmish line, preventing any shooting except on the left wing, where I happened to be stationed. It was a clean, open, right-left swing; and though I usually miss those beautiful shots, I was fortunate enough to drop the bird on the far side of the brook.

Duce came through at the call "Dead bird!" to make the find, and in a moment she spotted it. As usual, she first blew audibly through her nose, picked up the bird, went to the brook and dropped that scenty morsel into the water, picked it up and dropped it again. Then she retrieved the dripping wet woodcock and deposited it at my feet, and I swear she was grinning at her own ingenuity. Yes, by gravy, Duce was dunking that woodcock; and what is more, she did it frequently thereafter.

One strange thing about that dog Duce is her almost unfailing ability to mark down a missed bird or one that has flushed wild. We have seen her do this so often, even though she may be interrupted by another bird in the interim, that we no longer think it extraordinary.

Down in Spicer Swamp one afternoon Bill and I had become separated from Charlie and arrived at the upper end of the swamp while he was still inside. Duce had been making a circle when we emerged from the alder thicket and stepped out into the sloping pasture to wait for Charlie to catch up.

"Point!" called Charlie. "Bird! Up the swamp," he called; and sure enough, there came a woodcock at full speed directly toward us.

"Don't shoot," whispered Bill, "unless he goes by."

But the bird did not go by. Instead he cupped his wings and dived down right toward our feet, landing not two yards from us. There he sat, the funniest, prettiest, round-eyed bit of autumn beauty I can imagine, every bar of his hat standing out in bold relief. We could almost see the fluttering of his sides.

"Now watch for Duce," whispered Bill.

We stood immovable, waiting. There was a swish in the alders. Then the white flash of Duce, quartering but always moving to the center of a compelling impulse. Head high, nostrils quivering, she ceased her crisscross career and, like Robin Hood's arrow, dived straight at the resting spot of the waiting woodcock.

Oh, to perpetuate that picture of wild control! Setter fossilized. Bird tense and still. Humans transfixed with the pantomime. One small bird is the moving force in the entire performance. He is the king. Then, like the spasmodic eruption of a miniature volcano, he vaults straight at Duce's head and in a quick ascent climbs for the crest of the alders.

Well, let's not indulge in sentimentalities. If we do, perhaps I shall never hunt those ghosts of the alders again. The king is dead. Long live the king!

When the timberdoodle twitters, let your nerves be steady and your eye clear. Hold dead on to a bird that has reached the top of his zigzag climb out of the alders, but lead, lead, lead when he gets into the clear. Do not be fooled by the awkward-looking bill that dangles down from his face. It interferes not the least with the speed of Sir Jonathan.

If you are fortunate enough to drop the bird, mark the spot well and don't take your eyes from it, for his protective coloration is a masterpiece of deception and you may look straight at him without seeing. Be on your guard when you approach the spot lest his quick dive to the ground may have been not the result of your marksmanship but just the little fellow's idea of where he wanted to stop, and on your approach he may go away from there and leave you holding the bag. When you have found the proper place in the atmosphere into which to throw your load of 9s or 10s, you will not need to send very much lead to bring him down or render him *hors de combat*.

It was over in the Brookfield country a year ago that Charlie, Bill, and I were on the trail of a flushed grouse. We had left the swamps of the bottom land, cut across a sidehill, and disappeared into the heavy timber which extended from top to bottom. We had never been in that particular piece before, and when we did get into it found it so thick and impenetrable that further pursuit of the grouse was given up as a useless job.

When we decided to come out, Charlie was at the top of the hill, Bill was about a third of the way up, and I was in a spot some hundred yards below Bill. Charlie stepped out into the open, and as he did so a woodcock flushed wild and high and started down the hill. Charlie's shot was ineffective. By the time the bird reached Bill, its accelerator was wide open and it was picking up altitude every foot of the way, no doubt headed for the next county.

Bill's shouted warning of "Bird!" caught me behind a heavy thorn-apple tree, and as I glanced up I had but a flash of the speeding little chap as he made for the swamp. The right barrel was a complete miss, but on the chance that something might happen I jumped clear of the bush and, with the bird much too far away, let drive with the left barrel, which is a modified choke. Of course I did not expect him to fall, and he didn't, but kept straight on toward the swamp. When so far away that he appeared to be merely a speck, he pitched into cover.

The three of us moved down to flush him again. Charlie's big setter, Dan, was on the right and ahead of me. He started to make game, hesitated for a moment, then stepped in. There was a fluttering of wings, and when I came up there stood Dan, with his foot squarely on the woodcock's back. Examination disclosed that only one No. 9 pellet had entered the joint of the right wing, effectively preventing the little chap from making a complete getaway.

Opportunities for long shots on woodcock are the exception rather than the rule; but when they are presented, one should not make a practice of taking these long-range chances unless the destination of the bird can be more or less accurately marked, for a little lead may render him incapable of rising from the ground. Unless he is retrieved, he provides more food for skulking vermin.

I do not wish to open a discussion of shot sizes for upland game, particularly woodcock, but it has been my experience in using a light 12-gauge that 9s and 10s are amply powerful not only for woodcock but for grouse as well. If I should remark that more than one big rooster ringneck has fallen to the same charge, I should probably be designated as a crackpot. I will leave the subject merely with an expression of the opinion that one should gauge the amount of powder and size of shot with the peculiarities of his own arm. By trial and error he will soon discover the ideal load.

If fortune favors you and your pocket bulges with your quota of birds, prepare them for the table, after hanging them by the neck in your icebox for a week to ten days. Dry-pluck and clean them. With a strip of bacon skewered to each breast and a toast dressing well seasoned with chopped onions, spices, boiled giblets, liquor and all, they are ready for the roaster.

Baste frequently with melted butter and a little hot water. When they are quick-browned, you may remove them to the garnished platter and invite yourself to sit down. Little timberdoodle, you top 'em all.

On Pheasant Shooting

A good many gentlemen shooters of the old school have looked down their long aristocratic noses at the ringneck as a gaudy interloper, an obnoxious, raucous, and foreign voice in our quiet native uplands, a corrupting influence on our good bird dogs (you see, the pheasant won't sit "like a gentleman" to a pointing dog, but skulks off under his nose, thus confusing him and ruining him for quail and woodcock), and have even expressed disgust that he was ever allowed to come here at all.

Nuts. The introduction of the pheasant was one of the happiest events in our sporting history. Of course he is not a larger quail or grouse or woodcock—and why should he be? In some respects he is harder to take than our native species, and he certainly requires a different technique on the part of both dog and hunter. But that is not to deny his right to full citizenship in the community as a bird that has put game in covers where there was no game before or has repopulated whole areas from which our native birds have been driven away. He's a robust and dramatic bird, of good table quality, and should be accepted in his own right.

As a matter of fact, he has been so accepted, and perhaps I am only rehashing ancient history. Nevertheless, I bring it up because there persists a strong feeling in certain quarters that it is positively immoral to try to introduce foreign species to our native covers. So far only the pheasant among game birds seems to have taken hold generally, though the Hungarian partridge has done well in spots. The chukar, which a dozen years ago was exciting a lot of interest, seems to have passed from the picture. Evidently he either can't get through our winters, or cannot protect himself from predators, or lacks some vital food element on this continent. But the point is to keep an open mind on the whole subject,

remembering what the German brown trout has done for us all over the country and what the importation of the rainbow from Western waters has meant to the East. Someday, maybe, we'll establish another game bird which will give us as much permanent sport as has the pheasant.

PERCENTAGE PHEASANTS

by Bert Popowski

ALL other things being equal, the football team that has the ball in possession the greater share of playing time is most likely to emerge the victor. The late Knute Rockne was a firm believer in percentage football, and many were the upsets engineered by his Fighting Irish, even when pre-game odds gave them only the slenderest chance for victory.

Years ago a compilation of figures on upward of five hundred basketball games showed that in an overwhelming majority of cases the team that had possession of the ball a greater part of the playing time was generally the winner. Strangely enough, the closer the game the more frequently that was true, often only seconds more of ball possession rewarding that team with victory.

Come to think of it, that's the way it is with pheasant hunting. By and large, the fellow who puts in the leg work, hour after weary hour, is the boy whose gamebag is most hefty as the hunting minutes run out. But if you watch such a hunter, chances are that he is also hunting intelligently and hitting those patches of cover which are so often passed up but which surprisingly often conceal one of the long-tailed stubble chickens.

More than a score of years on the trail of this gaudy gamester have given me a healthy respect for his cunning, his speed afoot, and his iron nerve. But, like all game, the pheasant has its failings, and by observing these, and by gambling that what 100 pheasants have done the 101st is apt to do, the thinking hunter can save himself many, many miles of weary plodding. And bag his limits with his head instead of his feet.

My son John and I use system in hunting ringnecks. The two of us can't cover an immense cornfield, so we decide where the pheasants should be and hunt them there. If the field is a long, narrow one, it is almost invariably planted in the direction of its greatest dimension. But even if its width is greater than we can cover without permitting ringnecks to slip past between us, we can still cover it with precious few

pheasants getting up out of gunshot. Of course there are those oldsters that simply pour on the coal and sprint out of that field to safety; but then I've never seen a pheasant hunter successfully race one of the long-geared gamesters.

We do not walk abreast. The hunter next to the edge of the field—and he shouldn't be more than ten yards in from the edge—lags some five to ten yards behind the one who is farther inside the field. This latter shooter thus splits any pheasants that attempt to run from him. Some of them turn toward the safety of the center of the field, and these will get our later attention. But those that turn to the outside are faced with two alternatives. When they reach the edge of the field, they'll probably fly, and the chances are that they'll get up in gun range. But if they double back between the two advancing hunters, they suddenly find the trailing hunter where they've never before encountered him. The shock is demoralizing, they take to their wings, and we bag another cock bird.

There is another reason for this method of edging a cornfield, or any loose cover through which birds can run or in which they can hide. Often they allow the shooter to walk past them by some ten to fifteen yards and then flush. The trailing hunter is thus in a much better position to take them without having to depend entirely on his ears to warn him of the flush. Such birds as are walked up down-wind are particularly prone to handle so, chiefly because they can execute a much better take-off into the wind.

As we near the end of the field the leading hunter stops in a choice shooting spot some five to ten yards from the edge. There he swivels around to right-angle the line of march, and waits. Many a ringneck is by-passed by hunters who curve away from the corner of the field with the mental observation: "There can't be any birds in there." There frequently are, but they aren't foolish enough to contradict such hunters when their reward would likely be a handful of lead.

Across the end of that cornfield we cut, and handle the next corner the same way. Then we're ready to march back along the length of the cornfield, and this time we expect to find more birds. Why? Well, because all those that slipped off from the leading hunter probably didn't stop running until they got well away from him—that is, near the far edge of the field. So they will be added to those birds that were already near the far edge and, if the field is wide enough so that they were undisturbed, are still there.

Each corner is worked out with the same system: one hunter holding his stance while the other zigzags back and forth to make sure that no birds slip by him in the cleanup. If strips of weeds are encountered running across the line of advance, the hunters work through them more

slowly than usual, for running birds often sprint until they find a bit of thick cover and lie doggo. If such weeds run parallel to the line of advance, the hunters often pinch in on them, for they're the percentage pockets where pheasants lurk.

Any pheasant hunter worth his salt can tell you whether there have been pheasants in the field within the past two hours. Our eyes are constantly searching the ground for droppings, fresh scratchings, or dust-bath pockets, or for ears of corn that have had kernals picked from them. Such ears may be on the ground or may be hanging on the stalk up to two feet off the ground. If the latter, the ground beneath them should tell its own story of recent feeding activity.

Now let's tackle a weed patch in the midst of a stubble field through which ringnecks might easily sneak away. Do we smash into that weed patch from the near side? We do not. Why? Because it's pheasant nature to run first—even if only a little way—and fly. We circle that weed patch to the far end, then work it back to the point nearest to where we first came upon it. When so circled, pheasants frequently forego running and hold. Also, when flushed, they are more apt to burst out at right angles to the line of advance instead of straightaway.

Of course the side shots are more difficult, but they present a more certain target with more of the bird's vitals exposed to killing pellets. Straightaway shots are generally easy, but the long streaming tail feathers and tough muscular legs mean that your shot pellets must drive in much deeper to reach the vitals. Big-game hunters will recognize the similarity between a straightaway shot at deer or elk compared to the more difficult but more deadly broadside shot.

Then, too, there is the opportunity of a second shot in case of a miss, for the bird is not putting so much more distance between himself and the shooter as is the case when he flushes straightaway. Thus a bird flushing straightaway at 35 yards rarely gives you more than one shot at killing range; broadside, he is apt to be within 45 yards for your second shot, if you need it.

Now let's consider uniform, thick, grassy cover, through which the birds have difficulty in moving rapidly. This cover is generally thick prairie grass, second-growth legumes like sweet clover or alfalfa, or heavily overgrown stubble from which the small-grain crop has long been gathered in. In moving through such a field John and I have adopted the zigzag method of hunting. We start down the field abreast, move into it about 30 paces, then switch off to the left at a 45-degree angle for ten paces. Then a 90-degree turn to the right for ten paces, followed by a 90-degree switch to the left for a like distance. And so on down the length of that cover.

The strategy is relatively simple. If you go straight down such a field

of thick cover, the birds will slip just off your line of march and hold quietly to permit you to pass. Ordinarily they do not flush after you have passed, as they do in cornfields, but sneak quietly away. But when you cut back and forth, a bird that has neatly slipped off your line of advance suddenly discovers that you are bearing directly down on it. Its confidence shaken, the cock threshes out of there in frantic flight, and if your hold is right he's in your game pocket.

Long, slender tree claims—just right to be covered by two hunters—have yielded another strategy. We walk them abreast, always trying to keep outside of trees which might interfere with our shooting of birds that ran to the edge of the claim and then flushed. Within one hundred yards of the end of such a claim, one of us slips out wide and hurries to the corner opposite his advancing partner. His circling movement has a tendency to drive those birds that are near his edge of the claim into the trees and then into the direct path of his partner's advance.

The hunter remaining in the trees slows up his advance, but makes up for it by commencing a zigzag advance that prevents many birds from doubling back past him. The waiting gunner, on the other hand, makes as little show of himself as possible, to encourage the birds to run out to the edge. There, suddenly sighting him in waiting, they're relatively easy victims, though they offer a greater variety of shots than in any other type of pheasant hunting.

A cornfield, a tree claim, and a stubble field all have a grain to the growth in them. Generally this is in the direction of its length. If the cover in such areas is comparatively thin, it is smart strategy to walk crosswise of this cover for two reasons: first, the birds are thus screened by more vegetation and are thus less apt to flush wild; second, they have greater difficulty in negotiating the going and are more apt to hold.

Personally, I'm allergic to large groups of hunters. I can stomach up to five on a pheasant hunt; but big gangs, no. Not only are they apt to be overcome with hunting hysteria, but they invariably include hunters of different walking speeds.

So John and I generally hunt alone. If we do join a party, we do not make any effort to revise its hunting habits. It would take too long, and too much precious hunting time would be spent in sloppily executed maneuvers. However, here's how we maneuver pheasants in the three types of cover I've previously mentioned.

We use two methods in working weedy cornfields and those not so well supplied with holding cover: the latter is worked crosswise to the grain of the planting, and the weedy cornfield is worked lengthwise of the rows. We give especial attention to weed patches within

the cornfield and to the corners, for, all other things being equal, that's where the birds most readily concentrate.

The same advice applies to any cover. The wise pheasant hunter will give especial attention to small islands of thick weeds in moderately open cover, to small stands of buckbrush and brier in open undergrowth, to the natural thickening of weeds and all growth in the valleys as opposed to hilltops. In fact, in semi-arid country we sometimes ignore the tops of the ridges entirely and walk the vegetation-clogged winding valleys.

Just to illustrate how such methods compare with blind walking of pheasant fastnesses, during the 1945 season John and I made two consecutive week-end hunts in areas where hunters were having great difficulty in getting presentable bags. The average, to summarize the small talk I overheard from a half dozen groups, ran between two and three birds per hunter.

In the same territory, four hunting days, taken in two-day stints, yielded us 10, 9, 10, and 8 birds, just three short of the permissible daily bag limits for the period. In fact, when we hung up our first ten birds for the first day in a cooler and claimed them on the evening of the second day, I ran into a heated argument that two of us had bagged them. By inviting the doubting gentleman to examine the birds bagged during the first day, plus the fact that our car license indicated we had made a substantial haul in getting into the hunting territory in question, I finally got a grudging admission that it might possibly be true.

The birds were holding too tight, some claimed; others were of the opinion that the crop of young birds wasn't up to par. Both were right. The birds were holding very close and permitting haphazard strollers to walk right by them. And of the total of 37 birds we bagged, only seven were old cocks, the balance being of the current year's hatch. Further, we kept tab on the birds we flushed within range each day and they ran as follows: 31, 29, 33, and 32. These figures completely excluded the hens that got up, since no hens are permitted as a portion of the Nebraska kill.

Further, we lost just three cripples during the four days, though five of the birds we picked up were so hard hit that they flew out of gun range and then either towered and collapsed or fell stone-dead. By keeping an eye on the spot where they fell and totally ignoring any other shootable birds that got up, we recovered all five. The three cripples we lost were birds that were winged and hit the ground with their legs already in racing stride.

Thus our kill accounted for 29.6 per cent of the cock birds that got up within range, not at all a high percentage. Nevertheless we felt very

happy about the very light loss of cripples, whose recovery cost us shooting opportunities at more than enough birds to have filled out our limits for each of the four days.

If you and your hunting partner encounter conditions where you feel you are not getting your fair percentage of birds, perhaps this summary of many years of pheasant-hunting experience will help you. In any area where birds are to be found it follows that they must be hunted differently during various stages of the day. After a flock has spent the night in roosting cover, the birds are most interested in feeding until about 11:30. Thereafter they may gather in moderate cover open to the sun but sheltered from the wind, to preen and dust-bathe. After 2:30 the birds again feed for a couple of hours and then move leisurely back toward their roosting cover late in the afternoon. This applies to birds that have not been disturbed. Those routed by hunters may be found anywhere, but feed they must and feed they will, no matter how surreptitiously.

If cornfields are too heavily hunted, the birds are not averse to feeding in small-grain stubble, and in extreme cases on weed seeds and berries in brushy thickets. However, they prefer grain to weeds and berries and will only go into thickets during their dust-bathing-preening periods during midday and midafternoon.

Weather may affect their behavior to a marked degree. During wet weather they prefer to feed in relatively open spots in cornfields, and will then make no attempt to invade any but fairly open cover that does not drench their feathers. In dry, hot weather they may seek out the lowest and thickest cornfields they can find to avoid both heat and sun. Then their dust baths may be found in the cool earth of dense plum thickets and similar cover edging such feeding fields.

As the day wears to a close and they begin to seek roosting cover they may be encountered almost anywhere. They are wildest then and perfectly willing to fly instead of trusting escape to their long-gear'd legs.

On Dove and Pigeon Shooting

This is a subject about which I know nothing from first-hand, but I have always been interested in the swift erratic flight of doves I've jumped from Cape Cod asparagus fields while quail hunting and in the tales of my friends who have shot (at) the gray speedsters in the Virginia peanut fields. I have eaten a few doves, presented to me by my more fortunate friends, and if they're half as much fun to shoot as they are to eat, they— Well, won't somebody please ask me dove shooting?

About the western bandtail I know only what I read, but that makes me hope I'll live long enough to get a crack at them someday. Certainly the suggestion in Mr. Betten's second paragraph ought to be taken seriously—has anybody ever given any thought or study to the idea of introducing some of the old-world varieties of pigeons? Various kinds of pigeons do well enough in the semi-wild state on farms; might not wild stock take equally well to the hills and valleys of our Eastern states? Maybe not, but do we know?

WHISTLING WINGS

by H. L. Betten

AMERICA was shortchanged in the natural distribution of pigeons and doves. Although there are fully five hundred species of the order *Columba* in the world, our scanty resident list embraces only the Western band-tailed pigeon and the mourning dove. The tropical white-winged dove crosses our Southern border in summer, but this migration, or invasion, is, on the whole, unimportant.

Why do our conservation departments concentrate propagative and introductive activities on gallinaceous fowl and completely overlook the fine game qualities and potentialities of alien pigeons and doves? Do they actually imagine that the only upland game birds worth considering are those which can be shot over the stands of a pointing dog?

Of course there was a time when Northern woods held myriads of passenger pigeons. Few men are alive who participated in the fine sport they afforded. But up in Saginaw, Michigan, lives that fine representative American sportsman, William B. Mershon, who well remembers the millions of wild pigeons which once darkened the skies over his native state. Sorry the day when vandals destroyed the last passenger pigeon and eliminated the species forever from the list of American game birds.

Here in the West we have the majestic band-tailed pigeon, a real aristocrat. You sportsmen who have never shot this game in a proper setting have missed something worth while. Unfortunately, however, the distribution of these pigeons is not very wide. And unless one is well acquainted with their haunts and migratory habits, it is difficult to connect with flights. But when you do, the sport is something well worth writing home about; this bandtail of ours is tricky, thoroughly saturated with class, and a difficult mark for any gunner.

That universal game bird, the mourning dove, is still to be considered. False sentiment has coddled this virile bird to such an extent that his fine game qualities are too often lost sight of. His hollow notes, common to most pigeons and doves, are often construed to be tones of inexpressible mourning—which is a lot of tommyrot.

The distribution of this dove in America is very wide; they are present in uncountable millions in the West and Southwest. Prolific, resilient, and adaptive, they have rapidly adjusted themselves to the encroachments of civilization, the wide advance of irrigation, and the general new order of things. Better yet, they seem to thrive as never before under these changed conditions. Like the alien pheasant, they readily cope with increasing populations, the elimination of wild lands, and the division of large farms and ranches of yesterday into small, intensively cultivated holdings.

Mark this too—the dove has no vicious habits. He is generally much more beneficial than harmful to the farmer. A gentleman in feathers, he harms nothing in his daily contacts. He is a classy game bird and a real sporting asset to any country, fast and extremely versatile a-wing. When properly served, he is as tasty a proposition on the platter as any upland game bird you can name. Now what more do you want?

In the pursuit and in the appraisal of sport I am apt to be as fickle and veering as the winds. There are specific times when I fall for almost any branch of hunting and fishing, and each has an overpowering appeal.

Dove shooting stands high on the list. The opening day in California is September 1. By then I am thoroughly saturated, if not satiated, with trout and bass fishing and it is still too early for the classic steelhead in Northern rivers. It has been a devil of a long while between gunning drinks, so to speak—the calloused old trigger finger itches anew, the nose yearns for the delicate aroma of nitro in a hunting environment, the mind's eye pictures game collapsing in the air and the drift of cut feathers. Here on this island where I live, toward the last of August the snoring trades fade to a whisper before the advance of the equinox and a pre-autumn haze hangs lazily over the land. You know what that does to the gunner—what dreams he dreams.

Comes September. And if you're a dove-shooting addict, you're all set for opening day. It's an old custom of mine to snatch a few hours of broken sleep and slip away in the wee hours, bound for some valley dove pass or flyway. The car breathes evenly as it reels off the miles and annihilates distance.

Traffic is scant in the early-morning hours, and the headlights slice great slabs out of the opaque darkness that dominates the course. Rarely a belated wayfarer approaches, his car lights gleaming like fireflies at a distance. Or it may be a truck laden with garden stuff that thunders past. Otherwise I have the highway pretty much to myself. And that's something these days, when the world is shaken by din and we rush with the speed of hurricanes toward the grave.

Although the seven-o'clock edict has cast something like a blight

over the duck and dove shooting, still I like to get afield early. I like to surprise the breaking day in his pajamas. I like to scuttle and stumble and cuss a little in inky darkness on my way to boat or blind. I like to start out dove shooting in that wan hour when the sleepy dun fields slowly awake, when a rosy dawn creeps at a snail's pace over the snow-clad ramparts of the Sierras, when winged gray ghosts, vanguard of the flight, whirl along the pass with the speed of arrows.

Those Federal fellows have taken something away from us that had a greater value than mere game in the bag. They have taken some of the joy and charm away from dove shooting too. But there's no law against merely watching those svelte gray beauties slip by in graceful flight in advance of the zero hour or in swinging an empty gun on them. In fact, it's time well spent—an eye sharpener and tonic for jumpy nerves. You'll hit doves all the better for this shadowboxing when the actual battle is on.

In the great interior valleys of California there is a practically continuous wide area of dove country almost six hundred miles in length. This embraces countless passes, or flyways, which have been frequented from time immemorial by winged hosts. The day was when this vast region was arid in summer, with streams and water holes far between.

Now, since the general invasion of irrigation, the land is crisscrossed with ditches, and water and verdure are everywhere. No longer do doves have to fly twenty miles for a drink. Nevertheless many still follow the ancient flyways instinctively and religiously, no matter how wide they may scatter in the actual gleanings of food. Doves are much like geese and often respond to a nostalgic urge which draws them to age-old ancestral lines of flight.

Although the mourning dove is essentially a gleaner of wild seeds, civilization has added much to his diet. When wheat and other cereals were the main valley crops, waste grain was extensively eaten. This hardly applies today, for with the coming of irrigation and diversified crops his menu of cultivated foods has been greatly extended. Doves are prospering under these new conditions, not only in California but throughout the Southwest; furthermore, they are greatly extending their range under this stimulus, a development which augurs well for their future.

In spite of the superabundance of cultivated foods available, doves draw most of their sustenance from wild seeds obtained from perhaps a hundred varieties of grasses, weeds, and shrubs. Among these are the pods and seeds of wild oats, thistles, bromes, millets, Johnson grass, chico, bluegrass, panic grasses, and Indian wheat. The birds have a craving for seeds of turkey mullein or goatweed. Ordinarily, in any dove country, a patch of mullein is a surefire attraction, and this is

something I have uppermost in mind when I prospect strange grounds. Many a fine shoot that knowledge has yielded me.

In the great days of wheat, when California was perhaps the world's greatest granary, doves and wheat were inseparable. You paid little attention to limited flights elsewhere, but headed for the limitless ocean of stubble on the great interior plain and its millions of gray birds. With a backload of shells you took a stand along some swale or dry branch which veined the prairie and did an extensive business.

There were no limits then, and the size of the bag was governed by decency or the amount of ammunition at hand. Because of the waste grain they consumed and occasional raids on the shocks, doves were rated pests by the granger and welcomed by the gunner. Ominous "No Shooting" signs did not face the sportsman anywhere on those vast wheatlands which later in the year were invaded by millions of geese.

While not so prolific as many other game birds, doves make up for the small clutch of eggs by an average rearing of three complements of two squabs each per year. These duties are usually over by September, although a very small proportion of belated hatchings will be found.

Formerly a great many nests were made in the wheat fields and elsewhere on the ground, but today the shrewd and adaptive birds have practically abandoned the practice. Now the great majority are located in dense trees and thickets along water courses and in orchards and groves close to habitations. These wise birds, and the valley quail and pheasant as well, have learned that safety lies in partial domestication during the nesting season. Thus game birds escape the ravages of that rapidly growing curse, the crow, which combs the wild lands like a harrier in a determined search for the eggs and young of other birds.

Doves are not gregarious in the true sense of the term except during migrations or late in the year, when they often gather in bands. At other times they move about singly, in pairs or in small family groups, although many may congregate on a feeding area. Even in the last instance each pair or small family is apt to keep its distance, just as human neighbors do in towns and cities.

Moreover, during the breeding period each nest is separate from all others. Again nature protects the dove against disease and destruction in great colonies, agencies which doomed the passenger pigeon to total extinction. Here, in this physical replica of that ill-fated bird, we have a game species endowed with every quality that it takes to survive and thrive in the face of an advancing civilization and its many destructive developments. Long live the wooden-voiced, whistle-winged mourning dove!

Aside from his versatility of flight and bulletlike speed, the thing

which most distinguishes the dove is his grace when a-wing. Compared with this bird, the square-winged upland fowl are clumsy; they fly in comparatively straight lines and at a uniform speed. But a dove with the urge to reach out from here to there is one of our most graceful birds. He combines the aerial tactics of the sprightly greenwing with a dash of the crazy antics of the jacksnipe and his own personal technique.

He has as many confusing changes of speed as a bull sprig—anywhere from 20 to 70 miles per hour. And that “70 per” is no exaggeration. Not until you have witnessed a frightened or an impatient dove sweep downhill with a hot valley northwester burning his tail have you seen a comparatively small bird really shake a wing. Barring the brief stoop of a fast hawk, there is nothing in the upland field that even closely approaches it.

Take a good look at this dove fellow. He is built like a projectile, like a Spitzer bullet, for speed. Those long, muscular wings grip the air and pull like the propellers of a fast air liner. An imp of Satan, stabbed in the posterior with the old gent’s fiery gad, has nothing on Percy Dove when it comes to speed and celerity.

Don’t misjudge this baby-faced bird. For all his air of softness and innocence, he’s no little Lord Fauntleroy in feathers, but a pretty tough, wise, and cocky kid who knows his way around. So save your soft-hearted sympathy and rate him properly as an outright game bird, which he certainly is.

True enough, you can sometimes pick dove shooting that is comparatively soft. Squabs just off the nest are easy marks; likewise birds dropping in at a water hole. For that matter, so are early-season flappers and squealers among waterfowl and upland birds. However, if doves are numerous and you are a square dealer, you pass up the youngsters and the soft marks.

Of course the pernicious practice of dove baiting is out. And if I had my way, no shooting would be permissible within one hundred yards of any desert water hole. In most other places, after the first or second day of the open season, you’re apt to earn your bag. In fact, dove shooting is such an elastic sport that it can be made plenty tough for even the most deadly game shot.

It used to be an old Spanish custom in California to steer visiting cracks up against a fast flight of doves and gleefully watch their ego wilt. Among the victims I call to mind were Captain Ira Paine, Jack Brewer, Captain A. W. Bogardus, and Harvey McMurchy, all noted Eastern trap shots. Bogardus, they say, was not so hot on that late fall flight of seasoned birds up around Colusa.

I recall that time when Captain du Bray, a trade rival, inveigled Mc-

Murchy into a shoot on a windy pass where most of the doves sizzled crazily by a good thirty-five or forty yards from his stand. Du Bray made sure that both Mac's empty cases and defunct birds were counted later by reputable witnesses, and his average was somewhere around one dove for six shells. The doughty captain, agent for a competitive make of gun, told the world all about the fiasco and attributed the Syracuse crack's poor shooting mainly to the inferiority of the arm he represented and shot. There are tricks in every trade.

Ordinarily wildfowl do not like to fly before a stiff wind. In some measure the same applies to doves and pigeons. Nevertheless doves are strongly influenced by inherited inclinations and follow long-established lines of flight, regardless of the wind's direction. Along many valley flyways breezes blow in a fixed direction, and the habitual course of the birds forces them to drive before the wind. When you meet that combination, you are in for some of the fastest and classiest sport in the whole category of upland gunning.

'Way off yonder a couple of tiny black spots may appear above the horizon. These increase so rapidly in size that you know they are neither mosquitoes nor those distressing black dots before the eyes that patent-medicine venders tell us are sure indications of a torpid liver and a score of other ailments. Here they come, a brace of doves twisting and swerving in response to swirling air currents. Like comets they approach your stand.

It requires a fast swing and an unbelievably long lead to smack those babies as they streak down-wind in undulating flight, for all the world like a couple of greenwings late for an important engagement. Studied alignment is out. This is a case for unconscious gun pointing—shooting with the eye of faith, an old gunning mentor used to say. Under these conditions, birds forty yards out are difficult, if not impossible, marks for the average shot; and the best of them make mighty few doubles on doves, near or far, under these flight conditions. The present limit of fifteen hardly allows a gunner to get "hot" and co-ordinated before the final gong sounds.

Aside from pass shooting, which may run the whole scale from fat and lazy doves in slow flight to twisting screamers that fairly sear the air, there is jump-shooting to consider. This, too, is elastic sport, for the birds will be met under a wide range of cover conditions and in various moods. Soft shooting? Not very often.

An educated dove can teach the slick pheasant and the sly grouse a few tricks about self-preservation. He demonstrates his stuff right out in the open, too, without the props and aids of thickets and screening woods. He gets away on rattling, whistling wings with all the facility of

the Hun—which is plenty fast—and throws in some snipy twists for good measure.

His timing is perfect, so that when he speeds away the lethal pellets tag harmlessly behind or around him. Even when he flushes and takes to a lone tree near by, it's dollars to doughnuts he'll trick you. You may completely circle it at close range, only to have him slip out on the opposite side and craftily keep behind cover as he darts away.

Luckily for the sportsman, doves are not all wary. Many a time I have found them in just the right mood and environment to afford the finest kind of jump-shooting. This department of dove shooting has been greatly enhanced by the extension of irrigation in the valleys and consequent diversified crops and heavy growths of cover almost everywhere. Orchards and vineyards; the planting of windbreaks, hedges, and shade trees; the rank growth of weeds along irrigation ditches and in fallow fields—all have contributed shelter and food in abundance. To a considerable degree such developments have brought about new or changed characteristics in the dove. No longer a general inhabitant of the arid and treeless plains and the stubble fields, he has inherited a lush land of milk and honey and is prospering. He has learned, too, the art of hiding in ground cover as well as in dense tree growths, which, of course, adds to the interest of jump-shooting.

After doves have been heavily shot in a locality they often vanish in a body overnight. The general opinion then is that they have migrated south. Just as often, however, they move north, east, or west. They have no particular incentive to move southward in mild September, but they do aim to escape the guns. Inasmuch as these have boomed the whole length of the big valleys, the tendency of persecuted birds at this season is to move east or west to the arid rolling foothills. There they may be found in great numbers, while customary haunts on the level lowlands are practically deserted.

When they take to the uplands, dove shooting is by no means a sine-cure or cinch. If you don't know the angles and attempt to hunt alone, you're apt to wear your feet down in an attempt to jump birds within gun range. Usually they're wild as hawks.

When they rise they take to scrub oaks or Digger pines on the hill-sides, or continue on over a ridge to the adjoining gulch. Then it is excellent strategy for two gunners to work together, one on each side of a ridge, in such a way as to drive the birds back and forth. Usually the shots are more difficult than when shooting on the level. Many come over high in the air, only to drop like plummetts or in a bewildering spiral, while others scuttle over close to the ground and twist and dodge crazily.

While it is generally assumed that doves migrate far south in winter,

I have noted great aggregations in Kern County as late as January, and likewise in Colusa County, more than four hundred miles northward. In fact, some of the best shooting I ever experienced in early years was in the winter months and in these selfsame districts.

The turtledove is a stouthearted game bird, and when mature will carry away considerable shot. He "feathers" easily; your leaden messengers may tear loose a wad of his covering without doing him bodily harm.

In dove shooting I have a decided preference for a gun which seems to fit in well with the size of this game. Consequently, a 16 or a 20 seems to be about the proper caper. And a 28-gauge, in the hands of an expert, does fine execution. High-velocity loads are not required for doves on a flyway; these serve best in jump-shooting when birds rise wild. I favor No. 8 shot for doves, although I have done just about as well with $7\frac{1}{2}$ s and have killed plenty, clean as a whistle, with 9s.

As to choke, I like considerable of this in guns I use for dove shooting, but arms that throw patterns anywhere from 50 per cent to 70 per cent meet general requirements. I have always felt that a heavy 12-gauge gun was out of place in this gunning field, but that, of course, is merely my personal slant, bred from long use of smaller gauges.

It would be fortunate indeed if the fine sport afforded by pigeons and doves could be experienced by sportsmen everywhere in America. Scientific experiments in acclimatization, centered on some of the most desirable exotic species, may yet bring this about. Certainly, from the standpoint of the American sportsman whose gunning has dwindled year by year, such introductions are highly desirable. Meanwhile my hat is off to that fine little representative of a great family, that feathered aristocrat, the mourning dove, which has done so much for gunners in the West.

CLOVER VALLEY BANDTAILS

by Tom Burrier

THE maples were beginning their fall fashion show and the last songbirds of Indian summer were seriously considering a winter vacation farther south. Wheat stubble glistened in the pale September sun; stray gusts of wind sent acorns rattling through the naked branches of giant oaks. Autumn had come to the Puget Sound country of western Washington.

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At home all was gloom. Even Orvie, the black tomcat, wore a downcast look. I had pulled in early that afternoon, eager with plans for a good shoot on the morrow. Mom had given me the bad news.

"A group of city hunters has rented most of Clover Valley," she said, "and they intend to shoot it tomorrow. Dad went out and talked with the farmers a few days ago, but it's all sewed up. Seems it was rented from the seed contractor. Pigeon season is only fifteen days, and you can hunt chinks pretty soon."

It wasn't much consolation. Clover Valley closed! Why, that's pigeon headquarters—the only spot on the island where there is any shooting. It's a natural bowl some two miles square, located about six miles from Oak Harbor and crisscrossed with drainage ditches and tiny sump holes. The migrating bandtails come for the peas grown in that lush valley, seed peas that supply a good part of the world. Harvesting of the crop in August left a carpet of ripe seeds, burst from their pods during the picking. Perfecting the pigeon setup, the valley was fringed with small fir trees and a hundred tall, burnt-out snags were scattered through the area.

During past seasons the valley had been open to everyone but the building of the bridge had changed that. The new span across Deception Pass connected Whidby Island with the mainland for the first time. It was now accessible by auto.

"Where's Dad?" I asked.

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Markham lived clear out of the valley, a mile or so to the south. He was on the island's West Beach. Dad must have been desperate.

I was morosely oiling my 12-gauge when he came in. It was late, and a gentle breeze was rippling the bay. Mom took his supper from the warming oven, and I joined them in the kitchen.

"Well, we've got a place to hunt tomorrow," he announced. "John said we could use his sidehill. I built a couple of blinds and fixed up the place. We might get some shooting. Not as good a spot as the valley, but it'll have to do this year."

"There's no use kidding, Pop," I said. "Markham's place is at least a mile from the valley. By the time the valley shooters get through raising the morning flight, those bandtails will be three hundred yards over us, heading for King County. We may as well stay in bed and forget it till chink season opens."

"Well, we might give it a try. We don't want John to think we're not grateful. Besides, I worked out another idea, and it might pan out."

I wasn't hopeful, but the thought of missing opening day wasn't appealing, either. Dad and I had opened the bird season together for years, and I didn't feel like clipping it off now, even if we did nothing but sit listening to the barrage from the valley.

"Let's get out before daylight, then," I said. "Maybe there'll be some strays for a shot or two."

It was foggy next morning, and I wore an extra sweat shirt. Dad had on his shell vest for added warmth—quite a concession, as he dislikes them. In silence we drove along the familiar rutted road leading into the valley. I tried not to look as we passed our normal parking place and continued through the valley to Markham's place. It was quiet as we climbed from the car in the half-light of approaching dawn.

Dad knocked at the kitchen door of the farmhouse, and John Markham wished us luck. Then we plodded down the hill through ferns and second-growth fir until stopped by a rail fence. The light was growing, and fog swirled far down the valley below us. We could make out car lights moving along the road we had left and stopping where we had parked in former years.

"The blinds are over here to the left," Dad whispered. "I built 'em about forty yards apart and put the decoys in those three trees behind."

"Decoys! For pigeons?" I sputtered.

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CLOVER VALLEY BANDTAILS

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Maybe they would. Besides, we had nothing to lose. The valley was lost to us this year. And Pop might have a winner

"What did you make them from," I asked, "and how did you get them fixed in those little trees?"

"They're cardboard cutouts. I cut them in the workshop and mounted them on plywood strips. Little Danny Markham climbed the trees yesterday and put them in place. They look real, don't they?"

I gazed intently toward the clump of little firs he pointed out. There were twenty or more pigeon silhouettes outlined in the branches. Even as I watched there was a flapping of wings—half the decoys flew away!

"They must have roosted there!" Dad exclaimed. "Let's get into the blinds before those fellows in the valley open up. It's shooting time."

It was daylight now, and the fog was lifting rapidly. I scrambled hastily into the first blind, and Dad went down the fence line to the second. The blinds were built with the careless skill of fifty years' hunting experience. I knew their cornstalk-and-fern exteriors would reveal little to even the wisest of pigeons. If only the decoys would work!

There was a burst of firing from the valley, then scattered shots in the first volley of the season. Far below, a cloud of birds rose from the pea fields and scattered toward the valley edges. The main flock came directly toward us, gaining altitude with every wingbeat. They passed overhead—about three hundred yards overhead. I rose and stared after them as they vanished toward the salt water.

Two quick shots—and I spun around. Dad was lowering his double, and over the stubble field before us two gray forms were plunging earthward.

"Part of the stragglers," Dad grinned. "They came in low, behind the big flock. I thought you saw them. I think they wanted to sit with our decoys. They're still hungry, and none of 'em will go far from these pea fields." He climbed the fence and came back with the pigeons. They were beautiful full-grown birds; their sleek heads were dark gray, with the color lightening toward the breast into a light pearl shade. Their trim fantails were irregularly marked with the black-barred splotches from which they gained their name.

"Let's get back under cover," I suggested. "Maybe there'll be a few more strays."

"There's a pair with several friends." Dad pointed down the valley with his gun barrels.

Another flock of pigeons was boring into the valley. They were clearly heading for the pea fields, circling lower and lower as their leader selected the landing spot. We crawled into the blinds and peered through the rail fence.

As we watched, figures rose from the ditch blinds in the valley, and

the delayed sound of shotguns was relayed seconds later. The pigeon flock beat frantically for altitude, then straightened out for our side of the hill.

"Watch it," Dad called cautiously. "They haven't fed this morning, remember, and they're wanting another chance to go down. Maybe they'll come into the decoys."

The flock quartered toward us, sighted our decoys, and were gliding in. I held my breath. There were thirty or forty pigeons in the flock. I couldn't miss, or so I thought. My first target zoomed overhead, and I missed; but with the recoil of the second shot the bird hesitated, then tail-spinned to earth. I swung quickly to a second gray blur. He must have realized he was under fire, for he swung into high gear and vanished over the first.

"You've got to lead 'em a little more," Dad called. "Those birds are as fast as teal when they're sailing in like that."

"How did you do on that bunch?" I called back, pushing fresh shells into the magazine.

Dad hedged. "I—uh—think I had 4s. in the gun. I must have held too close."

Smiling to myself, I retrieved the bird. It's a rare occasion when Dad misses two shots, especially at that range. But then pigeons are different, and this was opening day.

"Mark!"

I didn't stop to look; I flopped in the ferns. There was one shot, the bark of Dad's twenty.

"That's better," he was saying in a satisfied tone. "I was beginning to think your mother was right; that I should see about glasses. But now I won't have to worry for a while. That bird was sixty yards!"

It was all of sixty yards. He stepped it off from the fence line and was smiling as he walked back to the blind.

There were more scattered shots from the valley. The great flocks had broken up now, and singles, twos, and threes were flying aimlessly about, trying to settle in ungunned portions of the pea fields. Some were roosting safely in the tall charred snags overlooking the fields. They were safe there.

The sun had crept high from the ocean, and its warm rays slanted on the golden wheat stubble. It dispelled the last of the ground fogs and threw the entire valley into sharp relief. I settled back in the blind, idly following a small group of birds milling over a ditch to our right. I didn't hear the bunch come in. There was a sudden wing-flapping and then silence again. I craned my neck cautiously.

"Turn around and take 'em!" Pop shouted.

I whirled, and the air came alive with birds. They had sailed in

behind us and headed for our decoys in the first! I felt better as the automatic reached out and pulled down the second bird of my double as it disappeared over a brush clump. I heard Dad's twenty bark; he also scored a double.

"Things are looking up," he called, "and the sun is getting warm. Now I can take off this shell vest. It binds my shoulders."

There was continued fire from the valley. Singles and doubles drifted our way or sneaked in from the bay and glided into the decoys. Our bag grew as the morning lengthened. The decoy setup was fine!

Dad stood up and stretched finally. "About ready to go? I'm getting hungry again. We'll get in another day this week."

We packed our pigeons carefully in the gamebag and climbed the hill to Markham's farmyard. Mrs. Markham waved a cheery greeting from the porch and exclaimed over the bag. Would we save the rest of the breast feathers for her? With those from the five birds we left for their supper, she could complete a down comforter. We would.

Dad drove carefully down the valley road. With a contented expression on his face, he pointed out more pigeon flocks. Midway through the valley a hunter stood in the road, hailing us. Dad slowed the car to a halt.

"Happen to have any 12-gauge shells? We're not getting many pigeons in spite of lots of shooting. I'm out of shells. Birds are too high for us; don't want to come down."

"I've got a box you can have," I said. He paid me for them and thanked me.

"Are you having any luck, or are you quitting in disgust?"

I looked at Dad. He grinned. Then I opened the rear door and unstrapped the gamebag.

"Lord!" breathed the hunter. "How did you get those? Potshoot them?"

"Potshoot, nothing," Pop snorted. "We used decoys!"

The hunter stared at Dad. "Decoys! For pigeons? Who are you trying to kid?"

He was still laughing as he crawled back through the fence.

On Turkey Shooting

I have never shot a wild turkey or even at one, and I have never tasted one. In fact, I have never seen a live one; two beautiful gobblers a friend brought back from the South one January are the limit of my experience with this most noble of all our game birds. (I have never forgiven that friend for failing to ask me to dinner to help him eat those magnificent birds!) But the turkey is so ingrained in our national consciousness, history, and literature that no general book touching American game-bird shooting would be complete without mention of him, even though few people have, or probably ever will, look at one over a gunsight.

One of the saddest aspects of the present is that the turkey has disappeared from much of his former range. Pennsylvania, I believe, is the present limit of his northeastern habitat, and he is generally pretty rare there, except in a few places. I understand, however, that experiments are being conducted in two or three New England states in the hope that means may be found to re-establish him in the land of the Pilgrim's pride. If he takes hold here, some of us may yet live to hunt him in the Berkshires, the Adirondacks, and the White and Green mountains. That would be something to work for!

TURKEY TALES

by Tracy Hammond Lewis

IT is hard to figure out how so much cunning and wisdom can be crammed into that peanut-sized head of *Meleagris gallopavo silvestris* (wild turkey to you), but the fact remains that he is America's smartest game bird, in addition to being the biggest. If he weren't smart, he wouldn't live to grow so big—in fact, he might not live at all, for he has all the good eating qualities of his domesticated relative, plus a few extra ones of his own.

It may be argued by some that it isn't brain power which this bird possesses so much as it is a highly developed sense of caution. I'll not become involved in argument with such meticulous persons, for I must confess that I sometimes wonder whether these two attributes are not almost synonymous. I know that among humans the most cautious person is frequently considered the wisest man in his community. Some Presidents, even, like the late Cal Coolidge, built their reputations for keenness almost entirely upon this one quality, call it what you will.

Nowhere is this excessive caution of the turkey's more strikingly illustrated than in his painstaking progress through the woods after his suspicions have been aroused. I saw a movie some years ago of the king of game birds out for his morning constitutional. It made me weary just to watch that baby walk. He would slowly lift each foot as though he were handling nitroglycerin, and whenever he heard some unusual noise he froze into immobility, his foot remaining poised in mid-air, no matter how apparently uncomfortable the position. Then, after a period of intense concentration, he would gingerly set the foot down and repeat the performance. If anyone except the movie operator, with his telephoto lens, ever shot that old-timer, no one could ever say that he hadn't died trying to keep out of harm's way.

There is a weak link in everything's armor, though, or our woods would still be as populous with these noble birds as they were in the sixteenth century, when the Spanish invaded Mexico. There they found natives raising some of these birds domestically. They were so

taken with the eating qualities of turkey meat that they shipped some of these birds back to Spain, from whence they were introduced to England and France.

The turkey's weak points are that he leaves a scent—which a turkey dog knows how to handle—plus the facts that he loves company and is a creature of habit. Well, we needn't feel so superior. Too much company and too many habits have been the ruin of plenty of humans.

When a good turkey dog winds a gang of turkeys, he follows the trail with surprising speed until he breaks into their midst, barking furiously. The birds take to the air and scatter in all directions. The hunter then comes along to the scene of all this excitement and builds a blind of pine boughs or other available cover, and after a considerable interval begins to call them with his artificial "turkey yelper."

Their habit of gathering again at the scene of their dispersion proves their undoing—provided the hunter doesn't make a single false note on the call, doesn't make a single move for hours, or do any one of a hundred other things that spell no turkey. And even though the turkey has a weakness for sociability, that doesn't put him in the bag, for even after returning to the vicinity of the blind he will usually circle it cautiously at a safe distance, straining his sensitive eyes and ears for strange sounds or sights.

Then, after having decided that only members of his lodge are present, he steps into range from the direction and at the moment least expected by the gunner and at a point where one must be a combination of acrobat and expert marksman to get him. Just to make things a little tougher, he springs into the air at the first sound or movement with such a paralyzing racket and speed that it's a debatable question whether the turkey or the shooter is in the worse condition when all the shooting's over.

I hope I'm not given to bragging; but if I don't know this bird, it's not the fault of my friends. I have been in at the kill, verbally, of most of the wild turkeys taken in Buckingham and Albemarle counties in Virginia, and, I suspect, of a lot that are still safely roaming the woods.

You see, when I first moved into this section of Virginia, which, by the way, is one of the greatest turkey ranges still remaining, I was practically virgin territory for the local nimrods—an ideal audience. They had difficulty in getting their friends to listen to all the details of their turkey experiences, for everybody had heard them all before. But there was I, with my ears stretched out, taking in all these veterans had to tell. For the only so-called wild turkeys I had ever killed were a couple of 10-pounders that at one time inadvertently became involved in a pheasant drive in which I participated.

Some of the lore I gathered in the front office of a local garage in Scottsville, where gunners came on rainy days to practice their turkey yelping. More of it was whispered to me in the hush of Buckingham turkey blinds—which whispering may have accounted at times for want of greater success in bringing home the gobblers themselves.

For the experienced hunter, the yelper made from a hollow turkey wing bone is probably the most effective. To the wing bone is attached a few inches of small rubber tubing, in the other end of which is inserted something that resembles a small bone horn. Very seductive noises can be made by sucking in the proper manner. The usual program is three short yelps, followed by a wait of four or five minutes.

To me most of the yelping sounds alike. I can even make noises on a yelper that sound hot to me, although I gather from the pained expression of others in the garage that my performance is not all it might be.

But it's pretty hard to please this symphonic orchestra of turkey callers. Their ears are as sensitive to a false note as a musician's, or, we might better say, a turkey's. In a group of callers there will be only one man entirely satisfied with the perfection of any given call: the man who is making it.

Slate boxes, scraped with the sharpened end of a flat stick, are also used, but they lack the skillful personal touch obtained with the turkey bone. The unspoken feeling seems to be that the man who would use such a contraption would likewise not consider it amiss to level a pump gun on a covey of quail on the ground. So long as it goes no further, however, I don't mind admitting that I keep one of these gadgets concealed upon my own person when hunting.

One of the best yelpers I know in this vicinity is Preacher Meredith. I am referring to his prowess in the woods, not in the pulpit, although he knows how to talk turkey to them there, too. A large number of the turkey kills I have heard about have been while huddled with him in Virginia turkey blinds. In fact, on one of my most recent turkey hunts I drew the parson as my companion for most of the day.

Four of us had started with four dogs for a place in Buckingham County where several turkeys had been seen lately. Two of the dogs belonged to Hamner, the owner of a garage in Scottsville, and the other pair was the parson's. They were, according to their owners, the best turkey dogs in the state of Virginia.

If the big rawboned pointer owned by the preacher possessed any fault at all, it seemed that it was a rather perverse interest in dogs of the opposite sex. At first this threatened to interfere seriously with our turkey hunting, until the suggestion was made that one of the pairs be returned to the car. Both owners thought this an excellent

idea and each looked hopefully at the other. To each it seemed but natural that the best dogs be kept for the hunt, so little progress was made until it was decided to work far enough apart so that the dogs' minds might be devoted entirely to wildfowl hunting.

Thus it was that the preacher and I decided to hunt the right-hand side of a large expanse of woods and the others the left—to meet eventually a couple of miles farther along on the edge of a swamp. It was agreed that anyone flushing a turkey would signal three times, either on his dog whistle or by blowing into the end of his gun barrel, and then wait for the others to come up before proceeding.

We worked our way into the woods, through hardwood and pines.

"They feed on the acorns among the oaks," explained the preacher; "but if we flush any, look for them in the pines. That's where they roost, and often a barking dog will make them tree there."

"They ought to be pretty easy to see, if they do that," I replied, knowing no better.

"That's what you'd think," he replied, "but it's amazing how even a 20-pound gobbler can flatten out on a branch close to the trunk, and his head will look just like an old pine cone.

"Once another fellow and I were pretty sure we had treed a gobbler in a big pine. Both of us had walked several times around it, looking at each branch carefully. High up in the tree was a big hawk's nest, but that looked empty too, until I saw the sun gleam on something. I thought I'd try an experiment. Without saying anything to my companion, I fired into the nest. There was the blamedest commotion you ever heard. A 22-pound gobbler flopped out and crashed down through the branches to the ground, nearly landing on the other lad."

He leaped another wide brook, which presented no problem for his long legs, and continued his turkey tale practically without interruption.

"When you flush a bird," he said, "you usually follow him up with the dogs, until he either trees or is put up again within range."

"Or," I suggested, not wishing my anticipation to become too highly aroused, "you lose him altogether."

"Yes," he admitted, "that happens too. But very often the birds will lie close in heavy cover like a grouse. And believe me, when a bird gets up under those conditions, it scares the living daylights out of you. A lone bird isn't likely to come to your call, however, and following him is about all you can do."

"What happens if you flush a bunch of them?" I asked.

"When a gang has been scattered," he explained, "the best thing to do is to build a blind and, after waiting a bit, start in to call. If the

birds return, they won't necessarily come back one at a time, either. So be ready for anything.

"Once I was calling from a blind on a range near here, and I heard an answer from about half a mile away. Twenty minutes later I peeped through my blind and saw the purple head of a turkey above the laurels about forty yards ahead of me, perfectly motionless. I aimed halfway between his head and body and let him have the number fours in my right barrel. The bird collapsed, fluttering on the ground, and I jumped out of the blind to get him. As I did so another gobbler got up on my right and cut in behind me. I turned, but got tangled up with myself and missed."

"Well, you got one, anyway," I consoled him. "That's a lot better than none."

"Whoa! Wait a minute," he answered. "I haven't half done with them yet. While I was mentally kicking myself for having missed that turkey and was putting fresh shells in my gun I walked towards the spot where the first one had fallen. I had hardly closed my gun when there was a racket ahead of me and two more big birds got up. I dumped the first one before he had gone very far, but I had to reach out for the other. I use number twos in my left barrel and was able to nail him about sixty yards off just as he came from behind some trees into a clearer stretch of woods. Well, there were three turkeys out of four shots; so I didn't feel so badly about the one that got away."

"If you'll wait right there, I'll go call the game warden," I told him. "Didn't you stretch the law by about one bird when you got three?"

"No, sir!" he responded. "Two's all you're allowed a day now, but this was some years ago, when the limit was four. And you really could get that many sometimes, too, what's more."

As he talked the long, lean preacher strode along with steps in keeping with his six feet two inches of height. I was so busy keeping up with him that I was glad to let him do most of the talking.

"Turkeys don't always yelp when they hear you," he went on. "Sometimes the first you'll know about the presence of a bird near your blind is when you hear him get up on his way out, or—if you are lucky—when you happen to spot him before he spots you."

"Often he will just let out an explosive putt that carries a great distance through the woods. One big turkey that came to me from a long ways off made just four putts on the way. I first caught sight of him about seventy-five yards away, standing straight and slim on the top of a rise. Then he made one of these putts, ran a few yards nearer me, straightened up, and putted again."

He paused a moment to listen to some noise he had heard, but then went on.

"When the bird got within forty-five yards, I decided he was near enough and drew a bead on his neck. I shot and, expecting him to fall, broke my gun to take the shell out. Guess how I felt when he jumped into the air and high-tailed it out of there. I decided I was through for the day and started back to the car.

"Then I heard my shooting partner, Northen, who had been in another blind, calling to me as he crashed through the woods.

"I heard that bird fall quite a ways in,' Northen said as he came up.

"I didn't believe him. The bird seemed plenty lively after I had shot, but I don't like to leave a wounded bird in the woods if I can help it. So I went back to the car and got the two dogs I had left there. We took the line of flight the bird had followed and walked several hundred yards without anything happening. Then my dog Bob let out a series of yelps and dashed off to our right. There, near an old log, was a big turkey, wings partly spread and his head half buried under the leaves. He was stone-dead. Two shots in the body had finally done their work.

"What's that?" the preacher broke off as the sound of barking dogs echoed in the distance.

"Rabbit hunters," I suggested.

He shook his head. The faint blowing of dog whistles and the horn-like blowing through a gun barrel followed.

"They've put up a turkey," he replied, taking the shells out of his gun to give an answering signal to the others. "Come on!" he added as he reloaded and started off in the direction of the sounds.

The lanky parson and his seven-league boots had me rather breathless by the time we finally arrived at the place where the other two awaited us. They had flushed three hens that had been feeding among the oaks a few hundred yards from a stand of tall pines.

After some discussion we decided not to follow the birds up in the hope of a flush, but to build blinds on the chance of calling them to us later in the evening. Hamner suggested that the preacher and I make our blind near the pines while they went a quarter of a mile or so away for theirs. We fixed our hideaways and then left to hunt elsewhere for the balance of the day. About half an hour before sundown we came back again. We left the dogs in the car, although quite often they are allowed to sit in the blind with their master, as they have been trained to remain quiet—much more so than he; as a matter of fact.

There was not a vestige of a breeze as we stepped carefully through the woods to the blind. The leaves were damp, making little noise as we moved along. Only the occasional snapping of a branch intensified the quiet.

"Now," instructed the parson in a whisper as we hunched down on a dead log behind the pine boughs, "if you hear one answer, don't move or say anything. I took my son out once—he had never killed a turkey—and we heard a bird get out of a tree after I started yelping in the blind. Then we saw him light on a rise some distance away in the woods, which were fairly thin there.

"I yelped again. The bird answered and took to the air. My son stood up.

"Tough!" he complained in a hearty voice. 'It's going away!'

"I yanked him down by his belt. 'Sit down,' I hissed. 'It's coming towards us.'

"By some fortunate chance—perhaps the noise of his own wings—the bird neither saw nor heard my boy when he made that nearly critical mistake. The gobbler swished towards us, cupping his wings as he swerved to avoid a tree.

"'Now give it to him!' I ordered when the turkey was within thirty-five yards.

"The boy jumped to his feet, and this time I didn't pull him down. He fired and killed his first turkey. But don't count on all of them being that accommodating," my companion concluded as he picked up his caller for another yelp.

"In fact," he whispered after he had called, "don't take anything for granted unless you are positive. We had a fellow out with us the other day who should have known better than to do what he did."

"And what was that?" I asked.

The minister explained.

"Well," he said, "our blinds were about two hundred yards apart. I was calling, and pretty soon had three of them answering me, coming nearer and nearer. It was getting later and darker and colder, but I was pretty sure we would get a shot. The birds had come up to within a hundred yards of us, and instead of yelping they began to 'putt.' At about the third putt I heard the fellow in the other blind getting to his feet.

"'Hey!' he called to me. 'They've gone to putting, and I've never killed one yet after it started that.'

"Personally, I've probably killed at least twenty birds that did nothing but putt as they came into the blind—never a yelp out of them. But the lad was right about one thing. When he got through, there wasn't anything left to do but go home."

Meredith took up his yelper again for another call. Far off to the west came its duplicate. But it wasn't an echo. And it wasn't our friends who were on the other side of us. The whole woods seemed tense in

the silence that followed. An occasional twisting oak leaf, blundering its way to earth, had me jittery. Why didn't he call again?

After an age he did so. Again an answer. Not so faint this time. Another interminable wait while more oak leaves crashed to the ground. Another call, three slowly spaced yelps—and again an answer, still nearer! The preacher tapped my knee, pointed in the direction from which it came, and then slowly pressed his finger against his lips. The warning was unnecessary. I itched in six different places, but I wouldn't have scratched one of them for money. I heard a rustling in the woods ahead. The gleam in Meredith's eye indicated that he thought the noise had been made by a turkey.

Then silence again. A faint breeze stirred the dead leaves. To me it sounded like a gale. I almost wished it would blow over a tree and end the suspense. All at once, from somewhere out in front of us, came a startling "putt."

I didn't drop my gun, but I can't tell you why. I didn't see anything, either, although I strained my eyes without moving my head. What had happened to my voluble companion? I didn't dare turn my head to look. I was sure he hadn't left the blind, though, for in the thick silence that followed that "putt" I could have heard a gnat wink. I sat there rigid, not knowing what to do—which I imagine was the best thing I could have done.

From that point on I was in a bit of a daze, although to my friends I still give a graphic account of it. I do remember that to my left I suddenly heard a tremendous "whiff, whiff, whiff." If it hadn't been for the noise, I would never have seen a great, dark, bronze shape zooming into the air. I must have instinctively thrown my gun to my shoulder and have done the right thing with my trigger finger at the proper moment.

I was conscious of an uproar in the woods, shouting from the preacher, and that is about all. It seems that I had killed a hen. It wasn't an unusually big one—12 pounds it weighed later—but it seemed huge to me as I jumped from the blind and proceeded to it at a calm, orderly pace—which was as fast as I could run in those woods.

I pushed my fingers through its bronze feathers to its warmer skin. Yes, this was a real wild turkey. I had shot it myself. A horrible thought struck me as the preacher came up.

"Did you shoot?" I asked.

"No," he smiled, "it's your bird."

But an idea still haunts me. Do you suppose a preacher might tell a white lie? Particularly a preacher who hunts and fishes and is as good a sport as Meredith is? Well, whatever the answer may be, you'll find me doing as much talking as listening at future turkey sessions.

On Squirrel and Rabbit Shooting

Why is it that in some parts of the country certain kinds of game are held in high esteem but in other parts are not? Thus, in the Pennsylvania countryside where I spent my youth, rabbit and squirrel were the most prized items on the game list. That can, perhaps, be explained by the fact that there was little else. But even today, with pheasants bringing an abundance of new game to the covers and quail making a good showing in many parts of the state, the rabbit and the squirrel still hold top honors with the general run of shooters.

It is not so in New England. To be sure, there are beagling clubs and a good many rabbit shooters, though the interest is nothing like that in the Middle Atlantic States. And that fine little gamester, the gray squirrel, seems to me to be generally neglected in New England, despite the fact that he is pretty plentiful, at least in spots, throughout the region. Somehow we apparently get in the habit of identifying certain kinds of game with certain regions and tend to neglect the rest. That can often deprive us of a lot of shooting pleasure, the kind that seems to me well explained in the following stories.

SQUIRRELS OF THE CYPRESS BRAKES

by Muse Davis

YOUR American squirrels are adaptable little fellows. Give them a few feed trees, an old hollow snag, and a bit of protection, and they will survive and be happy. All over this continent, in many different types of woods, these gamesters dwell in comparative abundance and offer for the rifleman a brand of sport cherished since the heyday of the Kentucky rifle.

Many of us do our squirrel hunting in the hills where hickory nut, beechnut, and acorns are the staple foods and the hollow maple is the favorite for permanent quarters. Others of us have the swamp country, where red oak, white oak, hackberry, elm, and gum are the mainstays. Some of us, among the more fortunate, have easy access to the cypress and tupelo-gum brakes.

Here in the Southland we are blessed with all three types of country, and it has always been, and is now, my good fortune to have them within easy striking distance. At times, especially early in the season when the shagbarks ripen, I prefer to hunt in the hills. Not infrequently the Spanish-oak ridges in the swamp are mighty attractive. But for steady hunting, season in and season out, give me the cypress and tupelo-gum brakes. They unfailingly produce good shooting.

There are reasons for this. Nearly every cypress tree is hollow, and therefore offers a secure refuge in which the squirrels may raise their young in safety. Moreover, the tree offers fine food when the balls ripen in September. The tupelo gums, whose large black berries ripen in late August, are also readily eaten by the squirrels. On the banks of the brakes are the pig pecans, or mockernut hickory. These acrid little nuts are greatly relished by the squirrels and replace the shagbarks and big buds which do not grow in the low country.

Of course there are the pin oaks. These fine acorns ripen in late July and are the first hardwood upon which the squirrels feed. In addition to these are the post oaks, swamp white oaks, and overcup. These trees all grow within easy reach of the cypress dens, and the

fact that a squirrel has to travel but a short distance from den to feed tree is a factor which contributes to his long life.

It is generally known that a short food supply is reflected in a depleted squirrel population. In the cypress and tupelo-gum brakes there is never a scarcity of food, and there is a wealth of refuges available. These are two reasons why the hunter will always find squirrels in such country.

In hunting the cypress and tupelo-gum brakes the rifleman should look for his game in two places—near its den and on its feeding ground. In the early morning hours the squirrels will be moving around in the cypress; later in the day they will be found in the near-by pecans and oaks.

To hunt the dens successfully, the rifleman should penetrate the dark swamp before daybreak and take up a station within easy range of a known or suspected den. If there are no known den trees, a good rule to follow in selecting a stand is to pick out a cypress which is surrounded by a number of tupelo or other trees. This smaller growth forms a perfect avenue of travel from den to feed tree, and that is something which a wise squirrel always takes into consideration when selecting his living quarters.

If you have taken up your station in the brake well in advance and in a good place, daylight is almost certain to bring several shots at squirrels as they come out for the day. This procedure is ordinarily a leisurely move. One minute the tree is bare; the next moment you spot a gray, or black, or orange bit of life inching its way around the rugged bole. Soon the squirrel hops out on a limb and scratches his ears. Then he jerks his tail a few times and barks throatily. Perhaps two or three will come at once—sometimes more.

In handling these first squirrels of the morning it is well to shoot carefully and accurately. To fire two or three times at one squirrel, or even to move around the least bit between occasional shots, will immediately warn every animal in the vicinity. They are much like crows in that they will not leave, no matter how many times you shoot, provided you do not show yourself. Once they spot the hunter, it's all off in that particular area.

One morning seven squirrels came out of a cypress to reward my morning vigil. My first shot crippled one, and I had to shoot him several times and finally run him down. While this was going on the others retreated to their holes, and I saw them no more.

On some occasions I have bagged as many as three without moving from my position. The trick lies in killing every squirrel stone-dead and allowing it to lie where it falls.

Three cat squirrels came out of a cypress den and commenced to

feed on the resinous balls. From a hide in some gum switches directly beneath I saluted one, and he tumbled out. The startled two, which remained in the tree, went into action. One hid in a bunch of gray moss, but the other jumped out of the cypress and vanished in a tupelo top. I remained motionless. My victim lay not six feet away, but I made no move to get him.

Ten minutes passed. The squirrel hidden in the moss raised his head and looked about. He did not see me. Gradually, little by little, his sharp ears became more distinct. The least movement to raise the rifle would have attracted his attention. He ducked down again, and I tilted the rifle skyward. When he raised his head for another look, a ball caught him squarely. As this squirrel thumped the ground his partner, which had hidden in the tupelo, moved into the open, barked loudly, and whisked his silver-edged plume. I added him to the bag.

It doesn't work out this way every time, but a well-played hand and a bit of luck often produce results.

After the sun has risen, the hunter should leave the brake and haunt its edges where the pig pecans and acorns grow. However, if there is considerable sign which indicates the squirrels are feeding extensively on cypress balls, it is better to stay in the brake. When such is the case, good hunting is in store.

A squirrel has a certain amount of contempt for the hunter as long as he has his claws sunk in a cypress limb. He knows a jump or so will take him to perfect safety, and he will tolerate a clumsy stalk. With the squirrel season opening as it does in October, there is very little hunting of this sort to be had. The balls of cypress and tupelo have both ripened a month before, and the edge of the squirrel's appetite for this feed has been satisfied. They will most likely be in the pig pecans and oaks during the early season.

The squirrels of the brakes like best the large acorns of the pin oak. These ripen, as I have said, in late summer, and by October the squirrels have harvested the crop. However, it is never wasted time to inspect these trees carefully, whatever the time of year. Squirrels will return to a pin oak as long as an acorn remains.

Many hunters are unable to recognize a pin oak and mistake it for a red oak. The two trees are quite similar, but the pin oak has an orange cast between the furrows of the bark which the red oak does not have.

Pig pecans, post oak, swamp white oak, and overcup ripen in October, and you may always suspect one of harboring a feeding squirrel. The overcups are the last oaks to drop their acorns, and late in the season you should look for feeding squirrels among their boughs.

In hunting the feed trees along the edge of the brake it is a good

plan to stay between den and feed tree. A startled squirrel will ordinarily start for his den. Should he get into a hollow cypress, he has you checkmated. If you are between him and the den, you can very often head him off and make him hide in another tree.

At times they will run in the opposite direction and hide in a near-by tree. In such a case it is wise to sit down by the den and wait. That squirrel will not be satisfied away from the home port. In a surprisingly short time you'll see him heading for his hole. Stand up and show yourself. Nine times out of ten he will stop short and give you enough time to get off a well-aimed shot. I have worked this ruse times without number.

The importance in squirrel hunting of a pair of good legs cannot be overestimated, and especially is this true in the pig-pecan and oak flats along the brakes where the ground is often bare of brush. Squirrel hunting implies quiet, careful stalking, but the ability to run swiftly many times means a squirrel added to the bag.

One morning I came upon a fox squirrel, a black squirrel, and a cat squirrel cutting in a pig pecan which stood close by a huge cypress. The cat squirrel drew my first blast. He is the smartest of the three, and he is the most determined and fearless. You cannot turn a cat squirrel if he has made up his mind to go into his den; he will literally run over you if you are standing in his way.

As the rifle spoke the other two squirrels set sail for the cypress, and I raced for the same goal. It was a close finish, but I reached the welted trunk first. In order to jump into the cypress the two squirrels had to come down to a low limb which drooped just above my head. Their nerve failed, and they compromised by hiding in a little pin oak.

When squirrels have taken refuge in a tree which has no hole, there are two likely places in which to look for them. One place is the highest point to which they can climb; the other is the very tip of a big limb. These are the favorite spots, provided there are no moss clumps or abandoned nests handy.

Both of these squirrels wound up in the bag, but had they outrun me to the cypress I would never have carried them out of the brake.

The hunter is very often unable to decide whether it is better to wait for a frightened squirrel to come out of hiding or to seek another. The decision depends upon the kind of squirrel and the time of day. It is better to seek new game if the hour is early. At this period the squirrels are on the move and are easily found. Later in the day, when the nutcrackers have fed to repletion and are stretched along limbs, basking in the sun, they are harder to locate, and it is advisable to give your patience a test.

Should the hidden game be a cat squirrel, it is better to leave him

and seek another. This squirrel may remain in his hole an hour before venturing forth. If the hour is very early, and he had no chance to feed, he may show up in a few minutes. Two hidden squirrels in one tree are well worth your time, regardless of the hour.

A fox squirrel seldom holes up for long, nor does he spend any of the daylight hours under cover if unmolested. I always wait for these fellows. On one occasion I chased a fox squirrel into a hole in a small hackberry and sat down to await his pleasure. The cavity was screened from view by leaves, but rather than further scare the squirrel by moving around I did not take a better position.

At length the orange-hued fellow climbed out of his retreat, and a ball crashed through the leaves and into his chest. As he fell I saw a second squirrel struggling in the mouth of the hole. The bullet had gone through the first squirrel and smashed the head of the second, whose presence I had not remotely suspected. Yes, it sometimes pays to wait!

The ability to walk quietly is necessary to success in squirrel hunting. It is an accomplishment in which perfection is reached only after long practice. A good stalker keeps every bit of his weight off his advancing foot until it is securely placed where no treacherous twig is lurking. He watches the ground ahead for safe footing. He never steps on crisp leaves; they crackle under his boots and are as fatal as snapping wood. If possible, he steps where the leaves have been pressed down.

Never make a hurried move when stalking. Keep your arms and your rifle close to your body. Do not allow brush to rasp against your clothing. Bend it quietly aside, and do not let it spring back noisily. Try to move with your game, for it cannot spot you nearly so quickly when it is running as when it is still and on the alert.

Despite the utmost caution, it frequently happens that a snapping twig will ruin a perfect stalk and warn the squirrel. Instantly the smart fellow freezes and looks straight at the hunter. The best thing to be done in such a case is to drop all pretense and assume a "Let's call the whole thing off" attitude. Throw the rifle into the crook of your arm and saunter casually toward the squirrel.

Make no effort to keep out of sight or to walk soundlessly. Keep your eyes glued all the while on that squirrel! He'll start up his tree slowly and climb into the top to hide. You see exactly where he went, and you will find him easily. This is indeed a barefaced and crude trick, but it is amazingly successful. Even the artful cat squirrel is a sucker for it.

Should you be unable immediately to locate the squirrel, walk on past the tree and sit down. Do not confine your inspection to the

squirrel's hide-out—watch the whole tree. A squirrel is adept at getting on the opposite side of the tree and coming down the trunk unknown to the waiting hunter. When he reaches Mother Earth he's safe. Or can you stop one on the run with a rifle?

In the late fall, when the leaves have fallen and the brakes are bare, it's time to put the 'scope on the rifle and try your skill at long range. At this period the brakes are quite open and the squirrels are wild and wary from much shooting. The only successful method of hunting is to take a stand in the range of several good dens and spend the entire morning there.

The rifleman may, if he knows his weapon and has it well sighted in, count on sure hits up to sixty yards. To tumble a squirrel from the crown of a monster cypress at such a distance brings a unique thrill.

Most of the squirrels bagged at this season will be killed on the ground. They frolic around considerably on logs and dig under the acorn trees for buried nuts. It is in separating their small gray and orange bodies from the leaves of the forest floor that the 'scope becomes a vital necessity in managing a killing shot.

In long-range shooting there is always the temptation to accept chances which are impossible of success. Many cripples result from lack of skill with the rifle and in estimating range. My belief is that it is better to turn to other sport and endure as best we can the time intervening until cypress and tupelo balls ripen again and the brakes once more reach their peak.

EVER TRY SNOWSHOES?

by Ben East

I just bought a new hat. It's a blue velour, a good one. It ought to be. It cost seven and a half bucks. That's a lot for a hat. But I bought this one for a special reason: I want to take it off to the snowshoe rabbit. And when I take my hat off to him, I want it to be a good one. He's that kind of rabbit!

Matter of fact, if you were to walk up to me right now and ask me to name the greatest game animal that roams my native heath in the lake states, I would probably vote instantly for the snowshoe hare. Don't laugh. I'm dead serious about it. And I ought to know. I've still got blisters on my heels and a kink in the calf of each leg from a week end with the snowshoe rabbits of the north-country swamps.

I'll concede at the outset that rabbit hunting isn't exactly in the same class with tiger shooting or hunting Kodiak bears. But it's pretty fair sport, all the same. For my part, I've had more thrills and bigger ones behind a good pair of rabbit dogs than I managed to extract from any white-tailed deer I ever shot—and that's not intended to imply I don't like deer hunting. It's just that I like rabbit hunting more. You can't use dogs on deer, not in my part of the country.

Ever hear of hunting rabbits—snowshoes, cottontails, or any other kind—on snowshoes? Neither had I, and I thought Tuck Parsons was out of his head when he suggested it. I even told him so.

"All right," he said in an aggrieved tone. "Maybe you've got a better idea. Here it is, two weeks after New Year's. The snow is two feet deep on the level, and there ain't many level spots down in the rabbit swamps. How the heck are you goin' to get around? Ever try to wallow through a couple of feet of snow all day long without shoes?"

I admitted I never had. But was rabbit hunting any good at this time of year, anyway?

Tuck snorted at me. "You've got a lot to learn," he grumbled. "There ain't no such thing as poor rabbit huntin'. There's some that's better 'n some other, but there's none that's really bad. You try settin' behind the kitchen stove pickin' a bone with the old woman day after day,

like I do when we're up here alone, and you'll come to realize that any kind of huntin' is good!"

"But how about the dogs, Tuck?" I insisted. "Can they get around in snow this deep?"

"Some folks are forever borrowing trouble," Tuck remarked, as if talking to himself. "Suppose we just let the dogs worry about that."

I subsided. If Tuck said it could be done, it could, and, after all, there was a lot in his philosophy about good hunting. It had been six weeks since I'd had a gun in my hands, and any kind of hound music sounds like a heavenly choir to me, at any season and under any conditions, for that matter.

Tuck laid a thin stream of tobacco juice in a blue earthenware receptacle behind the stove leg and watched me in silence for a long minute to make sure I was converted, or at least beaten into submission. Without more words he got up, went through the kitchen door into the woodshed, and came back in a minute with two pairs of snowshoes. He gave me the smaller pair.

"The harness may be a little loose, but you can make out," he explained. "I'm a-goin' to call Lewie," he announced. "His Drum dog is pretty good on this deep snow."

Lewie met us in front of his house, a half mile down the road from Tuck's. I had my misgivings about his Drum dog, and about Tuck's Pal, too, for that matter. Drum was lean to the point of gauntness, and Pal had the general contours of an overweight dowager. What they both lacked, in my estimation, was legs.

Oh, they had legs of a sort, if it came to that, but it didn't appear to me that they had legs long enough to see them through a rabbit hunt on two feet of snow. I was just ready to say so when I remembered Tuck's earlier observation about borrowing trouble. I thought better of it and shut my mouth tight, partly to keep my ideas to myself, and partly to prevent the January wind from freezing my tonsils. It was cold that morning, for a fact!

We walked down the road a piece and cut across Lewie's deep-drifted pasture field to a promising cedar swamp. I was waddling like a tipsy duck on Tuck's snowshoes, and I knew I was going to have plenty of trouble once we entered the tangled thickets of the swamp. If I had known just how much trouble I was due to have, I'd have gone back to Tuck's house then and there.

But at least I was accomplishing one thing. I was laying trail for the hounds, and a good trail, too. They trotted along behind me, plainly saving their energy. But whether they were saving it for more important things or just because it was their nature to spare themselves as much as they could, I couldn't make up my mind. Every few minutes

one or the other of the dogs would step on the tail of my shoes, and I'd trip and wallow along like a landlocked loon for three or four paces.

Finally we came to the swamp and plunged in, and I got rid of the dogs. They cut their anchor cables and cruised off on their own. But my troubles were just beginning.

I'm not exactly a novice on snowshoes. I've worn 'em off and on, a few times every winter, the last twelve or fifteen years. I've walked twenty miles a day on 'em and carried my own pack, and I've gone through reasonably tough going. But that was the first day I ever tried to snowshoe through the center of a cedar swamp with a shotgun in one hand, keeping the muzzle of the gun out of the snow and out of the small of my partner's back at the same time. Take my word for it, brother, it's quite a feat.

I'd scrooch down and try to wiggle under the low-hanging branches of a cedar thicket, and somehow I'd jar a trunk and *flop!* Down would come a bushel of dry snow on top of my head. I'd worm through a dogwood tangle, and a limber twig would foul my shoes like a snake in the grass and I'd dive headlong on my face. Twenty times I reversed the stance of my gun to get the business end pointed away from Tuck's midriff or Lewie's ear, and each time they changed their course abruptly and I was looking straight down the barrel at 'em again.

Every time I fell down I had to unload and work a plug of snow out of the gun muzzle with the aid of a broken twig and plenty of lung power. I fell over a dozen logs in the first mile, and enough snow went down the back of my neck to build an Eskimo igloo. This business of hunting rabbits on snowshoes was working out just about as I had expected. And so far I hadn't seen any rabbits or anything that even reminded me of 'em.

That swamp was as bare of tracks as a billiard ball. We combed it from end to end, and the only sign of life we found was a well-worn trail where a porcupine had wallowed in and out of his den under a stump. The hounds were all for finding out more about his way of life, but luckily for them he was curled far under the stump and wouldn't come out and get acquainted.

We crossed a narrow tongue of upland and headed into a second swamp, and in the first cedar thickets we hit rabbit tracks. They were three or four days old, but they lifted our hopes and sent Drum and Pal diving headlong under snow-hung brush and windfalls. They knew where to look for rabbits, and it didn't take them long to strike. In a dense evergreen tangle fifty yards in front of us they fell over a long-legged swamp snowshoe, and the show was on.

I'll say one thing for Pal and Drum. They had steam in the early stages. They opened with some of the sweetest hound music in the

book, and they made that rabbit hump himself. Matter of fact, they kind of overreached themselves. Their act was too good to last, all things considered. They blasted the rabbit through a thicket as if his tail were on fire, sending him on one short circle and across a half-frozen creek before any of us could locate a shooting stand and get set.

About that time the swamp-wise old snowshoe made up his mind that it was no time to fool. The dogs meant business. Well, if they wanted to play that way, he'd show 'em a trick or two. He had a set of snowshoes on his feet, home-grown and guaranteed not to shrink, and with two feet of snow under him he knew more about running than any hound that ever gave tongue.

He started for the farthest corner of the swamp and went into high gear. The swamp was a mile long, but a snowshoe rabbit thinks nothing of a mile. The dogs were due to think plenty of it before they got back.

Their voices faded deeper and deeper in the snowy tangles. The last I heard was Drum's deep bass, away off in the distance, stoutly proclaiming that he was on the track and would be back after a while if we'd just wait for him. Then the baying died out entirely, and there was only the cold wind in the firs and cedars to break the unearthly quiet of the winter swamp.

I had picked myself a stand in a little opening that had plenty of rabbit tracks underfoot. I waited ten minutes. By the end of that time I was aware that the wind was colder than a breath of dry ice. I wandered back and found Lewie at the edge of the swamp, one snowshoe cocked up on a stump to keep his foot out of the snow.

We kept our vigil for another ten minutes, slowly freezing from head to foot. Then, faint and far off, I heard a hound coming back. It was Drum, baying steadily, and I moved out into the swamp to meet him. I picked an open place and waited, and the dog came on, sure and true, and I could feel my heart begin to pick up speed. If there was a rabbit ahead of the dog, I was due for shooting in a matter of seconds.

Then, through the cedars, I caught a glimpse of Drum. He was coming back on his own track, and every few feet he threw out a sturdy hound note just by way of telling the world he wasn't too down-hearted. But there wasn't any rabbit in front of him and there wasn't any enthusiasm in his stride. Drum was done, and no mistake about it. A hundred feet behind him Pal came trotting in the same trail, too far gone even to bay. They came up to me and were as glad for the good going of my snowshoe tracks as a kid who has just discovered lollipops.

We came out to the edge of the swamp, brushed the snow off a log, and sat and smoked for fifteen minutes to rest the dogs.

"No call to be discouraged," Tuck remarked after a while, as if he had been reading my mind. "Bad beginning don't mean a thing. You don't find many rabbits, even snowshoes, that'll run as far as that one did this time of year. We'll locate a smaller swamp, and we'll show you some fun."

I ached to tell him I had had about all the fun I needed, but my pride saved me. I thought ahead to all the fishing and hunting I would do with Tuck in the next twelve months, and the prospect of being reminded a hundred times that I had shown the white feather pulled me through.

We finished our smokes and headed off across the fields. When we came to a little willow swale, no bigger than your front yard, Pal and Drum pricked up their ears and trotted around to the far side of it. They were gone maybe three or four minutes, and all of a sudden Pal yelped as if somebody had dropped hot lard in his ear. On the heels of the yelp he exploded into full song, and Drum joined in and the two of them came tearing through the willows, yelling rabbit at every jump.

It had to be a cottontail. You'll never catch a snowshoe in an open spot like that, away from the shelter of the swamp evergreens. And the chances were, the cottontail would hole on the first circle if he could. One thing was certain: he would either hole up or come out of the swamp in the very near future. He came out.

We swung around, guns ready, and in the same breath the rabbit streaked into the open as if he had been shot from a torpedo tube. When I threw my shot, he was ten feet from the brush. He slued around and started back for the willows as if he had forgotten something. He made it, and after that we saw only his ears as he dodged behind the hummocks. Tuck tried and missed, and I tried again; and then Lewie tuned in, and the rabbit rolled in a flurry of snow.

"That's a good sign," Tuck proclaimed. "You wait and see."

We went on to an evergreen swamp beyond the next hill, and I had to admit one thing. That brief brush with the cottontail—it hadn't lasted thirty seconds—had put new life into the hounds. They no longer trailed along in our snowshoe tracks. When we hit the edge of the cedars, they dived in as if two feet of snow didn't mean a thing.

"You work up to the other end of the swamp," Tuck instructed me. "It ain't far. Lewie and I will go in here with the dogs, and we'll bust something loose and send it around to you. You get in some kind of an open place, where you can see to shoot."

I didn't dignify him by talking back. After all, I had done a little snowshoe rabbit hunting in my day. I knew the kindergarten rules.

I worked along toward the upper end of the swamp and struck in. The going had seemed pretty bad back there where we began the hunt,

but that was a paved highway compared with what I encountered now. Cedars and balsams and tag alders were snarled together like the splints in a basket, and there was half a ton of loose snow on every evergreen. I fell over logs and crawled under windfalls, and collected so much snow inside my shirt collar that my spinal column turned into a glacial trough. I wallowed and panted along. All of a sudden I heard the racket of the hounds in the lower end of the swamp.

I tried to hurry, but it was no go. I wormed through a thicket and fell flat on my face a couple of times. Then I realized that the dogs were headed my way and the baying was growing loud.

If I were going to do any business with that rabbit, I'd have to find an opening pretty soon. I tripped over a snow-capped stump and crawled under the low branches of one more cedar—and stepped out onto an old tote road that ran straight through the swamp. Here was exactly what I had been looking for. The road was grown up to willows and alders; but I had a clear lane for fifty yards one way and thirty the other, and the dog music indicated that the rabbit was due to cross within twenty feet of me.

The two hounds were close now, and the swamp was really ringing with their clamor. I slipped the safety off and held my breath, and waited for a telltale flash of gray-white behind a snow hummock. It wouldn't be more than three or four seconds longer—and then a shotgun boomed in the cedars between me and the hounds, and Lewie's yell of triumph rode the wind.

"Got him!" he hailed exultantly. "He's half as big as the dog!"

There was a lull for a quarter hour after that. Tuck came out and met me on the old tote road, and we waited there for the hounds to jump another snowshoe.

"How do you like it now?" he demanded.

"Well, I don't see any big reason for applause so far," I told him.

He looked at me in an injured sort of fashion. "It sure beats hell what it takes to satisfy some guys," he declared. "We got two rabbits—"

"And six Charley horses," I cut in on him, "and credit me with a sprained back and a blister on my heel as big as your pipe bowl. And if we wait here ten more minutes, I'll have pneumonia! All in all—"

That was as far as I got. Down in the lower end of the swamp I heard Pal's clear tenor come thin and broken on the cold wind. He opened in a wild outburst, and then Drum's deeper voice was rolling through the swamp with his, and they were coming in our direction, and Tuck and I were loping opposite ways along the old brushy road to find good shooting stands.

The dogs were past hurrying. They slammed the rabbit along for three or four minutes, and then they dropped back to low gear and

the snowshoe had plenty of time to play tricks in front of 'em. He slipped along, under the windfalls and through the worst tangles, making things as tough for the hounds as he could. He came straight for the old road until he was within twenty yards of it. My hair was standing on end, and I was watching as a cat watches a mousehole. Then he veered off and swung the other way, so close to me that I saw both of the dogs through a tangle of brush when they came along on the track five minutes later.

They drove him back into the lower end of the swamp, and it was slow work. Their voices faded to a faint thread of sound, and then the rabbit turned and came my way again. Minute by minute the clamor of the dogs was louder and nearer. The rabbit would be running well ahead of them. I had the safety off and the gun almost at my shoulder. He would cross the road in one long jump if he crossed at all, and once he was in the thickets on the other side I'd have no second chance.

Out of the tail of my eye I caught sudden motion under the cedars to my left. I swung around and the rabbit came into the open behind me, not five yards away, a lean, gray-white ghost that ran as if he had wings. I laid my shot on him and saw him cartwheel in a smother of snow. When I picked him up, he was beheaded about as neatly as if I had used a broadax.

I walked down the road and met Tuck. "You win," I admitted. "This winter rabbit hunting is all you said it was."

He stared at me with no special approval. "It's funny how quick some guys can change their minds," he remarked.

When the dogs came out to us, they were played out completely. Tuck looked them over and grinned cheerfully. "Well," he summed it up, "enough is enough. Let's go home."

Rabbit hunting on snowshoes? You've never lived a day till you've tried it! It sounds screwy, but take my word for it, brother, it's all O.K.—especially if they happen to be snowshoe rabbits.

Where's that new hat? I want to tip it again.

On Snipe Shooting

A fine little game bird is the snipe. My own experience with him is limited to a few specimens I've stumbled across when woodcock shooting in New Hampshire or quail shooting on Cape Cod. But my respect is altogether out of proportion to his size!

Part of that respect stems from an experience Mark and I had chasing one back and forth between two pot-holes which were about a hundred yards apart over perfectly open ground. A cross wind was blowing, and that bog hopper used it to wonderful advantage in making a pair of fools out of us. We kicked him out of one hole and each belted twice at him, though he seemed to fly so slowly it was unbelievable we could miss. Then we marked him down in the other hole, walked over and put him up again, and again missed. That went on for about five round trips, when the bird apparently got tired of the game and simply went away.

There ought to be more interest among sportsmen in this migrant. Certainly, as Mr. Kimball points out, he is a target worthy of the best shooters and a table morsel fit for the most fastidious epicure. If you're lucky enough to live within a day's drive of a good snipe bog, better investigate it.

BOG HOPPERS

by Kendrick Kimball

WE NEEDED a storm badly. All day long the mallards dallied on the shoals. It was agonizing to watch them twist through the haze in clouds and settle back to doze and preen until shooting time had passed. Then, flitting through the gloom like bats, they sped fearlessly to pot-holes within a few rods of the lodge, quacking and gabbling through the night but returning to their sanctuary just before dawn.

"I know danged well the weather's goin' to change," Tim would assert on our arrival from the marsh. "The breeze is backin' up. The islands are hangin' above the water line and the sun has a lookin'-glass appearance. Yessir, she's goin' to bust into a howler."

Tim was a professional guide and therefore born to optimism. The improvement in his spirits was noticeable as soon as he closed the door upon the scene of our disappointments. He would toss his boots into the corner with a hollow clunk which truthfully summarized our prospects for the next day. Then his downcast expression was succeeded by one of eagerness and anticipation.

"The gulls are streamin' off the shoals," he would continue, pumping more enthusiasm into his voice. "They're huntin' a new roost, knowin' the water's goin' to rise before a blow. The muskrats are workin' on their hives instead of lollin' around in the warmth. Listen to that cock pheasant cacklin' in the cane," he would demand with a shrewd gleam in his eye. "That ol' ringneck is tellin' his harem to get under cover before the wind starts yankin' off their tail feathers."

The performance would continue for an hour. It usually reached the same conclusion—a visit to the window with a telescope and much squinting and scraping as the cumbersome instrument was focused.

"Hmm," Tim would grunt, nodding sagaciously. "Not a heron in the willows. They're settin' in the grass, knowin' danged well it'll be unhealthy to camp out in a tree tonight. Nothin' to it, nothin' to it—she's goin' to bust loose with a hurricane anyhow."

Half convinced, I would wait vainly for a token of the impending change. Dawn would find me peering anxiously at the cloudless welter

in the east. But the breeze usually expired with a sigh when breakfast was over, and then the heat would set in, heavy, oppressive, inviting the butterflies to another gambol over the meadows.

"Storm's been delayed a bit," Tim would announce lightheartedly over the dishpan. "Due at noon, mebbe, or two o'clock." Then, if my disappointment did not seem too severe, he would postpone its materialization until the next morning. "Oh well, a little rest'll do us good. We'll play blackjack with the boys at the fishhouse, or drive over to Sebewaing for a look at the new brewery."

When I packed my luggage after six days of this, Tim made no effort to dissuade me. He escorted me halfheartedly to the lane. His handshake was limp, his aspect melancholy, and he seemed to be in the throes of that deep and dreary pessimism for which solitude is the only cure.

At a loss to understand, I drove to a store in the near-by fishing hamlet to buy tobacco. Upon the wall was a barometer, and to my intense surprise I saw that the indicator stood at a point where a disturbance of unusual severity could be expected.

"You're crazy," Tim replied listlessly when I broke the news to him on my return.

"But the barometer says so."

"Barometer, my eye," he grumbled. "'Tain't worth a whoop. This spell is goin' last a week longer anyhow. Until today the rheumatism was kickin' around in my left leg—sure sign of bad weather. Today the leg's good as new, so there ain't one chance in two million for a change."

"I'm staying anyhow. No barometer could be half as wrong as you've been."

He ignored the thrust. "Just look around," he commanded in a dull and hopeless tone. The squirrels ain't gatherin' nuts. The blackbirds have stopped pickin' up gravel for their gizzards—ain't goin' south for a while. Not a peep out of the bluejays, and they allus holler like blazes before a storm." Just then the milk train tooted for a crossing. "Whistle's clear as a bell," Tim declared triumphantly. "There'd be a wait to it if a blow was comin' any ways soon, and you know it. What more do you want? But stick around if you want to be ornery about it—stick around and be danged."

At dusk a drizzle beat out of the mist. It gathered impetus within an hour, and soon, to Tim's amazement, a downpour hammered upon the roof. We stayed up late, driven to the stove by the raw air sluicing under the door.

"Can't last," Tim kept repeating. "It's agin' every sign of man, bird, and beast. She'll roll away to the uplands as sure as Tophet. If she don't,

I've been double-crossed, and that ain't happened in twenty years," he would add, shaking his head in a puzzled accompaniment to the creaks and groans of the rafters.

At dawn the clouds were low and threatening. A north wind tossed the willows in a fury. It whooped over the fields, driving the leaves before it in ragged battalions and spinning an occasional flake of sleet among them.

Bending before the blast, we crept to the first pot-hole, expecting a clump of mallards to burst from the dripping reeds. The only occupant, a coot, regarded us dubiously and spattered away. Another hole, which ordinarily contained a few belated dabblers, loomed empty through the murkiness. Beyond, a cluster of fowl rested on the crinkled surface of a bayou, but they also were coot, paddling contentedly in the shelter of a threshing arm of cane.

I turned openmouthed to Tim. "Where are the ducks?"

"Under the lee of the islands," he snapped. His ruddy, unshaved features were eloquent with disgust. "Wind's wrong. Uncovered good feedin' there and piled up the water here."

As I dropped my sack of decoys a flock of brown danced up from a pool. Another whipped away with a rasping cry, and still another, and in an instant a half dozen coursing motes, performing every conceivable evolution of flight, sent down a defiant "scaip, scaip" from the pewter background of the clouds.

"Jacksnipe," I shouted, forgetting my disappointment with the water-fowl.

"Oh, them things," Tim answered with a sniff. "Water's just right for 'em on the meadows. Marsh should be loaded. In fact, I know danged well it is, for I heard 'em passin' over the lodge durin' the night, scaipin' and scawin' to each other, one flock after another."

I fumbled among my shells. "Well——"

"Go back for more flapjacks," Tim supplied. "Then we'll rest up a bit. About eleven o'clock the wind should veer to the west, and the mallards will pile into Horsehoe Bayou by the drove, and——"

"Mallards?" I was indignant. "We're going snipe hunting."

My companion gave me a sharp look. He pushed his sou'wester to the back of his head in a mystified and disapproving gesture. "I never played tiddledywinks with a shotgun yet, and I'm too old to be startin' now," he protested. "Just a lot of skitterin', side-windin' chippy birds that ain't worth any man's powder and lead."

I laughed tolerantly, for the assertion was not a new one. Legions of gunners do not appreciate the sporting qualities of the little brown dodger of the bog. Many are prone to classify him as a glorified tin can: merely something to shoot at when no other target is available.

Prejudice arises from the relatively small size of the jack, the uncertainty surrounding his arrival, and the wading that is necessary to penetrate the quagmires, rain-soaked fields, and mucky pastures in which he is usually found.

Your genuine, blown-in-the-bottle snipe hunter will argue to the point of fanaticism that there is no superior bird. Give such an individual a light piece and place him in a wet cornfield in the early fall. Grant him a fresh flight of longbills, attracted by the worms in the soggy earth, and a lazy, sunny day to induce the newcomers to lie closely. Provide him with this blessing, and he will desert any duck blind or grouse cover to pit his skill against the capers of *Gallinago delicata*. Undependable, vexatious, and often hard to locate? Yes. But these elements lend zest and flavor to the pudding.

When the tyro steps into a pocket of jacks, he is liable to abandon his previous concept of action. Away they skip at every angle, resplendent in brown and russet plumage, white breasts and penciled flanks blurring into the drab tones of the vegetation. The barrel heats, the shoulder smarts, but the spirit never lags so long as there are more dodgers to twist over the shocks or drop like plummets into some nearby swale after a frolic through the skies.

Tim knew the snipe's potential worth but was too stubborn to admit it after his slanderous outburst. He betrayed himself by the interest with which he watched a brace go zigzagging across the bayou. Their erratic flight and saucy cries aroused the competitive instinct born of years of gunning. Clamping down upon his chew, he clicked off the safety on his piece and waited grimly as one of the pair looped back to survey the locality.

"Let him light," I advised, surmising that the bird would spiral to earth in the vicinity and flush at closer range.

My companion's antics were something to behold. He stabbed his barrel at the gray arc of sky in a desperate attempt to find the bird. The throbbing speck dived straight at us when the sights reached it, and streaked overhead, wings folded, derisively voicing a series of yips. Caught off his balance, Tim fired from the top of his shoulder, spine tilted backward at such a precarious angle that the recoil jolted his hat into the muck.

Grinning sheepishly, he bore my laughter with a glint in his eye that boded ill to the next target. By a quirk of fortune, another jack burst from the rim of a near-by puddle. Possessing a previous acquaintance with gunners, this fellow twinkled away silently and so low against the grasses that he could scarcely be discerned. When Tim pressed the trigger, the snipe bounced upward as though jerked by an invisible cord, and the charge ripped into oblivion.

"Dang this duck shot anyhow!" Tim complained. "You should have nines or tens for a job like this. Like tryin' to hold on a pea on a griddle," he added ruefully, stuffing more shells into his magazine. "But no drill-faced scurmudgeon can make a fool out of me and get away with it."

With his jaw thrust out aggressively he joined me in a saunter across the meadows. We walked down-wind, so that the birds would flush at a quartering angle. It seemed good to be in the field again, to breathe the rain-washed air, heavy with the tang of muck. The panorama of clouds and churning vegetation, epitomizing the wildness of the day and sweeping on to mist and shadow at the horizon, quickened the urge to be abroad at a time when all creatures were on the move.

It was soon apparent that we would obtain all the shooting we desired. Wherever we looked we saw snipe trading across the marsh. They were restless and hungry, hence in an explorative mood. Other waders had ridden south with the same storm, for the querulous whistle of yellowlegs filtered from above, as did the call of plover, lost to view. Pectoral sandpipers whisked past like wind-tossed leaves, wheeling as one bird with alternate flashes of white and brown as they sought a haven in the grasses.

We splashed across a slough to a likely-looking strip of meadow containing windrows of sedge deposited by a previous blow. The earth sucked and smacked at our boot soles, as is frequently the case in good snipe country. The first bird postponed its departure until I was within a few rods of its crouching form. I held a foot ahead of the lancet bill, and the jack plummeted into the water with the limp, folded-rag appearance that denotes a kill.

Two steps farther, and another took off with a startled yip which unnerved me. As a further complication, it broke into a series of tacks that I was unable to follow with the heavy duck gun. I attempted to snap down the target at long range, but the charge went windward by several yards. Disdainful of such marksmanship, the bird lit in front of Tim, who sent it thudding to the muck when it flushed an instant later.

"Ho-ho!" he shouted, waving the kill aloft. "How's that for teachin' 'em who's who on this marsh? Just watch me trim up those long-nosed pewees from now on," he boasted, switching the chew to his left cheek, wiping the moisture from his barrel, and jamming the hat over his ears.

He had found his eye, as I knew he would, although it was his first appearance with such energetic game. Thirty years of duck shooting, often at teal whizzing past in a gale, had equipped him for any test. With the intuition of the veteran he realized that the best means of coping with the jack was to stop him before he was fairly launched. The

average, he observed, follows a straight course before slipping into zig-zags and acrobatics.

Despite his confidence, he missed the next candidate, a youngster that bolted like an aerial cottontail. Two others scampered from the sedge at the report. The nearest wobbled as the shot tore up the muck around it, but regained its even keel and sailed with stiffened wings to a ridge.

"Dead bird!" I yelled, knowing the target had been clipped through the vitals.

Even had I been wrong, there was little chance of escape. The jack's plumage is soft, and one pellet is usually enough to stop him. When slightly nicked, he runs erectly or tries to fly again; when hard hit, he lies where he falls, making no attempt to skulk away to deeper cover.

In the meantime I reached a pond from which a dozen winter yellow-legs, teetering gravely among the stones, whistled a warning to other denizens of the marsh. I proceeded cautiously, noting a profusion of droppings at the edge. My suspicions were well founded, for a dozen snipe boiled from the vegetation with a bedlam of protest over my intrusion. I downed the nearest, an easy flank shot, and saw the second pitch earthward when I pulled. Another left the grasses with a hollow whip, but experience induced me to lower my piece, though it contained another shell.

"Hi!" yelled Tim, pointing at the hurtling jack. "Almost knocked your hat off."

"Take him yourself!"

My companion halted the speeding bird amid a puff of feathers. "Why didn't you shoot?" he demanded.

The explanation was simple. The gunner who follows snipe without a dog is often taxed to find his kills. When the jack drops upon his side or back, the white markings are conspicuous from a distance; when the back only is exposed, the gunner contends with protective coloration at its best. Two scattered birds in the latter position are a problem, while three assume the proportions of a dilemma. When snipe flush plentifully, it is easy to become confused over the whereabouts of birds you have grassed, a circumstance that leads to enough tramping to locate a dozen new targets.

Tim banged away at birds beyond reach. He was childishly eager to show his mettle at the new and engaging sport. Swamp sparrows gave him several bad starts by fluttering out from his feet. He would lower his piece apologetically on such occasions, wipe his eyes with his coat sleeve, take another reef at the chew, and proceed like a man on eggs, craning his neck, peeping and peering all around.

Our paths converged at a pot-hole surrounded by quill grass. A few

steps through the wiry vegetation, knee-high and densely grown, convinced us that further search in this territory was useless. The jack frequents cover of this description when it contains spaces where the grass is matted down. Accordingly we veered toward a ditch with muddy sides, where it seemed certain that dodgers would be lurking.

For a moment I had my misgivings. Not a stir of life anywhere. Yet I knew it was too early to form an opinion, for one of the charms of snipe hunting rests in the unexpectedness with which the quarry produces itself. Reluctant to venture from concealment, the jack is seldom observed while feeding. My gaze roved back to the ditch, and there a quick movement on top of a muskrat hive brought my piece halfway to my shoulder.

We had interrupted the siesta of a big jack, undoubtedly a female, always larger than a male of corresponding age. This particular dowager, which probably scaled more than five ounces, departed with a dignified bleat. She would have been an easy target had she not zig-zagged down the ditch, a few inches above its muddy flanks. Visibility was poor in the shadow of the scraggly willows, and we could only guess at her whereabouts. With shot swishing about her, she vaulted over a stand of cattails with another bleat which expressed rebuke as much as alarm.

Working our way through the brushy tangle, we found snipe in numbers and in the mood for shenanigan. They took flight at long range, "scaiping" sharply and continuing the cry at intervals. Others, infected by the same wildness, joined them along the route, corkscrewing upward as dots that disappeared over the far reaches of the marsh and came weaving back. Two birds that bolted tardily were tumbled into the ooze, and a third, raked by our concentrated fire, came down in a cartwheel.

The shooting was fast and furious. Sometimes a laggard would catch us with empty magazines. Sometimes we would bring variety to the sport by blasting at the high fliers. Our percentage of misses was not disturbing, considering the fact that we were using coarse pellets through which more than one prospective victim scurried to safety.

Puffing from constant wading, we paused at the end of the ditch, where Tim examined our collection of butter-fat dodgers with the elation that accompanies every hard-earned prize.

"Never paid any attention to these things before," he confessed, licking his lips as he visioned the snipe in the battered roasting pan at the lodge. "Yessir, many a time while lyin' in a blind, 'specially late in the afternoon, I've seen a flock of thirty or forty, all bunched together, pitch out of the sky. Once, polin' back from Pintail Point in a snowstorm, I

passed a hundred weatherin' it out on a bar, all humped and huddled like chunks of mud."

Orienting themselves to our presence, the snipe dropped back to their dinners in that precipitate dive which the eye has difficulty in following. Now and then one would soar to a dizzy height and dart off on an aimless tour of the heavens.

"A feller should use a 16- or 20-gauge for best results," Tim resumed. "He can point fast and shoot in a hurry. The snipe won't get so far away they can sneak through the pattern. But first he should line up a few bogs and pastures near his home, and hire some farmer kid to let him know when the birds are in. Snipe hang out with cows pretty much when the land's low and mucky."

I grabbed his arm, for a string of mallards was nearing the bayou where we left the decoys. As they swung down the ruffled channel I noticed that the wind had veered to the west. They splashed to a landing without a preliminary circle, sat with necks outstretched, and began to tipple. A greenhead hooped his wings and glided down to join them. Other ducks were beating across the horizon, and in the vicinity of the islands a wreath of blacks milled above the flats, dividing soon into fragments, several of which grew larger and more distinct.

"She's turned into the kind of a day you've been wantin' for years," Tim went on casually. "So get over there in a hurry and throw out the blocks. Don't mess around with crow ducks—take only mallards and keep your knob down, or they'll be baggin' you when they really start comin'."

"Hurry up!" I commanded.

Two pintails, both drakes, had settled among the reeds at the bayou's edge.

Tim's countenance still held its calm and dreamy expression. "Guess I'll rest here awhile," he drawled. "Wind'll hold in the same quarter tomorrow. Yeah, I'm stayin' here until I catch my breath, and then, by cripes, I'm goin' to amble across the marsh. What for? You should ask. To kick out a few more of those bog hoppers, of course!"

Two days later, when I returned to the store, I saw that the barometer was at the same low point. It seemed strange, because the fishing hamlet was wrapped more serenely in the spell of Indian summer than before. Smoke from the chimneys rose perpendicularly into a sky as blue and untroubled as the bay.

"Another blow coming?" I asked incredulously.

The proprietor chuckled in his beard. "Don't pay any attention to that thing. It's been busted for a month, and the boy keeps forgettin' to take it down."

On Quail Shooting

The quail is generally identified with the South, but his range is surprising, particularly if you include the several species of the Southwest and Pacific Coast. What licks him in the Northeast and northern Middle West is deep, long-lasting snow. He is a seed-eater, and must have bare weed or grain fields available for at least a part of the winter. But he does well on such comparatively mild spots as Long Island and Cape Cod, where the combination of sea-tempered air and high winds keeps enough ground open during even the most severe winters.

The pheasant, too, is a seedeater, but is so robust a bird that he can survive under conditions the quail cannot. Grouse have a more varied diet and are able to subsist on buds when the quail's and pheasant's food supply is deeply buried under snow.

There are few thrills to equal the rise of a covey of quail in a more or less open field, nor any shooting more difficult than following the dispersed covey into thick growth and trying to bag the singles. The asparagus fields of Cape Cod, fifteen to twenty years ago, used to offer what was probably the best northern quail shooting. Of late years, unfortunately, much of the asparagus culture seems to have been abandoned and the fields grown up to briar and brush and scrub pine. The birds are still there in good numbers, but a covey rise in an open field is now a rarity, and the hunter needs a grouse shooter's dog and eye and reflexes—plus—to get himself a limit bag.

HOW TO HUNT QUAIL

by Havilah Babcock

BIRD finding, of course, comes before bird shooting. Birds, like gold, are where you find them. They may also be in a lot of other places. Given the same dogs and the same territory, one man may put up twice as many birds as another. An inexperienced hunter finds his game by accident or the process of elimination. An old hand, seemingly by instinct.

"Damned if you can't almost make game!" reverently remarked a friend of mine to a certain guide. "Why, you can take one limpsy old dropper and find more birds than I can with three good dogs. How do you do it?"

The easygoing guide relighted his pipe and whimsically drawled: "Mebbe I just say to myself, 'If you was a covey of birds, where would you be at this time of the day, this season of the year, and this kind of weather?' And I just go there, and there they be. Reckon it's just know-in' the how-come."

Bob-white is not only a homebody, but a great creature of habit and lover of routine. No other game bird is so regular and so predictable in its habits. Under normal conditions, a covey will follow the same itinerary from day to day. Learn the schedule, and you meet the train. True enough, the schedule may vary with such factors as time, weather, temperature, and feeding conditions, but it will vary predictably. As our guide significantly remarked, you've got to know the how-come. Bird finding is indeed a pretty respectable art in itself.

But it is mainly with the other half—quail shooting—that we are concerned at present. I well know that only a hardy soul will undertake to prescribe a list of don'ts for the bird hunter, and that any man who sets down his observations on the subject is apt to have his life made miserable thereafter by his hunting companions. But with all my sins on my own head, here I go.

Don't try to head off a covey by getting between the birds and their customary refuge, with the fond hope of making them light where

you want them. Don't try it for three reasons: first, because it can't be done; secondly, because they will swerve around you and present a really baffling shot; thirdly, because it will "upset your equanimity and make you mad," as I once heard a fellow express it. 'Tis a folly I was most reluctant to abandon as a boy.

Birds are going where they are going, and there is precious little you can do about it—except to adapt yourself accordingly by getting behind their habitual line of flight and giving yourself a conjectural straightaway. If they won't accommodate you, accommodate yourself to them.

Most coveys have a traditional refuge which they make for whenever disturbed. Even in new territory it is often possible to determine a covey's flight—simply by figuring out the most unshootable place they could possibly fly to. When dogs are stanch and cover is adequate, a knowing gunner can often maneuver himself into a good shooting position, regardless of natural hazards.

Don't hunt in a hurry. You will overlook birds and break down yourself and your dogs to no purpose. If you have anything important to do, stay at home and do it. If you are in birdy country, forget all about accounts collectable, bills unpayable, your wife's parting remarks, the fugaciousness of time, and the seductiveness of the next field. The finest bird hunter I ever knew seemed to fiddle aimlessly around as if he had nothing else in the world to do.

And never, never run to a point. The surest way to ruin an unstable, overanxious dog is to run up whooping and yelling to him to be careful. What a jewel of inconsistency—a man hurdling the landscape like a scared cross-countryman and bellowing "Careful! Steady!" at every stride. Not only will it eventually ruin a dog by making him nervous and distrustful of himself, but when you get there you are so out of breath and emotionally off balance that you can't hit anything. Besides, a grown man looks so silly doing it.

Don't hunt with a more experienced shot—one of those chivalrous cusses—who cockily announces: "Now I'm going to give you the first shot on every bird that gets up. I'm not going to shoot until after you have finished. Just take your time."

How in the heck can you take your time when the courteous thing to do is to get your shooting over as soon as possible so that your benefactor will have a chance? When I first began to shoot quail, I hunted a livelong day under just such conditions without getting a single bird, and came home that night feeling lower down than the left hind heel of a hound dog.

However fatherly and considerate the other fellow may be, the mere knowledge that he is waiting to shoot, and will get your bird if you

don't, will so disorganize you that you can't hit the state of Texas. No one but a hardened campaigner can stand such generosity.

Only good shots—or gentlemen—should hunt together. Learn leisuressness alone. The beginner must work out his own salvation, and the fewer spectators present to witness his infamy and psychoanalyze his failures the better.

Don't shoot singles competitively. When a point is made and the probabilities indicate a lone bird, let your companion take the shot with complete confidence that you are not going to lift your gun, regardless of the consequences. Hit or miss, that shot is his, to be handled as leisurely as he pleases. When the next single is pointed, your companion should show you the same consideration.

When two men stand with itching trigger fingers, each anxious to beat the other to the draw, the effect is ruinous. Both will fire prematurely, often tearing up the bird or missing altogether in their over-anxiety, and sooner or later bickerings will ensue as to "who shot John." Besides, such unseemly competition begets the worst fault there is in quail shooting—overprecipitancy.

Bird hunting, when it is done right, is a gentlemanly and leisurely pastime. In shooting singles, turnabout is not only fair play, but the only way. True enough, a companion may sometimes stand in readiness in case a full house instead of a lone jack is raised, but this assurance of non-interference is prerequisite to satisfactory singles-shooting.

If you have a good dog who knows more about hunting than you do—and many dogs do—or one more familiar with the territory than you, give him his head. Let the dog take you hunting. Some gunners unwittingly keep their dogs from prying into gamy places, where judgment and instincts would naturally lead them, by interposing their own preferences. If you have a really good hunter who knows his business, the fewer instructions you give him the better.

Observe your dogs when they are making game so that you will recognize the symptoms thereafter. The posture of a pointing dog is as diversified and as unstandardized as a golfer's stance in putting. A dog's reaction to the proximity of game is equally unstandardized.

One dog registers interest in one way, another in another. One lifts an unobtrusive muzzle, delicately tests the air currents, and proceeds unerringly. Another noisily gulps down draughts of air. One advertises the imminence of the quarry by an undue cautiousness of demeanor. Another contents himself by freezing his tail and sloping forward, while an uninspired groundling may lower his muzzle to the earth and snort prodigiously.

With some dogs the reaction is almost imperceptible. Some have to

be knocked down with a hint, like some people. But to an observing hunter there is always some telltale mannerism that screams aloud, "I think I have something here. Stand by for further orders."

Time and again have I stumbled unprepared into a rattling bevy because I had failed to recognize the symptoms in my own or another man's dog. A study of your dog's individualities in this respect will reward you handsomely later.

When your dogs are making game, keep close behind them. Running birds will sometimes take wing with little provocation. Early-season coveys, or others that haven't been shot, flush easily, often refusing to lie for the point. It is especially important to keep up with your dogs when they are experiencing trouble in pinning a skulking covey down, when the ground cover is scant, or when they are trailing in dry leaves or noisy underbrush.

The gunner who keeps up with his dogs under such conditions assures himself at least 10 per cent more shots during the day's hunt. The percentage fluctuates with such variables as the terrain, ground moisture, rankness of vegetation, and nose and workmanship of the dog, but in any case it is sufficient to justify a little extra-alertness on the gunner's part.

Take your dog seriously. Whenever there is any chance whatever of his being on game, honor his point. Not to do so is to befuddle him, encourage him to discount the importance of advertising his discoveries, and now and then to deprive yourself of a beautiful shot.

Because you never can tell. Birds are often found where, by all reckoning, they shouldn't be. Who of us has not had the experience of ordering a puppy in to flush a suppositional sparrow—and watched in deep chagrin as a thundering covey erupted and sailed away to safety, catching us, metaphorically speaking, with our breeches down?

It is especially important to honor the workmanship of a young recruit. Can you expect a puppy to take himself seriously unless you take him seriously? And if he does a little practice pointing on a skulking rat or a stinkbird, don't embarrass him too much or berate him too severely. That pestiferous stinkbird can fool the canniest of bird-dog noses for an instant.

Not all false pointing is false. Mayhap an erratic single has decamped from the exact spot just before you came over the hill or a nervous covey has just scurried into an adjacent thicket. 'Tis best to be charitable. No dog—or no hunter—is infallible.

The time to find a dead bird, or capture a wounded one, is the instant it falls. Unless you have a perfect retriever, not only mark the exact spot where the bird fell but proceed to the spot immediately.

With every minute that passes, the body scent of a dead bird or the trail of a disabled one diminishes and the enthusiasm of your dog wanes.

But before you budge from your tracks to do anything, reload your gun. If you don't, you'll feel awfully silly when some laggard pops up and sails insolently away. The easiest shots seem to come after you've wasted both barrels on the initial flurry, anyway.

Don't bawl your dog out for failing to find the bird you thought you killed. If he is a good retriever, he will probably find enough birds you didn't know you hit to make up for it. And, of course, you wouldn't try to pull the wool over the eyes of your companions by yelling "Dead bird! Dead bird!" at your dogs with great moral earnestness, when you know darned well you missed clean as a hound's tooth. But you might know some hunters who are not above it.

Be sure your bird is dead. It is so easy to administer the coup de grâce to a disabled one by snapping its neck or cracking its head over the gun barrel. An inert bird is often only stunned, and will sometimes regain consciousness and escape. Have you ever had the experience of relieving a dog of an apparently dead one, only to have it suddenly come alive and slip from your hand?

I recall two amusing episodes that may find some sort of parallel in your own experience. A young nephew of mine was highly elated over getting his first bag of quail—twelve in Virginia, where he lives. Summoning the entire family to the back porch, he began removing the birds from his coat and tossing them to the floor as he impressively counted: "One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven—twel—" But the "twelve" stuck in his throat as the last bird swerved suddenly upward and, in the words of one of the on-lookers, "sold out like a bat out of Hades, leaving the boy with a sagging chin and a firm resolution.

The other episode involves two friends who got into a chivalrous argument as to who had killed a single which they had shot together.

"Here's your bird," said one, tossing it to the other.

"No. You killed it," replied the other, tossing it back.

"Beg your pardon. I missed him a mile," and back the bird went again.

"But I swear I didn't touch him," protested the catcher, passing it back.

They would have worn that bird out, I guess, had not the corpse terminated the argument by suddenly coming to life and executing a perfect incompleated pass by hurtling off halfway between them. Alphonse and Gaston looked stupidly at each other.

"There ought to be an *Æsop* fable to fit that," one of the hunters

sheepishly grinned. "Just goes to show it doesn't pay to be too magnanimous."

During the twenty years I have been following dogs in Virginia and the two Carolinas, I have asked many crack quail shots the question: "What is the biggest mistake the average bird hunter makes?" With a oneness indeed surprising, they all replied: "Shooting too quickly."

Hardly one dissenting vote!

I have not the least hesitancy in saying that 75 per cent of poor quail shooting is due to just that—shooting too quickly. It looks like a fault easily correctable, but many of us can testify to the contrary. These past masters whom I questioned were all, significantly enough, deliberate shots, some of them seemingly overdeliberate. Their comments reflect the judgment of men who have learned leisureliness. Some of the comments are especially quotable.

"Aim fast. Shoot slow," advised one old-timer. "It is never as far as it looks down your gun barrel."

"Wait until the bird quits his didos and settles down; then let 'er fly," suggested another.

"Get your gun on the target as soon as possible; keep it there until you think he's clean out of range, then cut loose," offered still another.

"If you'll wait long enough, chances are you will get a straightaway shot after all," was the discerning comment of the finest wing shot I ever knew.

It is a fact that, in reasonably open shooting, that dizzily careening target is pretty apt to straighten out in time—and there you are. There is one beautiful dependability about Bob: once he has cut his capers and bought his ticket, he loves a straight line. Holding your fire not only increases the probability of a decent shot but allows your shell a chance to pattern itself effectively.

Except in snap or brush shooting, where no holds are barred, perhaps the soundest procedure is: Don't make up your mind until the bird has made up his. And don't be so intent on getting a double that you forfeit an easy single.

"Most folks shoot too fast because they think a partridge is flying faster than he is," a versatile and observing quail shot once remarked, "As a matter of fact, a partridge is not an especially fast bird."

And that is true. It is the noise rather than the speed of flight that baffles the beginner. If you don't believe that, aim at a decamping covey with an empty gun. You will be surprised at the comparative slowness with which they fly and the number of easy shots the rise offers—if your gun is empty.

"They fly so fast I can't get my gun on them," bemoaned an amiable New Englander with whom I once hunted.

"The speed of bob-white is partly an auditory illusion," I suggested. "If you don't believe that, stop your ears up before flushing a covey. Ulysses plugged the ears of his sailors so they wouldn't hear the songs of the sirens. You might try it on quail."

The suggestion had been joshingly offered, of course. But when I came in that night, my friend, who had been missing so badly that he had almost become a fatalist, met me jubilantly.

"It worked, old man. It worked!"

"What worked?" I asked innocently.

"Your recipe—plugging my ears. They don't fly half so fast when you do that. Did it on two covey rises today and got a double each time."

"Well, I'll be damned!" was the only comment I could make.

I have often thought of that estimable New Englander and his Plymouth Rock determination to learn quail shooting. And always I chuckle at the picture of a portly gentleman halting proceedings in mid-field, with all dogs on point, and summarily ordering: "My ear-plugs, Watson, my earplugs!"

There are less heroic expedients, however, that might be recommended for slowing down the too-ambitious hunter. Some overanxious fellows resolutely count a certain number before triggering the gun. I knew one who would curb his haste by saying to himself, "Well, I'm not bound to have this one, anyway." And one ingenious gent there was who bargained with a darky to "tote the gun for him," surrendering the weapon only after the flush.

Still another way to check premature firing, though at times impracticable, is to observe the sex of your bird before shooting. A large number of hunters can tell you the sex of their birds before the retrieve is made. If your vision is no better than mine, however, you had better skip this. I'm always too busy looking for the bird down my gun barrel to notice whether he belongs to the white-collar class or not.

The best method I have ever found to steel oneself against over-precipitancy is to hunt with an empty gun for a while. But after all it is an individual matter, and nearly everybody has his own recipe.

On Dogs

The hunting partnership between men and dogs is far older than history, as prehistoric drawings on the walls of caves attest. It is a partnership likely to continue as long as history itself, however, for the dog has made himself—or man has made him, whichever way you look at it—an indispensable comrade in field, forest, and water.

The perfect dog, however, is as rare as the perfect wife or child (or, for the matter, the perfect husband and father). Simply, he does not exist. Yet the ideal is one which otherwise sensible men in a demonstrably relative world persist in cherishing. Fortunately, a dog almost always means more to a man than his efficiency as a hunting machine.

RUG DOGS I'VE OWNED

by Hart Stilwell

THE next time somebody offers to give me a bird dog, I won't even try to be polite in refusing. I don't want anybody to give me bird dogs. I want to buy them. Maybe I will pay only twenty dollars for my dog. Maybe I'll get him for five dollars. However small the amount, I'll buy him.

For years people have been giving me bird dogs. Almost everyone I ran into had a fine hunting dog he wanted to give me because he was leaving the country, or the dog didn't get along with his cat, or he couldn't keep it in town, or for some other reason. And for years I took these dogs, took them and suffered with them. Now I am cured.

I owned a long string of what the boys choose to call rug dogs. First on the program was Dato, and Dato was not to blame. Neither do I blame the Army officer who gave him to me. Dato had really hunted as a pup—and I had the word of three or four persons on this point. He had been sick for several months after that with distemper, which must have affected him permanently.

When I took Dato, he was almost two years old and was one of the most gorgeous black-and-white setters I ever saw. His coat was long and silky, and the black was glossy.

Dato looked fine in practice, but he had no nose. He was like a fine race horse that had everything except speed. I found it out the first time we went hunting, pretty much to the disgust of Mack, who had his pair of pointers out in the field holding birds while Dato breezed through them, showing no sign of even knowing the birds were there until they flushed and he saw them in the air.

That night the dogs curled up near the campfire, warming their backs, and we sat talking of other quail-hunting days and other quail dogs.

"He's a beautiful dog," I said as Dato got up and walked around the fire.

"Yes, he'd make a fine rug," Mack said.

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I couldn't blame him. When a dog ruins your hunting on the first day of the season, you feel pretty much upset.

Dato started the line of rug dogs and gave them their name. I gave him away, to a man who did not hunt. The man wanted a pet, and Dato made a fine one. The rest of that season I hunted with dogs belonging to my friends.

Then one morning the following spring I woke up, blinked my eyes to be sure I was awake, and stared out the window at one of the most beautiful setters that ever lived. He was almost snow-white. The only color on him was a black spot that covered one eye, and it made the rest of him look whiter. He was nosing about the yard, and soon my wife started to drive him away.

"Wait a moment," I said. "Maybe I'd better investigate this situation."

The big setter was friendly and had a fine-looking head with what I took to be intelligent eyes. I fed him, and he hung around the place the rest of the day.

He belonged to a man living about five miles away, I discovered. The man sent word to me that the dog was a fine hunter, from good stock, that he had paid \$50 for the dog as a mere pup and that I could have him if I wanted him. With my gullible nature I sent back word that the dog was mine. I should have paused when the message came to me and realized that something was out of line.

Wink was his name. That black spot over one eye gave him the appearance of winking. Wink the Wanderer, I should have labeled him. I put a tag on his collar, with my name and telephone number on it, and then the calls started pouring in.

Wink explored the country for miles around. And wherever he found a likely-looking home he pitched camp. The owner of the home would then call me and suggest—yea, even insist—that I come and get my dog. It was amusing at times to speculate on just where the next call would come from.

I don't like to keep a dog tied or in a pen; otherwise I might have kept Wink. Sometimes in driving around the countryside I would see him, loping along as though he had some particular goal in mind. Perhaps two days later he would show up, lean and hungry. He would stay close to the house, eating tremendous amounts of food; then he would disappear, and I would get a call from some farmer five or six miles away to come and get my dog.

Any home was "home, sweet home" to Wink. Through his wanderings I became acquainted intimately with fifteen or twenty persons in the vicinity. I even had a call one day from the man who gave him to me, and I went dutifully over there and fetched Wink back home.

It became a game. We would place bets on which direction the next call would come from. Then one day no calls came. There was none the next, and the next. In fact, no call ever came again. I never knew what happened to old Wink, but I am reasonably sure someone stole him and tied him up. Otherwise his wanderings would have brought him back to me just on the law of averages.

Next was Pete—Pete the Pointer. He was given to me by a friend who said he was leaving on a five months' trip and couldn't take the dog with him. The friend kept hanging around after he gave me the dog—in fact, he never did take the trip. This made me conclude I should have had a written guarantee from him, before accepting the dog, that he was leaving on a five months' trip.

When I walked up to Pete to take him home with me, he stiffened out, raised one front foot gracefully, and held as pretty a point as I ever saw, looking straight at me.

"Now what?" I said to his owner. "Where are the quail? Or does he think I'm one?"

"He's just showing his stuff," the man said. "And boy, has he got it! How do you like the stylish point he makes?"

"It's fine," I said, "but I still don't understand why he should point me."

"Oh, don't mind that. He points lots of things," the man said, and gave me a smug sort of smile.

When I dumped Pete out of the car in my yard at home, he took a dozen steps and then fetched up another nice point. I waited for a covey of quail to flush off my lawn, but none flushed. Pete walked over a few more feet and then pointed again. He kept right on pointing. I could look out the window almost any time I happened to be at home and catch him on point. Overtrained, I figured, and thought no more about it.

Then Pete and I went hunting. Off he breezed, bounding through the grass; then he halted on a beautiful point. After five minutes of tense and careful prodding around in the grass, expecting quail to explode right in my face any minute, I came to the conclusion there were no birds there and told Pete to go on and find game.

He raced off, a bit proudly, I thought. Within two minutes he was frozen on point again, his tail high, body tense, one foot up. He had style if I ever saw it.

He had style, but somebody had forgotten to tell him what the business of the day was, and I nosed around for quail in vain. This went on for hours. I would walk around a clump of brush and come upon Pete, holding a fancy point. When I satisfied myself that he was point-

ing thin air, I would shout at him to move on. He would move on to another point.

There he was on point again. As I was debating whether to shoot him on the spot or just trudge on, trying to walk up some quail, a real live covey of birds flushed only a few feet from us. It's difficult to say which of us was the most astonished. I was so surprised that I stood with my gun on my shoulder and made no motion to fire. Pete just looked at the birds and blinked. Then he ran off in the opposite direction from that taken by the quail.

That's the last covey he ever found, and I still think he didn't know the quail were there until they flew. I gave him to a friend of mine who is a camera bug but who does no hunting. This friend now has an album full of striking photographs of Pete on point, and people looking at the pictures think he has the best bird dog in the country. Pete is as happy as can be and will freeze up on point for his new owner at the bat of an eye.

I should have been cured, but I wasn't. I went out looking for more punishment, and found it. I deserved it, too.

The next dog I took into the fold of rug dogs was given me by a little boy who explained that he had a fox terrier and a bird dog and his mother wouldn't let him keep both, so he would give the bird dog to me.

"He's a dandy retriever," the kid said.

But he was mistaken. That dog wasn't a retriever; he was a collector. He hadn't been at my home a day when he started bringing in items of a wide variety and occasionally strange nature. First he brought home a dead cat, a spur, and a socket wrench. The following day he brought the mate to the spur and hauled a great mass of clamshells from the near-by lake up on the lawn.

His next collector's items were three pairs of ladies' silk hose and the lower plate of a set of false teeth. He also began to build a bone yard, and the odor kept us inside the house at night. He had a habit of rolling in everything dead that he could find, and he found a lot. I could smell him coming half a block away.

Quince was his name. He showed signs of being a fairly good bird dog, and I might have gotten along with him all right but for my refusal to tie up a dog or keep him in a kennel. I want my dogs to run free.

This fellow proved a little too much for us. One day he brought home a banjo, an expensive one that some neighbors had left on their front porch. Quince dragged it all the way home, practically ruining the instrument. Then he stood wagging his tail, proud of his achievement and apparently waiting for me to play it as the neighbor did.

It was impossible to get rid of anything he brought except to burn it, and you can't burn bones and banjos. I took Quince out in the brush one day to do a little hunting with a small-caliber rifle. I shot a possum, and Quince was delighted. He started dragging the heavy animal along behind me.

I didn't want the possum, but I couldn't make Quince leave it alone. Finally I buried it in a shallow hole, covered it with brush and stones, and by much rough talking made Quince come on home without it. It wasn't thirty minutes until he had gone back into the brush and brought the possum home.

He was too much for us. When he brought home a half-dead rooster that he had "retrieved" out of a neighbor's yard, I got rid of him. I gave him to a man in town who has a high fence around his place, and Quince is apparently happy there, retrieving a great mass of stuff from one side of the yard to another. I often wonder whether he would have eventually brought me the upper plate of the false teeth if I had kept him longer. It was the only instance in which he failed to show thoroughness, and at times I am inclined to believe the owner of the teeth used only the lower plate.

The last of the rug dogs was Jim. Jim's owner took real pride in his dog. He explained to me that he could no longer afford to keep Jim because he ate too much. He also explained that Jim was a good hunting dog; he said he had killed many birds over the dog.

So I took Jim. His former owner was certainly right about the eating part of it. Jim could wolf three cans of dog food with a swooshing noise and then look up for more; there was a hungry, pleading expression about him that cost me untold cans of dog food. It was a pleasure to feed him, but it was certainly expensive.

Then one day I made the mistake of taking a gun out in the yard, and Jim saw it. He fled in terror, hiding under the house. I put up the gun and coaxed him out. A fine hunting dog—apparently afraid of a gun.

Every dog is entitled to a fair trial, and I gave Jim his chance. I hid the gun in a case, slipped it in my car, and took Jim out into the field for a trial. When I turned him loose, he started hunting in a fairly creditable manner. But I couldn't go on hunting forever with the gun hidden, and when I brought it out into the daylight he saw it. He could see the glint of a gun barrel quicker than a goose. And when he saw it, he made a mad dash to the car, diving in headlong and hiding between the seats.

I didn't blame Jim. I have nothing but pity for a bird dog that is gun-shy. But I blamed his owner. No man could own a dog that shy of a gun and not know it. I took Jim back to him.

"I have decided I don't need a hunting dog," I said as I pushed Jim out of the car into his yard. "What I need is just a pet around the place. So don't waste this fine hunting dog on me. Give him to somebody who will hunt."

He started to give me some back talk, getting his feathers ruffled up a bit as if he was insulted, but I just drove off and left him there with his gun-shy dog. Jim was my last rug dog.

The next day, when I was complaining bitterly to Mack about my luck with dogs, he said, "Why don't you loosen up and buy a dog, like the rest of us do?"

That was an idea, and I set about in quest of a bird dog in exchange for money. The first dog-for-sale I came upon was an eight-months-old pup owned by a farmer.

"Will he hunt?" I asked.

"I ain't never hunted him," the farmer said.

"Is he gun-shy?"

"I dunno. I dunno anything about thet dog, mister, 'cept he's eight months old. Maybe he'll hunt, an' maybe he dunno a quail from a coon."

"Brother," I said to the farmer, "you've said enough. You're perhaps one of the most convincing bird-dog salesmen I ever met," and while he looked on a bit incredulously I counted out the money in his hand and took the pup.

Then Frank and I went hunting. I called him Frank after the attitude of the farmer.

Frank went nosing about the brush for a while, and then he stopped on a point. I could have wished for a lot more style. Frank had none of the style of Pete the Pointer. But he had something else—out in front of that nose of his he had quail, which, after all, was what I was hunting. When the covey flushed, I managed to knock down two of the birds. And when they fell, Frank immediately brought them back to me.

We sat down and had a little conversation together, this pup that I had bought without recommendations or assurances. And that ended the rug-dog business.

I'M A SUCKER THAT WAY

by Havilah Babcock

I HAVE never bought the Brooklyn Bridge or the Washington Monument, although I was once offered the latter at a bargain. Nor have I bought any hypothetical gold mines, ostrich farms, or the phony gilt-edged. I don't play poker, and I don't follow the ponies. If you should ask me to go your bail, I would wag a moral forefinger and give you a whoso-goeth-surety-for-another look. And if you tried to high-pressure me, I would let fall an edifying precept or two and show you the exit. As you can see, I am a man of considerable moral fiber and high sales resistance.

But, mister, have you got a dog to sell?

Even the mighty Achilles, quoth the legend, was vulnerable in the heel, the mighty Siegfried in the back. There is one vulnerable spot in the armor of my sales resistance, one weakness that has brought me within two-whoops-and-a-holler of the poorhouse and threatened to loosen the blessed ties that bind; that has at times warmed the cockles of my heart and at times filled me with the bile of disillusionment. I can't help buying bird dogs.

I am a highly specialized sort of sucker. I have bought more bird dogs and know less about buying bird dogs than any other man in seven counties. It's a good thing the thou-shalt-not-covet commandment says nothing about dogs. I don't give a darn about my neighbor's ass, but how I do envy him that high-stepping pointer!

Whenever I see a good-looking dog, only utmost restraint and the inhibitions that come from living with a good woman prevent me from running up with my hand in my pocket and a mister-how-much-will-you-take-for-him look on my face. Even then I sometimes get myself into situations which appeal to my wife's peculiar sense of humor. For instance:

Once while hunting I came upon a handsome Irish setter on point.

"My friend, I'll give you fifty dollars for him as he stands," I offered in a burst of wild enthusiasm.

"That's thoughtful of you," the man answered with quiet amusement. "I just paid a thousand for him."

The fellow's hunting coat was nearly as shabby as mine. How was I to know that I was watching a famous dog, owned by a man whose income-tax refund was bigger than my salary?

I have bought old dogs on their last legs and young dogs that were all legs. Any gangling, big-footed, friendly-eyed puppy who looks at me the right way can find a niche in the family budget. I've had my share of impressively papered patricians too, including three great-grandnephews of Muscle Shoals Jake, five great-grandsons of Dough-boy (what a man-about-town that old rake must have been!), a lady-in-waiting to a niece of Hard Cash, and, if my memory serves me right, a cousin, twice removed, of Smada Byrd, which I got from a Virginian.

And a lot of others that were just sons and daughters of the people, whence the geniuses come. Some with blots on their escutcheons and some without escutcheons on which to have blots. And one, to confess to the unvarnished, that turned out to be part July hound. That was the time my wife gazed at me fondly and said, "What you need, honey, is a psychiatrist!"

I have accumulated some good bird dogs and a lot of expensive experience. I have owned incorrigible flushers, shot-breakers, egg-eaters, rabbit-runners, chicken-chasers, bird-chewers, intractable hellions, and just plain congenital idiots. And one flashy little debutante that never outgrew the profound conviction that her sole mission in life was to point butterflies, which she did with a nicety of technique that would have disarmed the most captious critic. I have had dogs that were gun-shy, bird-shy, and car-shy, and that ain't all. Will you pardon the painful particulars?

Once I was dickering for a pedigreed setter wench. The owner, with becoming honesty, confided, "She ain't got but one fault, mister, and that's——"

"Don't tell me what it is, if you don't mind," I interrupted. "Might as well hang a dog as give him a bad name, you know." It's fun buying a dog sight unseen—sometimes.

So I paid the man his money and took the dog home. When I took her in the field the next morning, she hit a beeline for nowhere in B flat. At the rate she was going, she reached Timbuktu by four o'clock, any standard time. Curious, I went back to the seller.

"I ain't complaining any," I said, "but what was the only fault that dog had?"

"She was man-shy, sir."

"She was what?"

"Man-shy," he repeated without any elaboration.

"Well," I said, "I've had dogs that were gun-shy, bird-shy, and car-shy, but I'll be hanged if you haven't sprung a new kind of shy on me. Right sure she wasn't brain-shy too?"

Why do I do it? Well, whenever I bring a dubious acquisition home, my wife asks me that too, and I always begin: "Honey, you just can't tell. That puppy might turn out to be——"

"I know," she says with Christian forbearance. "He might turn out to be another Manitoba Rap, or Alford's John, or something in disguise. Black diamonds. Acres and acres of diamonds. Someday the ugly duckling will turn out to be a princess. The old refrain, 'someday.' It's reformin' a dog that's fun. You want to see what you can do after the other fellow gives them up. You love an unsolved equation.

"Oh, I know all the answers, after these eighteen years! It's the gambler's instinct in you, dear, plus your natural ego. If you had gone in for poker, you'd have been terrific. Why don't you quit experimenting, take your money and buy two or three good dogs, and stay put?"

And why don't I? Well, just because I was either born that way or got that way since. I'm just a sucker that way.

I've got a remarkable wife, as you can see. Sometimes she is more remarkable than at others. Perhaps most women are that way. Once when I brought a new pup home, she met me on the porch.

"Darling," she said, "you are about to tell me a lie. How much did you pay for that dog?"

Now what would you do with a wife like that?

Then she propped the broom against the door, put her hands on her hips, and began to catalogue my alibis.

"Let's see," she said, checking them off on her fingers. "You have bought dogs for the following reasons: Number one, because he had a fine head. Number two, because he had a fine tail. Number three, because he was a grandson of his grandfather, or something. Number four, because his color would make him conspicuous in the field. Number five, because he had such possibilities. Number six, because you felt sorry for him. Number seven, because you wanted to see how he would turn out. Number eight, because he would make such a fine companion—a man's dog. Number nine, because the man you got him from sounded so honest. Number ten, because the fellow practically gave him to you. Number eleven——"

"Hold on," I protested. "That ain't ethical. You've used up all your fingers."

On another occasion, when I sneaked home a half-starved diamond-in-the-rough, she eyed him narrowly.

"Now I would really appreciate enlightenment here. Why did you bring that son-of-the-people with you?" she asked.

"Well, I'll let you in on something, honey. Most people wouldn't notice it, but do you get the width between his eyes? You can always judge a dog by that. Know what it means? It means brains!"

I glanced up to catch her amusedly surveying the distance between my own eyes.

"What did you say it means, darling?" she archly inquired.

Then she went into the kitchen and put the finishing touches on her quince jelly. And speaking of her quince jelly, well, 'tis the chiefest of my sublunary joys. After all, I reflected, a man might have done worse by himself at the high and aggravated art of wife-picking. The next moment a window lifted for a Parthian shot.

"Is that another but dog?" she asked.

"What do you mean, but dog?" I returned, all unsuspecting.

"You know. Would be a great dog but for something or other."

It was when I bought a whole litter of puppies and brought them home to my amazed helpmate that the plot really began to thicken. My entry into the wholesale puppy business precipitated something of an incident, diplomatically speaking, and helped to usher in a new household regime. Pointing successively at each puppy, she slowly intoned: "One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven!"

Having taken the census, she folded her arms and gazed at me with quiet martyrdom in her eyes. Watch a woman when you see that martyred gaze in the offing. Then she shook her head resignedly and favored me with one of those with-all-thy-faults-I-love-thee-still looks, following it up with one of the but-I-wish-to-heck-I-didn't variety. Her attitude, I gathered, was that, when the Lord in his inscrutable goodness gives a woman a husband, her gratitude should be so boundless as to overlook a few motheaten spots in the fabric. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth, you know.

That was the only time the old girl went literary on me. Nothing less than Shakespeare would relieve her mind.

"What a piece of work is man!" she mimicked. "How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!" Then, finding that Shakespeare did not go into particulars enough, she added with ardor, "And what a remarkable idiot!"

Obviously things were getting in a parlous state. I would either have to take measures or take the consequences. Either reconcile my wife to my doggy transactions or reconcile myself to a dreary and dog-

less existence. I went to a friend who had had a course in abnormal psychology. He was sympathetic and helpful, having had Belgian hare troubles of his own.

"Encourage your wife in some extravagance of her own," he began. I winced, and he considerably amended: "Some minor extravagance, of course. One of the lesser vices, you understand. If she follows the graph, she will become too absorbed in her own hobby to bother yours. That is what is called checkmating the enemy."

The advice sounded sensible. That spring, therefore, my wife received a gorgeously illustrated flower catalogue and a credit slip for ten dollars' worth of flower seed, to be shipped as she selected. She laughed unsympathetically, threw out a general remark about stupidity-running-in-families, and turned the credit slip over to a garden club.

Undaunted, I went back to my adviser. Surely two men should be able to outfigure one woman.

"Have you tried to interest her in collecting stamps?" he asked.

I hadn't, but I would. I promptly ordered a stamp catalogue, a classy magenta album, magnifying glass, watermark detector, tongs, hinges, and what not, and had the whole business shipped to her. From a junk dealer I ordered a job lot of unassorted stamps.

Well, brother, the vaccine took. Her philatelic ardor now knows no bounds, and my dog-buying troubles are all over. I haven't had money enough to buy one for months. It all goes for stamps. Whenever she rapturously opens up a new lot, I say: "Honey, why do you buy all that junk? Why don't you take your money, buy what stamps you need, and get it over?"

"Run along now, darling," she dismisses. "Someday I'm going to find a rare United States Provisional or a cockeyed king or something. You never can tell."

And that's the way it is with a woman.

THE GUN DOG

by Elias C. Vail

A REAL gun dog is the greatest pleasure that a bird hunter has. Yet consider the time and money spent on him compared with the field-trial dog that is worked with day in and day out. Too many field-trial enthusiasts work dogs, or have them worked, for the trials, and if these dogs do not make the grade they say, "Oh well, I'll use that baby for a gun dog."

I believe that a real gun dog should be started as a gun dog and that his education should be continued along these lines. True, many good shooting dogs, after they have been developed, can and will make a good showing at some of the trials, especially in the shooting dog stakes. Do not think that I am against the trial dog, for there is nothing better than getting out and seeing the rascals step.

When you are picking a pup that you expect to develop as a gun dog, do not go out of your way to get the top strain, bred along lines that should win on the prairies. There are many bird dogs, with just as good blood and breeding, that have more natural instinct for working closer to you—but not the pottering kind. A dog can be just as fast and stylish if he is working within one hundred yards of you as he can when half a mile away.

With a good gun dog there is no such thing as a set range. At all times either he should be in sight or you should know where he is. I have seen only one dog who was ideal in this respect. He was practically always in sight ahead of you in the thickest cover, but in the fields he would range out as far as he could go and still be within sight. This dog was ten years old when I saw him, and he had been hunted on grouse, pheasant, and quail in the South and could handle them. He was anything but a slow, pottering dog.

Obedience is a prime factor in the finished shooting companion. Any dog—that is, almost any—will handle when he is under your feet, so to speak. A dog that is at liberty—out doing it on his own—and who will turn at one blast of the whistle is the dog who will really obey.

He is never sulky about his commands, but will follow them merrily. This dog was not trained on a rope, but was continually worked by a good man who spent a lot of energy and time.

You can teach obedience more often by action than by force—meaning that if a dog does something wrong and you can jump over a bush and really surprise him, it will do a lot more good than strolling up to him and then using a stick. When out working your prospect, watch the dog at all times.

Why do not more dogs have better manners? I am sorry to have to say it, but the reason is that the majority of owners are too lazy. Do you realize that almost any dog can be taught practically anything—aside from field work—by spending only fifteen minutes per day with him? This does not mean that on Sunday you can spend all these 105 minutes and get the same result. What counts is a few minutes' work each day. If you try to do it all in one day, you get tired, the dog gets tired, you get mad, the dog gets mad. Usually you lose more than you gain.

I believe that the two most important commands to teach a dog are "Whoa" and "No"—"Whoa" for the field and "No" for the house. If you are with your dog a great deal, it is simple to teach him what "No" means. It should mean that he is to stop whatever he is doing. It makes no difference whether he is eating a meal or smelling the pant leg of some stranger. Any dog who is watched carefully and to whom the word "No" is said often, and at the opportune time, will soon learn that it is useless to do things that are not accepted in the best of families. It will surprise you to see how soon your dog's manners are, should I say, better than your own. When you are in the field and stop to have a smoke or eat lunch and your dog comes in and sits or lies by you without making a nuisance of himself his manners are surely appreciated. You do not have to take the spirit out of a dog in order to have him act this way; it is just a case of treating him as a pal who will do the things that you like to have him do. Any dog working with you under control is a much happier dog than the crazy beast running wild, at whom you could yell all of the time with no results.

Naturally you should start training with a so-called good prospect—that is to say, a pup ten to fifteen months old who has been permitted to run to his heart's content, chasing birds and anything else that interested him. Before this age a pup is not mentally developed enough to take training. True, up to this point he can learn a great deal as to understanding English—leading and coming to you when you call, playfully but not forced to do so.

His kindergarten work may be started with the words "Whoa" and

"No." But under no circumstances should his real training be started until he can really understand what it is all about. Compare a pup's age at one year with a child's age at about seven or eight years. How much is a child forced at that age? Give the pup a break.

When he is old enough to start real training, three or four months should put him where the average handler can start shooting over him. He should know what it means to mind; he should point his birds and know that he is supposed to stay there and watch them if they fly away. This does not mean that he will do all of these things each and every time, for he is still a young dog and not a piece of machinery. The owner will have to keep checking on him, seeing that he does not forget these lessons and straightening him out if he does forget. If this good prospect is kept in line during his first season, then in his second season he should be a very good dog.

As for the length of time it takes the average person to train a good prospect, that depends entirely on the trainer, how good he is and how much time is spent on the job. The pups that amble around and point birds when they are six or seven months old are not good prospects, even if they keep on doing a so-called good job their first season. Do I hear grunts from the gallery?

Every person at some time or the other has sown his wild oats. If not when he was in his-teens, then when in his twenties, and maybe thirties for some of us. Every dog has to sow his wild oats at some time, and if he does not do it before he is a year or so old he may wait until he gets into the middle of his first season, and sometimes his second season, to have his fling.

Remember those wonderful pups that pointed when they were only a few months old? You considered them so-called naturals, perfect their first season. Be honest now. Didn't these very same pups go hay-wire sometime later on? A dog that needs real work to bring him to perfection is the kind that remembers what he is taught and makes the best dog in the end.

I do not believe in having a dog retrieve during his first season, because there are so many other things that are more important. Also, there is a limit as to what a puppy can absorb. If the first-season pup has developed so that he handles fairly well, points his birds and stays there so that you can do some shooting over him, he surely has done a pretty good job. Your chances of having him steady, both mentally and physically, are so much better if he has no crazy idea of getting out there and picking up a bird that may be wounded.

Do not let him retrieve in his first season. Make him mind, stay put on point and remain there until after you have picked up the bird. Then, by all means, let him smell the bird and mouth it a bit if he

wants to. When you send him on after this little party is over, he will not be nearly as excited as if he broke shot and went wildly around looking for the bird.

His second season in the field, being a year older, he will have a much more level head and should be able to retrieve without entirely upsetting the applearc. Maybe during the summer just preceding his second season you have either taught or kidded him into retrieving. A force-trained retriever is without question the only retriever on whom you can depend. A natural retriever is one who simply does it for amusement, and when he is not amused he will not retrieve.

Having a dog that is steady at shot and will retrieve on command is a combination that you very seldom see. If you do see this, you can almost bet that the handler is good and that he cares much more about having good dog work than he does about taking home a bird for supper. If you like to have your dog steady and also like to see him retrieve now and then, try this. When birds fall where you can see them, pick them up yourself. When you need your dog to help you find a bird, let him find it and bring it to you. If you are a good shot and kill your birds, and do not wing them, there won't be many birds for your dog to retrieve, with the result that your chances of keeping him steady will be good.

The average gunner, when pheasant shooting, will get more birds if his dog breaks shot to retrieve than if he is perfectly steady. An educated shot breaker is a beautiful thing to watch. By that I mean a dog who will break only when a bird is hit and will be steady if the bird is missed.

A dog who breaks shot to retrieve a winged pheasant loses no time in getting to the spot where the bird hit the ground and should find it more quickly than the dog who is steady and waits for the command to retrieve. Every second counts on those running roosters. On the other hand, if the dog breaks and rushes forward after a hit bird, the chances are very great that he will flush any other birds in front of him.

Breaking shot can lead to so many faults that it is much wiser and safer to have your dog steady. For example, today a dog breaks shot and retrieves; tomorrow he breaks when a bird flushes close to him; the next day he chases a bird that flushes wild. Maybe the next day he will road a bird so fast that he wants it to flush just so that he can chase it. All of these things can happen and do happen. To avoid trouble, keep your dog in hand and keep him steady.

Dog temperament is a great factor in training. Each one is different from the other. Carefully study the temperament of your pup; if you understand it, you will have gained many steps toward his education.

Some have to be pushed; some have to be shoved; some have to be pulled; some have to be cussed; some have to be kissed, and lots have to be mussed. You can muss up a dog if the dog knows what he is being mussed up for. Be certain that you know what you are doing and why before you start correcting your pup.

It is cruelty to dumb animals to mishandle a good prospect—so that it becomes gun-shy. Few people realize how many dogs these days are afraid of a gun. This is not the dog's fault, but is usually caused by some stupid owner with not half as much brains as the dog. As accustomed to a gun as you are, have you ever been in cover and had a double-barrel 12-gauge fired alongside of you when you did not expect it? How far did you jump? What do you suppose would be the reaction of a pup?

A sure way of teaching your pup to like a gun is to shoot a .22 revolver with blanks when he is young and busy chasing birds—birds of any kind. If the pup shows any signs of its bothering him, just keep on walking and pay no attention to him; pretty soon he will be chasing more birds. After you have fired a few times while he is chasing, he will begin to think that the noise means fun. Personally, I have never seen a gun-shy dog who had this kind of kindergarten work. As a precaution I would advise that the first time you kill a bird over your pup you do not shoot directly over him. Be out in front or to the side.

Every dog has a speed at which he can travel and be within himself. Study your dog and find out what that speed is, and when you see him do any crazy running talk to him and slow him down where he belongs. Few dogs are run on one-course trials who could handle birds the first part of the heat. They are not running within themselves, and if they do happen to find birds the chances are that they will bump them. Notice the difference in the speed of an average dog at a trial in the first part of his heat and then when he gets to the bird field.

On the other hand, a slow, pottering dog will usually do most of his work by foot scent and will not cover nearly as much ground as the faster-moving dog. A fast, snappy dog who has the nose will cover a great deal of ground and point his birds by body scent, thereby pinning his birds, so that you will not get nearly as many runners as you will with the slow dog. I have seen no game bird that the fast, snappy-going dog cannot handle, and handle better than the slow dog.

True, the fast, snappy dog has to be well trained and under good control—but so does the slow, pottering dog. I can remember when I thought that if a dog got off a trot it was time to grab him by the neck. Now I feel just the opposite. So many people will argue with

you that the fast dog will flush too many birds. Any good dog will flush birds now and then. It is the poor one that never flushes. If your snappy-going dog does flush a bird once in a while, why worry? He will cover so much more ground that he'll find many more than enough birds to make up for it.

I think we all like to follow a fast dog in the field—that is, a dog who has some fire and snap, and who moves at a fast pace, but not so fast that his nose is not able to handle birds correctly. Most dogs with an average nose, the necessary brains and bird sense can handle birds when they are moving at a good snappy pace. But as soon as they get going beyond themselves—crazy and wild—they are not able to hunt intelligently and certainly cannot scent birds.

Do not confuse a fast, snappy-going dog with a wide-ranging dog. A dog is not necessarily a wide-ranging dog just because he has a little pep. He can be trained to work with you, no matter how fast he goes. Many slow-working dogs range out too far—a most aggravating trait. It takes them an hour to get out of range and an hour and a half to get back.

Many people have asked me how to make a dog quarter. If you have a dog who likes to hunt and find birds, make him turn by the whistle or his name, and he is bound to quarter his ground, for he has nowhere else to go. In case he is one that wants to go straight out and then come straight in, you will have to tack with him.

Here's a suggestion that might be of help to many of you after you have trained your young dog so that he knows how to point and understands that he should not chase. When you walk up to such a dog on point, say nothing to him. If he moves forward, let him go. Then, if he bumps his bird, land on him with all fours. This does not imply force as much as the suddenness of the contact. Let him make a mistake, because the only way he can learn not to do wrong is to make mistakes and then be corrected for making them. If you walk up to him when he is pointing and take hold of him and never permit him to make a mistake, it will be many a day before he learns these things, with the result that each time you will have to hold him. The same applies to breaking at flush. After he learns that it should not be done, give him a chance to slip, if he will, and then get after him. If you do put a rope on him, have the rope long enough so that you can go in and flush your bird. Say nothing to your dog, but if he does break at flush turn him upside down when he gets to the end of the rope. As he hits the end of the rope say "Whoa!" as if you meant it. I have never seen a real good dog that didn't have brains enough to know when he had a rope fastened to him and when he didn't.

The less you say to a dog while in the field the better. When you do say something, you should mean it. Never whistle or call to a dog unless you are sure that he can hear you. Then, after the second time, if he does not recognize your attempt, move in his direction and get busy. Do not nag him; he does not like it. Neither would you.

ILL ALWAYS REMEMBER

by John Crowe

ALL sold but this here one," the man said. "But it don't seem to worry him none."

The puppy struggled to climb out of the box, scrambling over his litter mates. He had explored that box very thoroughly; it was time to see what was outside.

"What's the matter with him?" I recall the question now with a twinge of regret. Not intended for disloyalty, it was only the first of many times when I stood in need of learning. I knew I'd buy the pup, but for some reason it seemed necessary to appear hard-boiled.

"Nothin' much. Feet are kind of small, and he's got plenty of length to his tail. But six-week puppies—you can't tell."

A few minutes later I was possessed of my first dog! His name was Joe. The name was not selected for its originality, but *How To Train Your Hunting Dog* advised: "a name which is short, easily recognized by the dog, and of such phonetic quality as to carry well." With the name of Joe, the dog's education was so well begun that I felt as though he had entered the "partly trained" class.

For the ride to his new home, Joe was put in the back of the car. His immediate response was heart-rending, high-pitched, and embarrassingly loud. A steelyhearted resolve to ignore this soon weakened. I recalled what the book said: "Get the confidence of your young dog, first of all." Perhaps this was a poor beginning; so Joe moved from the luggage compartment to the front seat, beside me. In the excitement of his first victory over adverse circumstance, Joe weedled copiously and without warning. His proclivity to complicate life had come to my attention for the very first time!

Joe's permanent quarters were to be a fine doghouse, built of new lumber and equipped with all the latest appurtenances for canine comfort. This doghouse represented at least fifty dollars in cash and about fifty hours of labor. For me, carpentering is no pastime; so the new doghouse was really a monument of regard for my new dog.

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But Joe didn't like it—unless he had company. Apparently it made no difference to Joe whether I moved out to the doghouse or he moved in with me. One thing was certain: Joe disliked loneliness. To be convinced of this, all you had to do was listen, at any time of the day or night—in fact, you didn't have to listen; you couldn't help it. His perspicacity was remarkable. He knew the neighbors would not complain of his treatment of me, but my treatment of him was something else. There could be only one result in the unequal contest: Joe moved into the house.

Whelped in the summer, Joe's experiences in his first hunting season did not amount to much. But he showed great interest in dead birds, and one day he found his first live one, a ringneck. The bird was in a brush pile, from which it burst with a great cackle and shower of snow. Joe turned tail and fled. Not until he reached me did he realize that he was running in the wrong direction; then he turned and ran off after the bird.

By his second hunting season Joe was making progress. He loved the sound of a gun; he found and pointed birds, sometimes. Occasionally I could get within fifty or sixty yards before he flushed his game; then he chased, but only until the birds were out of sight. He was aware of the whistle, for when I blew it there was sometimes an unmistakable trace of hesitation. If I waved him on, or to the right or to the left, he understood—perhaps—for he obeyed the signals nearly a third of the time!

"Don't expect to do much shooting," the book said, "with your young dog. Remember, you are training him, and gunning is but a secondary consideration." This was quite sound, except that it might have been revised to read that gunning is no consideration at all.

One day we got into a big flight of snipe. Joe was in fine form, finding—and flushing—nearly every snipe. I had a rope, fifty feet of heavy braided clothesline, for use in Joe's education. This, I miscalculated, would slow him. Training or no training, a good flight of snipe in those days was not to be taken lightly, and I wanted to shoot a few. But the line did not faze Joe in the least. Thereupon I decided to tie one end around my waistcoat and walk up the snipe. If Joe chased, the sudden jar when he reached the end of the rope would teach him a thing or two, especially if I yelled "Whoa!" just as the birds jumped. With Joe under control, I set out for a bag of snipe.

One went up. I yelled "*Whoa!*" and put up my gun to shoot. My finger on the trigger synchronized perfectly with Joe's arrival at the end of the line. Whether Joe's neck or my back came the closer to damage I don't know, but the line went back into my pocket. One lesson

was enough. Sometimes I learned quickly, if Joe did not. After the season closed, Joe began to point and hold his birds.

Years ago, when Joe was young, we used to go to Canada for the summers, camping on an island in an Ontario lake. Joe enjoyed these summers immensely—all but one thing: sometimes he had to stay on the island alone. When we fished from the canoe, or for brook trout in the little stream at the head of the lake, we could hear his doleful howling. His endurance was superb; he could keep it up for a day. But we had no worry about neighbors, for there were none. This time Joe was really stopped—so we thought.

Returning one day, we noticed that Joe was not at hand to greet us, with the exuberance which usually made our landing an adventure. After we were ashore, however, he appeared, his tail wagging, but his demeanor otherwise not normal. I knew the signs—something was wrong. What, at first glance, was not apparent.

Bill, my partner, got on his hands and knees to go into the pup tent in which we kept provisions. At the same time Joe disappeared into the bushes. A two-pound chunk of cheese, one whole loaf of bread and half of another were missing.

"He must have run out of cheese," said Bill.

I scolded Joe.

The next day he repeated the crime, consuming an entire box of cookies. The skill he must have used to get into the containers in which we had the supplies was really cause for admiration, and not for the lacings he got. The second time I laid it on. That was eight years ago. Since then, with opportunities galore, Joe has never stolen anything.

It is very doubtful if Joe stole that food to keep us from leaving him on the island, but I am convinced that his next move was for that purpose. We had been away for nearly the whole day. Returning, we found that he had carried everything he could carry out of the tents—except the provision tent, which he strictly avoided. There were blankets, shoes, socks, shirts, coats, even hardware scattered all over the island.

While Bill set about to get supper I disciplined Joe. The book had not covered such a situation, but I thought his sin would be clearly impressed upon him if he were made to lie at the entrance of the tent while I retrieved the articles which belonged in it. As I brought them I hit the dog with such articles as socks, but not with rod cases or the ax.

Just about everything was back in the main tent when Joe decided the punishment had been sufficient. He bolted, in defiance of my com-

mand to stop. Down the path, into the water, and off toward the mainland he went. He kept his course for fifty or seventy-five yards without showing any signs of returning.

In mixed anger and fear of losing him, I put off in the canoe, holding the advantage in speed but not in maneuverability. It was a dead heat—just as I got my hand on his collar the canoe went over. Bill came to the rescue in the rowboat. After our return to the island there was truce, by silent, mutual consent.

The next time we left him, Joe played his trump card. In sight of the island, but about a mile from it, we were casting along a favorite bar. It was late in the afternoon, and the sun, in the direction of the island, was at our backs. The bass were taking, so that we were engrossed in fishing when Bill remarked: "Joe's quit howling. Must be raiding the tents again."

"Maybe he's learning," I answered hopefully, and went on casting, but with increasing apprehension.

A few minutes later, from another part of the lake, a boat came around the point and over to the bar where we were. The people in it were strangers to us. They shut off their motor and prepared to fish farther out on the bar. We waved to them, but the sun on the water glared in our eyes; so our glance in their direction was brief. But we did look when we heard one of them ask another: "What's that in the water?"

The answer nearly upset our canoe: "Why, it's a dog!"

Joe detoured their boat and came on toward us. He was willing enough to get into the canoe this time. Once in, he stood up and shook himself, very casually. Thereafter he was a member of all fishing expeditions.

At the end of five years Joe had me pretty well trained. Then I married, and he had to start all over again on my wife.

Lesson one came at our first meal at home. There were some scraps of meat left on a plate, which I put on the floor for Joe. At this juncture Mrs. Crowe stated that she did not approve of the dog's eating from the family dishes. Joe took no part in the ensuing controversy, but before many more meals were past he had the situation well under control. He ceased to sit by my chair, instead transferring his attention to Ruth, who was more susceptible to his begging than the first encounter would indicate. Soon Joe had the unquestioned privilege of licking any plate or platter which might interest him. Finally he learned to share steak and chicken with becoming condescension.

Then there was the question of where Joe was to sleep.

"In the basement!" said the better half.

"In the kitchen," I offered in compromise.

Joe expressed his ideas on the subject when he found himself in the basement; there was no mistaking his meaning. In less than half an hour he moved to the kitchen. This should have satisfied him, and no doubt would have if he had not been subjected to the humiliating interlude in the basement. Perhaps he thought it was time to show who headed the family. He complained. My threats were ineffective, for the complaints continued. At last I suggested the necessity for dire punishment.

"All right," Ruth said. "But don't hurt him."

I knew then that Joe had the upper hand, but the persuader was applied—lightly, for I knew the cause was hopeless. Joe stopped howling. The next morning we made the discovery that Joe had spent the night chewing at the doorpost. His teeth were good, and he had made considerable progress. That was the end; Joe moved into the house, unreservedly, day or night. Now he sleeps wherever he wants to, including the beds.

Whether a dog can be both hunter and pet is a question which has been hotly argued. Some of the greatest dog performances it has been my privilege to watch have been by dogs which never knew the meaning of affectionate association with human beings. Again, some of the greatest have been by dogs which were real pets, as well as hunters. It is thin ice, but I'll go out on it to say that close association with you throughout the year may actually improve your dog's performance in the field. For the ordinary man, who has only a few days each year to hunt, investment in a dog for the purpose of hunting alone is indeed an extravagance. But add to the few days of hunting the additional return of a year-round companion and the picture becomes very different.

Your first dog, if he is any success at all, will be, in your mind, your greatest dog. No other dog will ever quite measure up to him, and no other dog will ever take his place. Not that a man must own a dog to get great pleasure from his work; but if the dog is yours, and especially if you broke him, that pleasure will have an added quality which, though indefinable, is very real.

You will recall his first woodcock, his first grouse. Those moments in your memory will not fade. And then, one day, you see him falter in an effort which used to be as nothing to him, and you know that the last hunt with the old dog is soon to come. The thought brings a tightness to the throat and, hesitating, you allow your companion to walk ahead, until your eyes have cleared again.

Chances are, for the occasional hunter, that his dog, for lack of the shooting experience which really makes a dog, will never be a world-

beater. Yet with any dog, ordinary as he may be, your hunting will become a richer experience. A dog is not a commodity; he will require more than simply an original investment of cash. He'll give you headaches and trouble, but he'll also give you returns upon which you can set no value—moments which you will always remember.

On Food

Why so many men have allowed themselves to become so utterly dependent on women for their food is one of the mysteries of the race. Lots of men can't even cook their own breakfast, but have to wait around until wifey comes down and boils 'em a couple of eggs and a pot of coffee. Then they go out all day, work furiously to bag a duck or a deer, which they present proudly to the wife, who as proudly ruins it by all sorts of devices designed to make the critter taste like something other than it is! Mr. Paul Brown's statement in the next selection that wives know more about preparing game than their husbands is not generally true—too often neither of them knows anything and treat, say, a wild duck as though it ought to resemble a puddle duck. The late Charles Browne, in his admirable The Gun Club Cook Book (Scribner's), calls the turn here:

. . . we read in cookbooks written by well intentioned and otherwise moral women, statements like these: "To remove the game taste from a wild duck, soak it in salt water overnight, parboil it three quarters of an hour, and roast it forty minutes to an hour" or "stuff it full of onions to take away the game flavor." It would be just as sensible to say, when writing of a Welsh Rabbit, "to remove the strong cheese taste from a Welsh Rabbit, add one or two ounces of tincture of asafoetida or one-half bar of laundry soap."

The moral being, he goes on to say, that if you don't like the game taste, don't eat it. And a point, while on the subject of wild duck especially, is that wild duck is red meat and should be so treated. Why anybody would want to "take care of" the wild taste, as Mr. Paul Brown suggests, is probably because women think everything ought to taste the same, and too many men follow along because they won't take the trouble to find out. I agree that nine minutes is too little for

a duck the size of a mallard, but twenty, in a very hot oven, is just right. Well, enough of this; you can argue about food forever. Mr. Brown's main point, however, that you can have good food in camp, is well taken. Food is important anywhere, any time, but especially so on a hunting trip, when an upset stomach can ruin the whole enterprise not only for the afflicted one but often for all the others as well.

Too few people are aware of the wealth of edibles to be found in the woods, it seems to me, and hence the inclusion of "Forest Foods." And too many people have an unfounded fear of contracting loathsome diseases from wild meat. I hope Mr. Carhart's fine article on this subject will allay such baseless fears that any readers of this book may entertain. Finally, Kerry Wood's "Wild Animals I Have Eaten" struck me as vastly amusing and informative when I first read it nearly ten years ago, and my admiration for such thorough research in gastronomy is unbounded!

WHAT! NO MULLIGAN?

by Paul Brown

FOR many years I have been going hunting whenever there was a reasonable opportunity, and sometimes, according to my family, when the opportunity was most unreasonable. I believe I have had at least one or two shots at every kind of game, large or small, furred or feathered, in this country. Sometimes I have been a member of a small party that camped at night wherever we happened to be; at other times a member of a larger group, operating from a clubhouse or a lodge.

There has been infinite variety in the sport my companions and I have had, in the terrain hunted over, in the game we were after, in the arms we used, in our transportation, in the very climate itself—but there was one universal and monotonous feature in all those hunts that finally became somewhat irritating. No matter what kind of game we brought back to camp or clubhouse, it was almost sure to appear on the table as the basis of that old stand-by of amateur masculine cooks—mulligan.

Now during the first ten or fifteen years of hunting there can be little objection to mulligan. No one can honestly deny that mulligan, made with a base of venison, rabbit, moose, elk, squirrel, or even bear meat and containing an adequate assortment of tender vegetables, is both palatable and delicious.

But after more than a decade it begins to pall a trifle. When all is said and done, it is merely the simplest form of meat stew. Any man, no matter how tolerant he is, will eventually begin to wonder mildly if there isn't some other way to prepare the meat he has shot.

If he permits his mind to dwell too long on the subject, he is very likely to arrive at the conclusion that it might be an excellent idea to take the cook along on a still hunt some foggy morning—and mistake him for a deer. Such tragic errors, if the criminal-court records can be believed, have been made with much less justification.

There may be a better way to accomplish a change. In fact, there are

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slight indications of improvement even now. Steaks are appearing on the hunter's menu from time to time, but they have been, at least within my experience, the only variation; and they have not been distinguished by excellence. Yet they should have been. There is no better steak than a juicy slice cut from the round of a deer, but it is too often spoiled in preparation.

Now a venison steak that is prepared so as to display prominently all its virtues should never be less than one and one half inches thick; and it should be broiled, rather than fried. Of course there is a broiler in camp. Grease it and heat it well over a hot fire. Place the steak on it and reach for a fork. By the time you have obtained the fork it will be time to turn the steak; continue turning it more or less constantly for several minutes.

This will sear the outside of the steak thoroughly and keep in all the juices. With the searing accomplished, a bit of fat can be added to each side of the steak as it becomes the top. Butter is best, although bacon fat will do nicely. Salt and pepper are added with the lumps of fat, the gradual melting of which distributes the seasoning evenly.

With a hot fire, at least twelve minutes and possibly fifteen will be necessary to complete the broiling, which should leave the steak a little rare. If you are in doubt as to whether or not the steak is done, make a short but deep slit in the center and observe the color of the meat.

Although I have eaten venison in the woods for years, I cannot recall ever encountering either the heart or the liver until last year, and then only as the result of strenuous insistence after I had brought in my own buck. I have no doubt that in the past the cook had attended to the disposal of those choice tidbits, for they're mighty good. There are several ways of preparing them, but they are delicious when fried.

Slice them rather thinly and let them stand in cold, salted water for a time. This will remove the unpleasant juices. Just before frying, the slices should be dropped into scalding water to complete the cleansing process. This will change the color of the meat but will not affect its quality.

Both the heart and the liver are delicious served with bacon. After the bacon has been fried and removed from the pan, the slices are dried, sprinkled with salt and pepper, and dropped into the fat. They should be fried rather slowly and turned frequently; otherwise the outside is likely to become rather hard—even brittle—while the inside of the slice is still underdone.

If preferred, the slices can be dredged in flour before they are dropped into the hot bacon grease. When the meat has been removed, an en-

tirely satisfactory brown gravy can be made by adding hot water to the contents of the pan and stirring briskly. Milk is better than water if available.

The saddle of venison is really a roast and should be so considered. Somehow or other, probably because the process cannot be actually watched while in progress, roasting is not so popular with amateur cooks, but there is nothing difficult about it.

Deer will ordinarily yield a saddle of from 7 to 15 pounds and in a hot oven should be well roasted in from 1¾ hours to 2½ hours. Plunging a sharp fork into the roast deeply from time to time is the best way of telling when to remove it from the oven.

To prepare the roast, trim away the flank meat and excess bone. Place it in a pan with a cupful of water, a little vinegar (which will have a tendency to make the meat tender as well as to impart an added flavor), and two tablespoonfuls of bacon fat. A couple of small onions may be added if desired.

When the roast has been under way for about fifteen minutes, season it with salt and pepper and baste it with the liquid contents of the pan. If the fatty fluid cooks away, more water should be added, so that the roast can be basted every few minutes to insure moist tenderness. The roasts that appear in the field on rare occasions when the cook's conscience prompts him to lay aside the frying pan are often hard and brittle because they have not been basted.

Incidentally, if it is at all possible, water cress should be served with the roast. Usually, in any country where deer are to be found, there are also open springs where cress remains green and palatable during the fall and winter months. A slight dressing of diluted vinegar and a sprinkling of salt improve it.

Elk, moose, and bear meat can all be treated in essentially the same way as venison, making allowances for the fact that moose and bear are likely to be rather fatty. When preparing them for the table, instead of adding bacon grease or butter, the excess fat that drips from the meat should be spooned from the pan and discarded. Of course it can be saved and used as the basis of meat stock, but it is liable to be unsatisfactory if worked up later into either soups or gravies.

In preparing the meat of these larger animals it is often advantageous to add just a bit of highly flavored spice of some sort to the usual seasoning—a mere dash of cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon, or allspice. Such a small quantity will be evident only to the most educated palate, and it will serve to disguise the coarse, gamy taste that is often found objectionable. With these meats a bit of vinegar should also be used to make them more tender, the quantity varying according to the strength

of the vinegar. If of usual strength, a tablespoonful is sufficient for every three pounds of meat.

Potpie is so commonly encountered in the woods that its preparation need not be described here, as it is merely a stew made by boiling meat with small pieces of dough and potatoes, usually thickened slightly by a little flour. The most that can be said for potpie is that it is satisfying and warming—which isn't such a bad recommendation.

There is another way of boiling wild meat that makes potpie and mulligan look like the efforts of a cook who never graduated from the culinary kindergarten. A piece of meat cut from the round, large enough to allow about one and one half pounds of lean meat for every portion to be served, is placed in a large pot and covered with at least an inch of cold water. Salt and pepper and finely chopped onion—one for every person—are added. The meat is allowed to boil rather slowly for 2½ hours. Three hours of slower boiling is better.

Scum will rise to the surface. This should be removed and additional water added from time to time to keep it at the original level. The liquid will eventually become a rich and fragrant broth.

Approximately a half hour before the meat will be done, potatoes are added at the rate of three per person. They should be cut into halves if they are large. The meat and the potatoes will be done at the same time. The potatoes are then crushed on the individual dinner plates and mixed with the rich broth. This stew is guaranteed to disappear so rapidly that inhalation seems to describe the process better than swallowing.

With this boiled dish there is nothing better than coleslaw, either hot or cold; and it's easy to make.

Shred the cabbage. Then prepare a dressing as follows: For each head of cabbage crack four eggs into a bowl and mix them to complete smoothness with 1½ heaping tablespoonfuls of flour. Add to this a half cupful of vinegar, a half cupful of water, two slightly heaped tablespoonfuls of sugar, salt and pepper to taste, and stir until completely mixed.

Grease a rather large frying pan. Put the dressing in this and heat—but be careful only to warm it. Then place the cabbage in the pan and stir constantly to insure an even distribution of the dressing, which will slowly thicken as the heating progresses.

If the amount of dressing is insufficient, simply add a little more water; but wait a bit before doing so, as water will be exuded by the cabbage. Cold slaw is slightly cooked and then cooled; hot slaw is cooked and promptly served.

So much for the meat of the larger animals. All sportsmen, however, cannot collect big game. The vast majority hunt birds, rabbits, or

squirrels. Generally these are taken home and prepared by their wives—who admittedly know more about it than their husbands. Were the men to cook them, the chances are the inevitable mulligan would result.

After all, it's difficult to spoil meat by boiling it. However, there are one or two other and possibly better ways of serving squirrel or rabbit. One is to fry or pan-broil them; another is to roast them. Both are easy and simple.

To fry, clean and wash the meat thoroughly and soak it in salted water, overnight if possible. Use a heavy pan with lots of bacon grease. Cut the animals into convenient pieces—quarters for rabbits; halves for squirrels. Season liberally and drop into the hot fat. Turn them frequently until they are seared and finish the frying over a lower fire.

Many people like to parboil the meat first. Others add a small onion to flavor the meat. Some prefer to dredge the pieces in flour before frying.

Roasting either of these small animals is equally simple. Put them into a pan, raised an inch or so from the bottom by means of a wire grill, and cover with a tight lid. For the first quarter hour the oven should be very hot, so that the meat is seared and the juices retained. Then reduce the heat and let the good work go on. As a rule, it is not necessary to baste small game, but it can't do any harm. A cup of hot water, a teaspoonful of vinegar, and a dash of onion juice make a splendid basting liquid.

If gravy is desired, remove the meat and add water and a little flour to the liquid in the roasting pan. Stir briskly until the desired consistency is obtained.

Incidentally, in making gravies it must be remembered that there are two distinct kinds. One is thin, clear gravy; the other is thick, brown gravy. Clear gravy is made without flour and is, as a rule, more highly seasoned.

The preparation of birds for the table is not difficult, whether the bird be wild turkey or quail. The time of cooking will vary according to the size of the bird. The smaller birds can be handled differently in the process, but the variations are slight and need not give the embryonic chef any concern.

After the birds are brought to camp, they are almost certain to appear on the table either fried or roasted. Only once have I been surprised by the cook. It was after a hunt in the tropics. Our cooking was being done by a black boy named Roscoe from Turks Island in the Caribbean. We took him on the strength of assurances that he could speak English, and so he could—seventeen words, by actual count. However, we quickly learned that he could cook; so we kept him.

One day he brought in to the dinner table what appeared to be a wild turkey. It was, but when we dug for dressing we found a small wild guinea where the stuffing should have been!

As if that were not surprise enough, within the guinea we found a wild pigeon, and within it a small ground dove! Wonders, we felt, should then have ceased; but on carving the dove we found that rarest of delicious things—a water chestnut! As we were up in the hills of Haiti, five hours away from the seacoast, we never could understand how Roscoe got that water chestnut, and we were afraid to ask. He was given to minor miracles of that sort, and we feared that any undue curiosity on our part might be disastrous.

This incident was, however, merely a sample of the cook's ingenuity. He had simply roasted each bird separately, crammed it into the body cavity of the next larger one, and warmed them thoroughly before serving.

If a large bird is to be roasted, it should be soaked in cold salted water. Legs and wings should be trussed tightly against the body, several strips of fat bacon laid across the breast, and the bird consigned to a medium-hot oven in a covered pan. Seasoning is added, and the usual cupful of water for basting is augmented by a generous quantity of either bacon grease or butter; a heaping tablespoonful is not too much. Approximately two hours later the bird should be ready to take his rightful place at the head of the table.

The liquid remaining in the bottom of the pan can be used for gravy; but with birds there is nothing better than giblet gravy. This is prepared by chopping the giblets into rather small pieces (it is assumed that they were roasted with the bird) and stirring them into the gravy without flour.

Quail, woodcock, and the smaller birds can be roasted in the same way, or they can be split down the back, spread flat, and broiled like venison steaks. A bit of fat placed upon the broiling birds will improve the texture of the meat.

Waterfowl require a slightly different method of preparation than any of the other birds, on account of excessive fat and so-called wild taste. All that is necessary, however, is to provide some sort of absorbent material to take care of both—and what could be better than filling?

Now, where I live, filling is distinguished from stuffing in a very simple way. Stuffing is found inside the bird; filling is outside. Otherwise they are exactly alike.

When roasting waterfowl, filling is heaped around the edge of the pan, surrounding the bird. It is made by mixing three eggs thoroughly with two cupfuls of mashed potatoes and an equal quantity of bread crumbs. Add two generous tablespoonfuls of melted butter, salt and

pepper to taste, and just enough water to hold the mass together. By absorbing the fat, the filling will become far richer.

Of course if you're one of the hombres who likes his ducks roasted for nine minutes only, you go right ahead and enjoy your rare fowl. I'll wait for mine to cook.

FOREST FOODS

by Jan Thornton

TRIPS afield for both fishermen and hunters present two vital questions regarding food, in view of our present rationing program: What beneficial contribution can be made to the war effort in obtaining edible products from the forests? And what foods do the forests provide for sustenance on fishing and hunting trips?

The Indians and early settlers lived entirely on the products of the forest and fared very well. Even though much of their flesh and vegetable produce has been depleted, there still is a varied assortment of edibles in our woods.

Today's sportsman can serve the war effort in two vital ways:

(1) By providing fish and game for storage purposes that will act as a reserve. (2) By locating edible nuts, berries, roots, and fruits.

The first affords an opportunity to provide game that is not a substitute but as wholesome in food value as domestic meat. As most game is hunted in cold weather, it can be preserved longer than the meat of domestic animals that are slaughtered in all seasons. Most of the larger game can be canned, smoked, dried, and even powdered (pemmican).

The coastal and inland fishing grounds could provide ample sustenance in case our deep ocean fisheries were hampered by submarine warfare to such an extent that they could not operate. These fish can be smoked, dried, or cut in fillets and canned.

The second suggestion has wide and varied possibilities, as wild species of practically all native vegetables, fruits, berries, nuts, and roots grow in our American forests. Most of our food importations can be reasonably duplicated in our woods, such as spices, coffee, tea, sugar, and oils. Field parties of public-spirited citizens, Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts could be organized to gather these substitutes.

In providing sustenance for himself from the forest's bountiful supply, the hunter or fisherman can uncover large storehouses of nature's edibles. What are these provisions and how may they be found?

During the years between 1856 and 1936 there have been recorded 1,112 species of food plants used by the Indians of the United States and

Canada. Many of these have been tried and tested by the white man and found either as good as or better than many of our everyday market products.

The amount of fresh food which the hunter or fisherman can carry in the woods is limited, and canned goods, with all the other necessary equipment, make a heavy load on one's back. Bacon and beans, flap-jacks, sourdough biscuits, and tea and coffee can become a tiresome menu when fish and game are scarce, and now we are faced with the reality that 90 per cent of these are restricted and hard to obtain.

During the American Revolution and the Civil War, substitutes for beverages were eagerly sought in the forests. Revolutionary soldiers gathered the leaves of New Jersey tea as a worthy substitute for Chinese tea, which was most unpopular and scarce because of high taxation. This wild plant, growing abundantly in dry woodlands and bowers all over the United States and Canada, is a member of the buckthorn family and is easily identified by its other name, wild snowball. The small white flowers growing in clusters resemble a snowball from a distance. The stems are from two to three feet high and are reddish brown in color; the fruit, a dry seed. Dry the leaves and place in hot water like regular tea.

The wild cherry tree not only provides valuable food for birds, and cough medicine from its inner bark, but also gives us a pleasant tea from its twigs and outer bark. These trees grow along streams and near roads to a height of thirty-five to eighty feet and have saw-edged oval leaves that are thick and shiny. Clusters of reddish-black cherries develop from the small, sweet-smelling white flowers. Birds and, alas, caterpillars are attracted to the wild cherry, or rum cherry. Dry the twigs and outer bark and steep in hot water for about twenty minutes, drain and bring to a boil.

Perhaps you like sugar and cream in your tea. Put this in your notebook. Gather a dozen hickory nuts and pound them in a pan with a small stone until they are well broken up. Add cold water and stir; strain off the shells and thinner liquid, and you have a delicious creamy emulsion that will make your tea the nectar of the gods.

How about coffee? The pioneers of Kentucky first used the seeds of the Kentucky coffee tree, which grows from Canada to Oklahoma. It is used extensively for ornamental purposes. In the winter months it can readily be identified by the stubby and gnarled appearance of its branchlets. The bark of this tree is rough, resembling alligator hide. The leaves are doubly compound. The seeds are encased in brown pods which resemble a sickle in shape. Each pod, which is about seven inches long, contains several hard gray seeds embedded in a sweet pulpy substance. These seeds may be roasted like regular coffee beans. However,

the pod and mucilaginous substance are poisonous, and the seeds should be washed before they are used.

The acorns of the white oak tree can be roasted, ground, and used as a substitute for coffee, but this tree may not grow in your hunting country; so we shall try to give the chicory, a much-abused herb, its just due. Not alone is this plant abundant, but it also is about the best substitute the forest can provide for coffee. The chicory is a member of the endive family and is often called succory. It grows wild in dry places and can easily be identified by its exquisite flower. The flowers are shaped like a large starfish and are pure blue and violet blue in color, blooming from July until October. The plant grows from one to three feet high, with tough, awkward stems and small leaves.

The roots may be roasted, ground, and boiled like coffee. The flavor is singular and should not be mixed with coffee or other substances. The plant has other uses as well. When you remove the root, place the rest of the plant in hot water for about five minutes and you have the makings of a fine salad if flavored with a little vinegar and salt and pepper. Or eat it raw like dandelion greens. A good remedy for a sour or upset stomach, caused by too much bacon and beans, is made from about two inches of the root placed in a pint of boiling water; allow to cool, and you have a relieving potion. Give chicory a trial as a hot beverage in the morning.

But tea and coffee make a very slim breakfast. What else has the forest larder to offer? Cereals! Hot or cold? Wild rice with maple syrup or groundnuts, wild strawberries, blackberries, or whortleberries. The big whortleberry can be dried and made into delicious pies.

The hickory-nut syrup can be mixed with flour, the latter from the soft, mucilaginous layer between the inner bark and the hard wood of the slippery elm tree. The slippery elm is also known as the red elm, moose elm, Indian elm, and rock elm. It has dark brown inner bark that is very rough and furrowed. The twigs are gray and hairy. Dry this substance thoroughly, grind between two stones, and mix with the hickory-nut syrup, and you have a fine substitute for sourdough or pancake flour.

Fry some of this dough in fresh bear's grease. It's good! No bear grease? Gather some acorns, pound fine, and boil in water. By placing some ashes of burnt maple in the water you chase away the bitter taste of the acorns. Skim the oil that rises to the top and you have a fine cooking oil for frying.

A long day of trudging in the woods or crouching in a duckblind for hours, not to mention fishing a stream all day, stirs the appetite to a keen edge, and "famished" is a mild word for the hungry fisherman or hunter. What does the forest pantry provide to garnish the fish or game

or to act as a side dish? How about asparagus, peas, potatoes, celery, and a little salad with your game?

There are many substitutes for potatoes in the woods. The groundnut, or potato bean, is a wild plant that has from thirty to forty meaty tubers of good size on its roots. Unlike our domestic potato, these can be eaten raw, but they are better when baked or boiled. This plant grows in marshy ground and is a climbing vine with flowers shaped like a sweet pea. Its brownish-purple flowers fill the air with an enchanting fragrance. One plant will feed four or five persons.

Many hunters have brushed by the perennial sunflower, and some have cursed the bees and bugs feeding on the nectars from its abundant yellow petals and pods. Deep in the ground, this widely growing plant secretes a rare substitute for the potato. Its common name is "Jerusalem artichoke." A Canadian Indian tribe has named this sunflower "Indian potato." Frost does not harm the roots. Dig them up any time, bake them, then slice them and fry for a few minutes with your venison steaks. Very good!

The common sunflower can be cultivated in home gardens, and the huge flowers give forth almost a quart of seeds that are valuable for feeding poultry. These same seeds are used in Russia as we use the peanut, and they also furnish a valuable cooking oil. When this oil is pressed from the seeds, the remaining mash can be fed to cattle and hens.

One of the offspring of the parsley family is lovage, a tall, skinny plant with flower clusters that resemble our parsley except in color—the lovage having tints of yellow instead of the deep green as in the parsley. Remove the outer skin of these long stalks, shake a little salt and pepper on them, and you have a good substitute for celery.

To provide our peas we must go to a lowly plant, the hog peanut. It can be distinguished by a graceful little pale purple-and-white pealike flower peeping from the autumn leaves in damp thickets. These vinelike plants have a very nutritious seed-pod pea under ground. They are at their best in late September and October.

This creeper blooms from July to September. The peas are large, and only ten or fifteen are needed. Wash and boil in water, flavor with salt and pepper. If you are in the woods in the spring, look for them, as the wintry frosts do not harm them.

Occasionally we find a plant that has various table uses, and naturally these are the most valuable. Tender asparagus with your game? Quite a luxury! The Indians boiled the roots of the butterfly-weed for a table delicacy, boiled the seed pods with buffalo meat, and dried the buds for winter use. They also boiled the tender shoots.

The round stalks of the butterfly weed, which grow from one to three

feet high, are green and red and come up from the roots in bunches. The ends of the seeds have silky hairs, and the stems are also covered. Growing in sandy ground, this plant has beautiful orange flowers that grow in podlike clusters. The leaves are shaped like those on the rubber plant. This valuable forest plant has as many names as uses: windroot, Canada root, tuber root, and pleurisy root, the latter an appropriate one, for it also has numerous uses in medicine.

But perhaps you are frying a mess of fish. What succulent vegetable can we pop into the pan to match the rare flavor of the catch? If you are fortunate enough to be down South, the core of the cabbage palm makes a tasty dish, either raw or boiled like cabbage.

But what if we are not in the South and want some cabbage? Simply take the tender meadow cabbage, leaves and stems, and boil them, and you will have a delightful vegetable not unlike cabbage. Most sportsmen will recognize the meadow cabbage by its more popular names of skunk cabbage and polecat weed, and the housewife knows it as swamp cabbage. This plant has a long season and may be found in moist places from March until late September, but should be eaten only in the spring, and then the water should be drained several times, as it may contain poisonous matter. The fruit looks like a .45 bullet and is quite fleshy. This abundant plant contains all the vitamins—if that will make your fish taste better.

How about fried sweet potatoes? Keep your waders or boots on, roll up your sleeves, and when you find those huge leaves (some twenty inches in diameter) floating on the edge of ponds and lakes, wade in, reach down to the bottom, and gently pull up by the roots. Presto, you have a half-pound tuber! Place in the hot ashes and, when nearly done, slice and fry in your fish fat. These are water chinquapins, and as plentiful as blackberries. Their lotuslike flowers are a beautiful yellow. The Indian squaws picked these valuable tubers up with their broad toes.

The water chinquapin's cuplike flowers contain flat-headed seeds; remove some of these and bake with tubers, and you have a tasty morsel which is the equal of chestnuts. Be sure to gather some of these seeds, place in jars, and when the fall hunting season comes around use them with wild rice as a stuffing for game birds.

While we are on the subject of bird-stuffing, the forest has given us a tree by the same name, chinquapin, which is a member of the chestnut family. The nuts of this tree are smaller but sweeter than the chestnuts. These trees grow in abundance from Texas to Pennsylvania and have a giant brother on the West Coast.

Every fisherman and hunter has used water cress for a salad to spice up his supper. Its tiny white flowers and dark green leaves blanket

both banks and water of brooks and springs. Chop up the whole plant, except the roots, and mix with sweet flag, which grows near swamps. Sweetcane, root, rush, grass, and myrtle flag are some of its other names.

The flagroot has shootlike leaves that resemble short swords and grows lazily in clusters to a height of three or four feet, falling all over the water from the bank of the stream. The water chinquapin is generally close by. Pull one of the flagroot stalks from the water—roots and all—and taste the leaf tips. If it has an aromatic taste, you are on the right track.

Do not mistake the pale-purple-and-white waterlily leaves for flagroot, for these are blue flag, which is not a food plant. Cut the root from the flagroot, leave stalk, wash thoroughly, but do not peel, and you have a ready remedy for dyspepsia. Chew the root as you would gum; it is also good for clearing the voice if you want to call a moose or sing at your cooking. Take home some—good for flavoring your birch beer.

If a long day afield has brought you no luck at fishing or hunting, what has the forest to offer in potluck for a full meal?

The wapattoo (an Indian word for potato) is a good food plant. We know it as the arrowhead, its broad arrow-shaped leaves giving it the name. It frequents lazy rivers, ponds, and marshes.

The flowers of this waterside plant are very delicate and lovely—small, with snow-white petals and yellow hearts. The unromantic botanists tell us that the male flowers are beautiful and the female very ugly, but we want food, not beauty contests. Reach down and loosen the roots, which come away easily and contain a number of small tubers. Boil or roast them.

Better still, make a stew by placing the groundnut, Jerusalem artichoke, hog peanut, butterfly-weed shoots, and water chinquapin in a pot with enough water to cover them and add a few shoots of the wild onion to the pot.

In June and July the wild onion, or wild leek, can be recognized by its two six- to ten-inch leaves sticking out from the ground like broad canoe paddles. Later these leaves wither and a small white flower appears, which on closer investigation proves to be many smaller stems shooting up from a larger one and making the flower appear as a cluster of blooms. The onion or root of the wild leek looks like a graceful pot-bellied bottle with stringers hanging to the bottom. They are good eaten raw, roasted, or sliced with your game. Put a few slices across the top of the bird and see how it improves the flavor.

The forest has many more rare and valuable food plants requiring a little study and time, yet well worth your trouble. The valuable uses of these plants will justify seeking or cultivating them for food and garden beauty.

WILD MEAT IS GOOD MEAT

by Arthur H. Carhart

THE man's voice at the other end of the telephone line sounded jittery and anxious. "When I dressed out my deer," he said, "I found a funny little knot of gristle stuff in the insides. There was a white worm in it. Shall I throw the meat away?"

I've been asked that question quite a few times. Hunters who may have dressed out a dozen deer and never noticed tapeworm cysts suddenly discover one and immediately get qualms about eating the carcass. Many deer carry these, and they often are found in domestic stock. Discard them and cook the meat well. There is no danger.

For what may be good reasons, the discussion of game diseases and parasites seems to be somewhat taboo. Yet it has started heated debates in a number of camps where I've been. Sportsmen know little about this subject; the experts have a lot still to learn. All sportsmen should have some knowledge of this field.

There is no reason to get spooked by the facts. Diseases of game hold no great threat to humans. Simple precautions can avoid trouble that might come from those few that are dangerous.

Admittedly, I am no authority. I'm just another run-of-the-mill sportsman who had some training in bacteriology, was head of a laboratory section in an Army hospital, worked with highly qualified scientists during five years my wildlife staff encountered disease and parasite problems in game species, and by mere circumstance and opportunity I've learned a little. Most important has been association with really qualified co-operators.

Sportsmen have interest in this subject for two reasons. The first is a personal one. They should know at least a few elementary facts about the more prevalent afflictions of game that are dangerous to humans and how easily they may safeguard against these few. And they should have a smattering of knowledge of the conditions that may bring epidemics in game populations and cause heavy losses.

Among the diseases against which reasonable precautions should be

taken, tularemia is probably the most prevalent, most generally known in a hazy way, and most feared. Rabbits are the well-known carriers among game species, but the disease has been found in grouse, beavers, and a number of other birds and animals.

Before anyone gets stampeded, we might consider the fact that perhaps in excess of 25,000,000 rabbits are harvested each year, cooked in tasty stews or broiled to delicious brown. Yet, with all that, a mere handful of cases of human tularemia show up each season and make headlines. Viewed in this light, it is probably more risky to eat home-canned vegetables, or drink unpasteurized milk or spring water, than to hunt, handle, and eat rabbits.

Tularemia is carried by ticks, and their bites and excrement are infectious. In fact, so much so that when the disease is present there need not be a scratch or cut in your skin through which the causative organism can enter your system. Infection may enter merely through a hair follicle.

The safeguards against this disease are simple. Where there actually is tularemia, it usually is epidemic. A heavy population of rabbits begins dying in numbers. Where this condition exists, steer away from that area. Individual animals are lethargic. A lively rabbit is almost certain not to have this disease. Handling rabbits with gloves to avoid contact with infected ticks is desirable. Tularemia causes yellow spots on the animal's liver, and if you find such a condition it is wise to discard that rabbit. Thorough cooking is a positive final precaution.

Those are the simple steps you can take to make your own checkup and avoid trouble. By the very figures of the number of rabbits taken and the few cases of this disease among humans, anyone should recognize that tularemia, which is probably the principal disease against which major precautions should be taken, is, in fact, nothing to cause undue alarm.

Tuberculosis of the bovine strain has been found in some larger game animals. We can practically check that off as dangerous to man; first, because it rarely occurs and, second, because the strain of bacteria causing the disease in animals is usually not highly pathogenic to man. We can also check off hoof-and-mouth disease, which can be picked up by man as well as game animals, because we have had no epidemics of this nature for about two decades. It would almost certainly show up in domestic stock first, be frantically broadcast in the news, and there would be ample warning to hunters in an epidemic area that deer and similar animals might be carrying it.

There is one record of trichinosis being contracted by a small group in California that ate inadequately cooked bear meat. That bear may have killed a pig affected with the disease, contracted it, and the con-

sumers picked it up through that chain of events. With such a limited occurrence, let's cross that off.

Bang's disease (contagious abortion among cattle) can be transmitted to humans and causes what is known as undulant or Malta fever. A common carrier to humans is milk from infected dairy cows. It has been found in fairly high incidence among buffalo and elk in certain localities. So far as I can ascertain, there has been no record of humans contracting this disease as a result of eating meat. Thorough cooking will be safe insurance against the almost negligible chance of contracting Malta fever from eating game.

About this point you can begin to draw a line between the more common wildlife diseases that may affect humans handling or eating the meat of game and those which animals or birds may have but which are so specialized in their hosts that they will do no harm to humans. In fact, these organisms become so extremely selective that they may do damage to one species and have no effect on another that is quite closely related. Because of this, there is no likelihood of their affecting humans. There are perhaps a few other game diseases that might cause trouble to man, but they occur infrequently and can be forgotten.

The discovery of a tapeworm cyst by the worried hunter illustrates very well a condition that may stampede a sportsman without real cause. The most common tape cyst in deer, for example, is that of the dog tapeworm. The insides of a deer are dressed out and left in the field. One of the canine family comes along, eats and swallows the encapsulated immature tape in the cyst, the capsule is broken down by digestive fluids, the worm attaches its head to the inner wall of the dog, wolf, or coyote intestine and enters its mature stage. As it feeds at the expense of the host animal, it forms sections carrying eggs that are voided in scats.

The eggs contaminate water or forage, are taken in by deer or similar intermediate hosts, the eggs hatch, the immature cyst stage of the worm forms, and the cycle begins again. Man is not involved. Even some few tapeworm species that might possibly make man a host are neutralized when meat is well cooked.

Nose bots in deer are ugly things. They show up in the nasal passages in midwinter. A high percentage of deer carry bots, but unless animals are pulled down in stamina by lack of feed in adequate quantity and quality, or otherwise are in low vitality, they throw off the bots. When stamina is lowered, however, such parasites may be the immediate cause of deer death.

One fawn examined by my field crew had over sixty bots in its pharynx, which was sufficient to almost block its breathing. Some adult

deer carried from fifty to a hundred bots. But others, in good condition, had fewer bots and seemed to be suffering no real inconvenience.

The adult botfly comes out of its hard-cased pupa in early summer, zooms into the nasal passages of a deer and, instead of laying an egg, deposits a microscopic live worm. This extremely small worm fastens itself to the mucous membranes and begins to feed on the deer. Through the fall these larvae of the botfly are so tiny that they can be seen with difficulty. But by late December they are growing terrifically, often to the size of the two top joints of a man's little finger. They are normally sneezed out by deer while snow is still on the ground, become brown, and form the hardened pupae. In early summer the flies emerge and again attack the deer host. They are detrimental to deer, but they are harmless to man, even though they have a disagreeable appearance.

Lungworms, roundworms, liver flukes, and similar parasites found in big-game animals are in the same general class as the bots. They are highly selective in the hosts they attack. For example, so far as we were able to determine, the deer bot does not trouble sheep. Sheep have bots, but they are other species. Man may not like the looks of these parasites, but need not fear them.

Early spectacular losses of ducks by botulism caused concern about humans being affected. Now the facts wipe out such fears. While botulism is called "duck sickness," it actually is poisoning of the bird by toxin present in feed and water. When organisms living in stagnant alkaline water produce poison sufficiently concentrated, it kills ducks that drink and eat at that spot. A man might have an attack of botulism poisoning if he ate the water plants, aquatic insects, and other duck foods that contained the toxin, but that isn't usual forage for a man.

If a man ate a poisoned duck without cooking it, he might absorb enough poison to make him sick, but it would take several times more poison to kill a man than it takes to kill a small duck. Heat destroys true toxins, and cooking a duck destroys the toxin of botulism in ducks.

My friend Ed Kalmbach, who was among those scientists who searched successfully to define the causes of "duck sickness," tells of pothunters in California collecting ducks that were paralyzed or dead from this poison, shooting the birds with shot to make it look like gun-killed game and selling these on food markets. If there had been any chance of this duck sickness affecting man, it would have shown up in a hurry. No cases were reported. That is not particularly appetizing to contemplate, but it is proof that no one need fear this disease.

We could go on to touch on the tapeworms in grouse, the tapes and coccidia in bighorns, the nasty-looking but harmless abscesses filled with yellowish fluid that are caused by threadworms in rabbits, and develop quite a treatise. But we've covered the essential precautions to be taken

when hunting, handling, and eating game suspected of being affected.

Perhaps it is more important for sportsmen to know something of the relationship of these diseases and parasites to the maintenance of good game production. A great volume of work has been done on the diseases and parasites of humans and domestic stock. Comparatively far less has been done in dealing with wildlife afflictions. Because so much has been done relative to human and livestock diseases, we can take some assurance from the fact that whenever game-carried diseases attacked man they have been thoroughly studied. As a broad rule, then, all others have little potential danger.

We are, however, interested in how disease and parasites affect the game itself. The die-off of game due to epidemics has often been spectacular.

Epidemics get rolling most often where there are two closely associated conditions. Both are the result of overpopulations. When a habitat is exceptionally good for some game species, the tremendous reproductive capacity of a game animal or bird begins to operate. By the time the population is built up to the carrying capacity of that good habitat, there is so much breeding stock, so high a potential production, that almost invariably population overtops the carrying capacity. Primary foods are eaten out. Vitality of the entire species drops. It may not be apparent, but present nevertheless.

Along with that there is the basic condition of relative crowding, which means any sick bird or animal exposes more of its fellows than if the range were more moderately stocked. These in turn infect others more readily because of more contacts. When there is lowered vitality and more contacts, due to overpopulation of the range, epidemic gets rolling. Although it has not been proved, these may be the underlying factors in the mysterious "cyclic behavior" of game species, where big populations build up over a certain number of years and then skid to remnants.

Preventive action against epidemics among game species is clearly indicated by the two major conditions that are the prelude to epidemics: lowered vitality plus crowding, which sets the stage for rapid spreading of a disease. Considerable prevention against epidemics can be secured by not letting these fundamental situations develop.

Game management holds the answer. Adequate hunting harvest that keeps the game within the reasonable carrying capacity of its environment can go a long way toward forestalling epidemics affecting wildlife. It is granted that this is not the cure-all, but it is the common-sense approach to the problem.

I have hit only high points of this subject; have roughed out only a sketchy introduction to a field that is extensive and intricate. But I

have touched some points that are basic and of higher importance:

There are a few diseases prevalent among game species that are of some danger to man. You should be on guard against them. Safeguards to be taken are simple. Beyond that, don't let unfounded fears keep you from utilizing the good meat you take when you hunt. Wild meat is good meat.

WILD ANIMALS I HAVE EATEN

by Kerry Wood

FOR delicacy of flavor, juicy tenderness, and zestful gastronomic enjoyment, the lordly mountain sheep and the lowly muskrat have provided me with the finest wild meat I have ever tasted. But cooks vary and so do palates, and I would hesitate to class such meat as tops over all wild flesh and expect to gain any general approval among sportsmen epicures. There are many factors contributing to or detracting from the appeal of a game meal: the cooking, the age and sex of the animal, even its feeding habits, which differ with districts.

Another thing, the approach to the meal is extremely important. For instance, after climbing all day over what seems to be the greater part of the Rocky Mountains, lugging a 7-pound rifle that grows into a 70-pound drag weight as the day advances, a man can stagger into camp and sit down before a steak cut from the athletic leg of a grandpappy mountain goat and chew it down with gusto, exclaiming on its goodness all the while. Yet that same man would feel justified and be justified in suing his cook for divorce if she tried to feed him such a gristle-grained hunk of processed rubber after a normal day of office work.

To my way of thinking, mountain goat just isn't edible unless you pack a Tarzan's appetite when you tackle it. But the Stoney Indians hold contrary views, and you will occasionally come across white hunters who can find nothing wrong with the tough stuff.

Again, a man of imagination would probably rebel, perhaps with retching violence, at the offer of rattlesnake stew, but the same person might find the snake meat highly palatable if he didn't know what it was. This recalls the fact that the time is not long past when we thought the French a peculiar people because they openly admitted to a fondness for frogs' legs, and now look at the prices we willingly pay for a serving of this delicacy from the marshes. It would seem to be a matter of person, place, and usage.

Then there is the condition of the animal to be eaten, a most im-

portant detail. As a test, buy a pair of tough old matronly fowls that have been running themselves hard after grasshoppers all summer and try to enjoy roast chicken with one of them. Impossible! Now take the other hen, stick her in a tiny foot-square coop that will keep her from scrambling around, and feed her a diet of rolled oats and all the milk she can absorb for two or three weeks, and then you will taste roast chicken what am!

Most of us have come across old-timers who sigh when they speak about the deliciousness of a moose roast, yet the majority of present-day hunters will admit, when backed into an honest corner, that moose meat they have tasted was too strongly flavored of something or other to be enjoyable. And when was your moose shot, brother? Why, after the season opened, to be sure! In other words, after the animal's rutting season was well advanced or nearly over, and that is what gave the flesh that "something or other" flavor you did not like.

The old-timers were probably recalling meals obtained from animals killed in early September, before the rut had started; or maybe some of them had hunted in that distant day when the females could be shot, and had dined on a haunch of tender young cow moose. It just isn't fair to compare the meat of an old, battle-battered, trophy-headed bull shot in November with that of a sleek young beast selected for its food qualities alone and knocked down before the love light could make it galavant to the detriment of its nutritious value.

The same rule holds true in regard to all the deer family: they are bagged by hunters across North America after the rutting seasons are well under way, or even past, and such meat cannot be called first-class eating. Not that I wish to criticize the lawgivers for fixing the open dates so late in the year, as it is wisest that way when the general good is considered. The animals have mated and, with the females protected, next year's calf crop is assured.

The snows have come by November and December, and without the aid of snow to track down the quarry, most hunters would be forced to return from the wilds empty-handed. The great majority of hunters, too, are far keener about bagging a good-looking trophy than in getting a few hundred pounds of grub, and when selecting horns the dining table must be sacrificed every time.

In the case of moose, for instance, it takes the bull about eight years to reach the maturity necessary to produce the spread of horns that look well above the mantelpiece; and when it is remembered that good butchers do not sell us beef that is any more than three years old, then we know what to expect of our ancient moose meat. Deer grow their prongs in shorter time; but if a hunter knocks over an animal

with a good set of antlers, he is likely getting a beast that is at least five years old.

The mountain-sheep meat which made such an impression on me was provided by a young and unsophisticated ram killed in early September. A guide friend shot it, selecting the animal from a flock of forty head. He wasn't interested in the horns, but wished to prove the truth of his claim that mountain-sheep meat is the best wild-game flesh available on this continent. So far as I am concerned, he's won his point.

It is legal, by the way, to shoot sheep in September here in Alberta in certain areas if a special and more costly license is obtained. Moose, elk, and deer may also be bagged in the early fall in the more remote Canadian wilds where the special licenses apply, and this arrangement gives some of us a chance to savor the goodness of wild meat in its prime.

As stated before, no two hunters will agree on the rating that should be given the various types of game for its stomach appeal; so the personal preferences listed here are provided just to start an argument:

1. Bighorn sheep.
2. Pronghorn antelope.
3. Mule deer.
4. Virginia deer.
5. Woodland caribou.
6. Young black bear.
7. Elk.
8. Moose.
9. Buffalo.

The last mentioned, buffalo, can be bought at most butcher shops in western Canada during the winter months, the surplus stock at the Wainwright Buffalo Park being killed and sold yearly. A young cow buffalo provides grand meat that is fit to rank alongside the caribou, but in keeping the list "all male" the bison loses caste and slides to the bottom.

Now let us leave the recognized game animals and consider some of the oddities. To my notion, the muskrat undoubtedly tops this list, and I would uphold its edibility above any other non-game animals available here in the West. The meat is tender, juicy, and delicately flavored. The animal's habits will bear inspection when one is considering the flesh for human consumption, for it is a strict vegetarian, feeding largely on the tender roots of aquatic plants; it is also a daintily clean little animal, both about its body and about its house.

The flesh lends itself to almost any style of cooking: fries, stews,

stuffed roasts, and as a tasty filler for meat pies. But the meat has its season; the muskrat is only good for our tables during the fall and winter months. At other times the musk glands are active and spoil the flesh.

If the "rat" part of the name sounds objectionable, be reassured, for the muskrat is not closely related to the Norwegian or house-rat family, being linked more intimately with the voles, or meadow mice. The ladies will like that.

Muskrat may someday become a famous American dish. It is rumored that Eastern fur farmers are selling the pelted carcasses to the restaurants and the meat is glorified on the menus as "marsh rabbit."

Porcupine is the time-honored stand-by of the lost woodsman who needs a grubstake. Take a stick and rap the beast on the nose, and fifteen pounds of good meat will be yours for the skinning. The meat tastes very similar to young veal, except that it is richer in fats. In appearance it is coarser-grained than beef, though this does not mean it is tougher, as it is usually easier on the teeth and almost flabby.

To my mind, a person needs to be fairly hungry to enjoy a meal of porcupine flesh, the fatty nature of the meat spoiling it for me, but there are those who think the inverted pincushion almost a delicacy. This animal is at its best for food uses in the fall and early-winter months. Where porkies occasionally dine on the bark of spruce and jackpine the flesh is sometimes strong-flavored, but as a rule the creatures will seek out other tree barks in preference to evergreens.

Another well-known rodent, the woodchuck, makes a good meat dish if the animals can be taken just before they start the winter sleep. The insulation of fat next to the skin will sometimes be inches thick, and this must be removed when preparing the chuck for the table. If the meat is soaked overnight in a solution of salt and water, the flesh seems improved. Chop the meat in small pieces and cook it in mulligan fashion along with a variety of vegetables for best results. It is not unlike porcupine.

The chuck seems to be extending its western and northern range, and where they were almost unknown in the parklands of Alberta fifteen years ago they are now common. Their presence has been a temptation to the Indians, who are like the Irish in their willingness to try anything once. Apparently the Crees of this region have decided that woodchucks are a welcome addition to the food racks.

Indians introduced me to another culinary experience that not many will envy. Have you ever tasted gopher? Well, let me assure you that they are quite edible if—and it's a big "if"—you can just forget that the gopher has a ratty head and that white men have unanimously tabooed him for table use. Don't think that I am going to advocate a

gopher-eating campaign—though if gopher meat became popular there is many a Western farmer who would surely profit by sparing some of the numerous rodents from his fields. All the same, the gopher can honestly be classed as good meat if we forget prejudices.

I had paid a visit to a Cree camp at the time of my experience and was seated near a fire where the squaws were cooking. The smell from the pots was decidedly appetizing, though one could notice the peculiar odor that characterizes the Western Indian's saltless cooking. My curious nature got me into trouble when I asked what kind of meat they were preparing. A young squaw smiled wickedly as she dished me a spoonful and suggested that I do some tasting. It would have been bad manners to refuse; so, asking for a shake of salt, I sampled the stew. It was after I had voiced the opinion that the meat was good that they told me I was eating gopher!

Discussing the animal with them, I learned that the Indians eat only the common yellow gopher, more properly named the Richardson ground squirrel. This is the well-known flickertail of the Western plains, perhaps the commonest rodent, in point of numbers, on the North American continent today. The Indians told me that they did not care for either the striped gopher or the gray-tailed bush gopher—the Franklin ground squirrel.

This was an interesting distinction, for while the common gopher is almost entirely herbivorous in its eating habits, both the striped gopher and the Franklin ground squirrel are flesh eaters, keen on field mice, fledglings, and anything in the carrion line. The Indians of my acquaintance had not differentiated knowingly because of this; they just did not like the flesh of the latter varieties. And the gentleman of the family removed a studious pipe and added another reason: it was much easier to get a mess of the common gophers.

The late summer, when the little animals are fat with the good feeding they have stolen from the grainfields, is the time the Indians like them best for food.

Rip Van Winkle was hunting squirrels for his shrewish wife's larder when he ran afoul of his sleep draught; so it would appear that squirrels have long been accepted as good table meat in America. I have heard that the big grays of the East make fine eating, especially in the nut districts where the animals can feed almost exclusively on such fare. Probably the red squirrels of the same areas would provide similar meat, but the grays seem to be preferred because of their larger size.

In the West we have a small variety of the reds; and as the seeds of conifers make up the most of their diet, usually the flesh of the little scolders is too tangfully flavored to suit most tastes. A 12-hour soaking in salt water reduces the strength of the odd flavor, but even then the

meat is not enjoyable if taken as a straight dish. It is best used as a garnish for a vegetable stew.

Coyote I have tasted, but— Let us try to forget it. It has a dark brown flavor in the memory. The meat was tough and stringy and gave the throat a peculiar burning sensation as it was swallowed. I'd advise you to stick to shoe leather if you get really hungry and it comes to a choice between horsehide and howlers.

Indians tell me that in the north the fox is not bad eating, and I met a white man who had tried timber wolf when he was starving and claimed it tasted like fried breasts of hummingbirds, cooked in grade-A butter. Lynx is fairly good stuff, according to another trapper, but avoid the sinewy steaks of cougar. Almost every animal species will contribute a delegate to the more primitive redman's stewpot at one time or another; and while the Indians seem blessed with copper-coated interiors, they usually draw the line at any member of the true weasels—ermine, mink, fisher, wolverine, and skunk. But they like badger, praise the succulence of beaver, and even wax fairly enthusiastic about prairie dog. I leave the experimenting to you.

Feeding habits play an important part in conditioning the flesh of birds for human use. One has only to point to the well-known mallard duck as an example of this. Here on the Western plains grain-fed mallard is considered by many to be the choicest table bird of all the waterfowl; but across the mountains on the Pacific Coast, where the mallards can get dead salmon and fish eggs for food, they have been nicknamed "scavenger ducks" and are heartily despised.

Western hunters generally seem to accept only three ducks as good table birds: the mallard, the shoveler, and the teal. The scoters, commonly known as "horse ducks," are often discarded as worthless when shot, and so are the scups, or bluebills, and the goldeneyes. Strangely, the little bufflehead, bearing the appetizing local name of butterball, is often carried home for use when other lesser known ducks, equally good eating, are considered inferior.

At this point the coot should be mentioned. The inland bird is a vegetarian feeder only and should *receive* more consideration from sportsmen who are out to bring home the equivalent of bacon. Most shooters know them as mud hens; and when they spill shot on them and discover the identity of the game bagged, they contemptuously throw the birds into the reeds and leave them to rot. Yet the coot is not at all bad as a food bird; and as it is by far the most plentiful of the Western waterfowl in this day of limited duck populations, hunters should view it more favorably.

Too, Western sportsmen rarely bother with snipe when seeking table fare. I cannot understand this at all, for we have snipe in good numbers

around most of the marshes, and undoubtedly the Wilson's snipe is the choicest table bird on the bird-game list. Three to a man is the right dose, and they can be pot-roasted, stewed whole, or fricasseed.

My personal preferences have dictated the following scale of ratings for Western game birds, and you can again argue if you wish:

1. Wilson's snipe.
2. Ruffed grouse.
3. Blue-winged teal.
4. Sharp-tailed grouse (nicknamed prairie chicken along with the pinnated grouse).
5. Grain-fed mallard.
6. Geese.
7. Hungarian partridge.
8. Canvasback.
9. Shoveler, pintail, gadwall, baldpate, coot, lesser scup, goldeneye, white-winged scoter, and bufflehead are all about the same.

Sportsmen have been trying to save the waterfowl some grief by picking on that black marauder, the crow, and within the last few years some enterprising propagandists have advocated young crows as a wholesome addition to the sportsman's grubstake. Crow banquets have become popular, and the diners seem to have no objection to Blackie on a platter. A friend tells me the bird is not unlike prairie chicken, and it may be that we'll now do our darnedest to exterminate the black hordes in the fair name of pothunting.

While I have not yet sampled crow, an English neighbor once emulated the old nursery rhyme and baked a number of the crow's smaller cousin, the bronzed grackle, into a pie, and that pie was very good. The only trouble with blackbirds is that they are too small and take so much fussing to prepare.

Boiled owl is just about as awful as it sounds. Hawks are horrid. Gulls are oily. Loons have about the same resiliency as that black stuff used for radio panels. Meadow larks are delicious, and so are dowitchers—this last bird almost on a par with the snipe. Robins are passable; eagles are not. Spruce hens are generally considered no good, but they just need a little extra preparation. Avoid woodpeckers. (Many of the birds listed here are on the protected list. Specimens sampled were obtained legally.)

Once I had the privilege of tasting great blue heron, a farmer mistaking the bird for a sand-hill crane and laboring under the impression that the crane was a sort of elongated turkey and therefore first-rate eating. The heron ruined the family's best carving knife; and

when we did get our portions, we found the flesh oily and fish-tainted. To save my stomach, I told the lady of the house that herons frequently eat snakes, and had the satisfaction of seeing the carcass promptly whisked off the table and thrown out. We were then fed ham, but it did not seem necessary to mention the fact that pigs also eat snakes.

On Night Hunting

One of the regrettable necessities of wildfowl conservation has been the ban on night hunting. Many a time I have listened to Cape Codders describe the wondrous sport of duck shooting under a full moon. I have myself several times set out a few blocks on fine nights on the Cape, just to sit in the blind to hear and watch the birds splash in. Even without a gun in your hands it's a marvelous sensation; you seem to feel the approach of the birds before you hear them, and you hear the winnow and rustle of their wings before you see their moon-enlarged forms dropping into the set. Well, let us shed a tear for the things that are no more and turn to what there is.

Night hunting is exciting sport, win, lose, or draw. But you have to be rugged to take it! Not all adventures equal the Sniper's in Colonel Sheldon's hilarious story, but you never can tell what will happen—anything can, and usually does!

IN SEARCH OF EXCITEMENT

by H. P. Sheldon

THE thing that for a time threatened to disturb a friendship of years' duration began one October afternoon with an incident that occurred on one of the thousands of this nation's Washington Streets. For two weeks previously the Judge had not been his usual frank, genial self. The Sniper had detected signs of preoccupation, of worry, and of an absorption in problems apparently too deep or delicate for sharing with his old friend.

That very morning, upon the Sniper's suggestion that the two of them journey up the North Branch of the Winooski to gun the Sawdust Cover for grouse and woodcock, the older gunner had been oddly hesitant. He wouldn't—or, more likely, couldn't—look his friend squarely in the face. He shuffled his feet and frowned portentously, and spoke of voluminous records to be read and considered and of meeting someone who would be arriving on the afternoon train.

The Sniper was suspicious.

"What's come over you?" he inquired. "If you weren't so fat and lazy I'd suspect you'd found a bee tree, and if you weren't so old and homely I'd think it was a female. Come on, now! What is it?"

The Judge fidgeted and finally gave hoarse reply.

"Work," he croaked desperately.

Thus denied, his friend gave up all thoughts of shooting and spent a dull day at his own office separating the accumulated correspondence of the bird-shooting season into two piles. Into one he sorted inquiries already so ancient that further delay would matter little, while into the other went inquiries so recently dated that they could well await further attention for at least another week or two.

Then, at four o'clock in the golden light of a prime October afternoon, on his way to the post office he encountered the Judge, with the friend who came by train. He met them face to face on Washington Street. The "friend" was a huge dog, tawny gray as to coat, with some of the family insignia of the Airedale and a bit that the astonished Sniper identified as borzoi.

"So that's it, is it!" the Sniper exclaimed bitterly. "Coon huntin'! I knew darned well there was something furtive and unnatural about this! Well, I am shocked! I am, indeed! A man of your standing planning to go racing and yelling through the midnight silences, swinging lanterns and pulling porcupine quills and getting plastered by skunks! Dear me! I supposed you were for woodcock and trout!"

The Judge flinched visibly under these harsh accusations.

Thereafter for some weeks the two friends conducted their affairs under truce. No mention was made of Bozo, the coon dog, but the Sniper knew from the ghostly bellowings in the hills, where the cornfields were, no less than from the unwonted rheumatic twinges of which the other complained, that the Judge, although honorably pursuing legitimate game by day, was off nightly with the big dog in the clandestine chase of coon. Moreover, there was about him at times a faint effluvium, the vaguest suggestion of a fragrance not of raccoons or roses.

The Judge finally collapsed.

"Listen," said he desperately one day while the two of them had lunch in the Grapevine Cover. His old 12-gauge, with figured Damascus barrels and dark wood gleaming dully, lay at his feet. "Listen, and don't be so darned intolerant. I've got the grandest coon dog in the county—I guess perhaps in the world! In a week's time we've bagged twenty-one coons!"

"How many porcupines and skunks?" inquired his companion coldly.

"Oh, not very many," said the other hastily. "The quills come out easy; and as for skunks, if you wear overalls all you have to do is hang 'em over a bush for a few days. It's practically nothing. And believe me, coon hunting is exciting. Grouse shooting," he considered, "has gone a little stale for me—I can't seem to get the old-time thrill from it."

"How many days for the overalls?" asked the Sniper rigidly.

"Three—or four, at the very most—if there's a good frost every night," declared the other eagerly.

"You're fooling yourself," the Sniper assured him. "But your best friend will tell you! There you are in gown and wig and, like enough, a flannel shirt and corduroys underneath, with the other dignified justices. The case is called: 'The State vs. Pecontic Power Company.' And there you are, I say, stinkin' of wild onions!"

"But 'Once a friend, always a friend' is my motto. I'll try it once, dull though it will be."

"You're wrong! It's exciting," the other promised. "You'll see. I'll pick you up at eight-thirty. Got any overalls?"

"Yes," his friend replied, "but I'm not going to charge in on any skunks that your Hound of the Baskervilles picks a quarrel with. That coon dog! Phooey!"

The Sniper found more cause for amazement when his friend pulled up in the driveway at the hour appointed. On the scuffed rear cushion of the ancient car sat Bozo, enveloped in an engaging atmosphere of dignity, eagerness, friendliness, and skunk that almost sent the Dark Haired Lady into a mild hysteria. She refrained, however, when she noted the solemn, pathetic expression in the pleading eyes of both the Judge and his big dog.

"He's a beauty! What a lovely head!" she exclaimed—and made another friend for life.

"And what's all this junk?" exclaimed the Sniper, surveying the contents of the car.

There were an automobile battery, presumably to be wired to a bulb and reflector which were tucked in beside it, and an old shotgun which he had never seen before and which obviously had long ago abandoned the last faint pretense to youth, together with its embellishments of varnish and bluing. There were, too, a bundle of Roman candles, gay in blue, white, and red paper coverings—which stimulated curiosity—a jug of water, and a lunch basket.

"Good-by, darlin'," he addressed the lady. "If you ever see me again, I'll be a changed man—I won't smell the same, anyway. Friendship! Ha! Excitement! Bah! I'm the bird who'll have to carry that 14-pound battery all over the Horn of the Moon country. That's why I was invited!"

The course led along the dirt road that followed the alder-fringed waters of the North Branch. A softly luminous moon hung low in the sky, encircled by a faint band of pale light which presaged rain even as did the doleful, gusty hootings of the great owls calling their melancholy comments on the decayed state of worldly affairs. Each solemn "hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo-who!" was followed by several seconds of silence, as if the recipient of these grave remarks required due time to digest their solemn import and to determine upon an appropriately grave reply. Rabbits bobbed their white scuts across the headlight beams. Occasionally the two friends perceived the vague color and motion of wings against the brilliance, but whether of owl or woodcock they rarely could determine.

At last they arrived at the spot where a cornfield set back into an angle of the creek. Elms draped with festoons of wild grape and clematis bent gracefully above the dark amber waters.

Bozo began rocking uneasily to and fro on his enormous front pads, and his yellow eyes gleamed with restrained eagerness.

The Judge stopped the car and opened the door.

"Go find 'em!" he said simply.

The big dog vanished instantly and silently into the luminous darkness.

"What do we do now?" asked the Sniper.

"Nothing. If he gets a coon treed, he'll holler. If he doesn't strike a trail, he'll come back. Also, if he finds a porcupine or skunk—God help us! But he won't bay for anything but coon, and then only when he's treed."

"Why don't you break him of skunk and porcupine?" his friend asked.

"Can't," was the reply. "Did you ever know a bird dog—even a field-trial champion—that wouldn't go full throttle on a rabbit if he thought he weren't looking? Coon dogs are no different."

The Judge filled his pipe and lighted it, his rugged, kindly, intelligent face showing briefly in the flare of the match.

The Sniper sought the solution of another mystery. "What are the fireworks for?" he wanted to know.

"To move 'em," explained the other. "Coons will hide in a tree so you can't shine 'em with a spotlight, but a Roman candle will stir 'em up so you can see 'em."

"What a fine, dignified sport!" observed the Sniper. But he listened nevertheless for some indication coming through the wall of darkness that the big dog had treed game.

None came, and after a while Bozo trotted across the ridged field, climbed to the rear seat, and licked his chops impatiently.

The Judge started the car. "We'll try it farther along," he remarked.

Twice more the same procedure was repeated, and still Bozo had not broken his sphinxlike silence. After each dark adventure he returned and with the same mute finality climbed to his perch, spun a red tongue around his broad chops, and waited to be transported to new fields of opportunity.

Finally they arrived at the edge of the Horn o' the Moon, that mountainous, almost mythical wilderness seldom penetrated by any but the most adventurous deer hunters—and by them for only brief periods each season. Here again Bozo vanished on silent pads. The Judge had an air of tension about him.

"Excitement?" the Sniper complained querulously. "Here it is darned near to midnight, and not a thing yet! Not even a skunk! I'd be glad even of a skunk if he didn't—"

The Judge stopped the objection with an upraised hand.

"Listen!" he commanded. "Hear that? Bozo's got him! Grab that battery! Come on!"

Across the moonlit silences rolled a brave, majestic organ note—a glorious, exultant sound. To save his soul the Sniper could not have checked the prickle of his skin or the cool and airy feeling at the base of his skull. The snap of a hostile rifle bullet could engender that same light, strange, transient feeling of adventure. Responding to it, he went over the side of the car with a bundle of Roman candles in one hand and the heavy battery in the other, striving to follow a pudgy will-o'-the-wisp who carried only a flashlight and a shotgun and displayed a tremendous agility in fleeing over frosty meadows and vaulting stump fences.

Hampered and confounded by the heavy battery, the Sniper became aware that the distance between himself and the coon hunter—who now seemed to be running free on breast-high scent—was increasing. Gradually the tiny splashes of radiance from the other's flashlight weakened and presently disappeared completely. In the ensuing gloom the Sniper ran full tilt into a wire fence and was thrown heavily for a loss of a yard or two. Thoroughly roused now, he rose to his feet, heaved his 14-pound incubus over the fence in a way to test its maker's most optimistic claims for its durability, and clambered over after it. He was filled with an almost intolerable bitterness.

"Wish the whole Supreme Court could see him!" he muttered. "Coon huntin'! Hell! He ought to be impeached!"

Above the sounds of his own panting, painful progress he heard the voice of Bozo, and in spite of his impotent rage he thrilled to that compelling resonance. There were other sounds as well from the direction whence the flashlight had last been sighted—wild, shrill, and eerie plaints which he finally identified as being the view halloo of his stately friend, the Judge.

"Gone completely wild!" he thought as he trotted down a frosty declivity that seemed somehow familiar.

An instant later he knew why when he stepped abruptly off a grassy edge into four feet of icy water.

"Belden's Brook, and the very hole where I took that three-pounder in May!" he gasped as he hauled the battery out on the opposite shore and resumed the pursuit, with his wet breeches slapping about his thighs.

Another thrill awaited him before he was to reach the spot where by now the coon dog and the Judge had joined voices in the most unearthly duet ever listened to by the affrighted denizens of the Horn o' the Moon. It came when, encountering a seven-rail fence, he painfully hoisted the battery to the top rail and as painfully climbed up after it. Swinging his long legs across, he seized the hateful burden and leaped.

He landed upon something warm, slippery, and vigorous that leaped

at the contact and let out a tremendous "Baw!" It scared the Sniper into a cold shudder and kept him there until he realized that he had probably landed full upon a specimen of someone's "young cattle" which at this season of the year roamed the hills like deer.

Guided now and greatly encouraged by the nearer yelpings and bayings of the Mister Associate Justice and his dog, he staggered forward a few yards to where a strip of mingled hardwood and evergreen came down a hillside. A little distance within the nearer edge, a great hemlock raised its shaggy column to the darkness overhead. The feeble stabs of light from the Judge's torch did nothing to relieve the quiet, brooding mystery of the upper branches.

Bozo, gaunt and strange in the dim reflection, sat on his haunches to one side. His great mouth was open, his golden eyes ablaze, and he sang his serenade well and truly.

"Where the devil have you been?" inquired the Judge impatiently.

"Don't tempt me to speak!" the Sniper grated. "Git your coon! Go ahead an' git him! And then, when you've got him, I'll tell you something about yourself and about where I've been with your confounded battery!"

"No sense in gettin' excited," the other reproved him. "Get it connected up and turn the spot up into that tree! Looks like a den tree. Bozo's about crazy—probably half a dozen of 'em up there. Hurry it up! Never saw you so awkward! Not tired, are you?"

"No, sir! Not a bit, sir! It really wasn't any trouble, sir! Swimmin' the creek yonder with that cute little dingus was fun—and falling on top of one of Proctor's yearlings. It was awfully amusing! Ready now, sir!"

"Thought I heard something blat," said the Judge. "I thought it was you, however. All right! Snap it on!"

A narrow beam of intense white brilliance shot upward into the gloom of the hemlock's branches and began slowly searching every lofty green cavern.

"Not a shine," the Judge remarked finally. "Move it around to the other side and try it there."

This maneuver brought no better success.

"Set the spot down and try a candle up in there," directed the pudgy sportsman. "The dog knows. He's got 'em. The candle will move 'em."

The Sniper obediently picked up a candle, found a match, and stuck the damp fuse into the flame. It responded with a smoky hiss, a sudden shower of golden sparks, and a whizzing ball of red fire which missed the Judge's intent upturned face by inches and brought an instant expostulatory roar. Then the Sniper began sending the hissing wads of flame methodically up among the branches.

"Just like an old-time political caucus," he observed. "Spotlights, torches, fireworks, and a dumb silver-tongued orator. Hold on! There's something moving up there! See that limb shake?"

"That'll be one of 'em! Douse the candle and put the spot on that limb. That's the way—right next to the trunk!"

The glare picked up two blood-red pinpoint spots about thirty feet up, sparks of angry ruby against the solid green of the hemlock fronds. A low, menacing mutter of sound came to their ears, whereat Bozo's harmony rose to a new and tragic note.

The Judge looked at the Sniper.

"That's no coon," said he solemnly.

"Darned right it ain't!" was the reply. "It's a bear, and an almighty big, mad one, too! I can see him now! And here we are with a mess of Roman candles and a handful of bird-shot loads! Well, if he takes a notion to come down and join us in our jolly rambles, I'm going to let him carry the battery!"

"Listen!" exclaimed his friend, fumbling among his pockets. "I've got a round ball cartridge somewhere—and here it is!" He held out a frayed pink case with a dull gleam of rounded lead showing through the top wad.

"Get it into the gun then," the Sniper directed. "And," he added grimly, "don't you miss him! Hanging out your overalls won't help us any if that feller gets amongst us. Guess the shoulder is the safest place with one of those slugs. Wait, and I'll set the spot on him."

He did so and came back to the Judge, who was preparing for the shot. Bozo's voice, now that the game was sighted, rose to new and fearful ecstasies.

The Judge raised the gun and brought the front sight against the dark, menacing mass in the tree. There was a brief spurt of bluish flame and the whang of the gun. The bear roared and lurched, and pitched downward out of the single beam of the spotlight into the darkness. The startled hunters heard the crash of branches followed by a heavy thump and a roar of rage, mingled with the courageous growl of the dog. A ferocious uproar burst up and lasted for a space of seconds. The spotlight meanwhile squirted its useless beam among the branches, leaving the actual battlefield in a blackness made only blacker by the contrast.

Then there was a yelp of pain from the dog and something thudded against the Judge's sturdy legs. Under the shock he reeled, and seemed to hover in mid-air for an instant before he collapsed into a thicket. His gun flew from his hand, and the barrels landed on the Sniper's skull with a crack plainly audible above the vicious sounds of flight and combat. That gentleman promptly recovered his wits and snatched up

the weapon, instinctively dropping a fresh load into the right barrel. And barely in time, for a vague, dark thing shot toward him, running full against the gun's lowered muzzle.

At the impact he pulled both triggers. He had a feeling as if he had been brushed by a comet's tail or some equally irresistible cosmic force; his feet left the ground, and then he was tangled up with the Judge in a hardhack thicket in a breathless, nightmarish sort of struggle. When he tried to get up the Judge tripped him, and when the Judge struggled to rise they both went down together. Meanwhile the sound of deadly combat continued to make the place hideous. The spotlight steadfastly played its pure and peaceful beam into the hemlock.

Momentarily expecting to have a raging bear upon him, the Sniper with a final frantic effort tore himself free of his trammels and rose to his feet. He groped for the gun, found it, and reloaded hastily, wishing fleetingly for something more potent than a bird load in this crisis. Then he found the reflector and turned the beam of light upon the spot whence came the bitter, muffled, snarling sounds. To his surprise, it disclosed the bear, dead as a doornail, with Bozo, gashed and bloody, valiantly endeavoring to shake the pelt off his recent adversary.

Reassured, the lean sportsman next turned his attention to the Judge, who still lay where he had fallen. He, too, had ceased to struggle, but stifled moans came from his compressed lips. A chill fear smote the Sniper.

"Are you hurt, Judge? Are you hurt?" he asked. It seemed an age before he could get the light where he needed it and before he heard the voice of his old friend, curiously hushed and strange.

"I believe I am, boy. It's my back. I can't get up or move my legs. They feel sort of cold and numb. I guess, old friend, I've gone coon hunting once too many times."

"My God!" implored the Sniper. "Don't say that! Let me look!"

He well knew the awful havoc wrought by shell splinter and bullet, but on the stricken fields of France he had never stooped to a wounded man with the dread that now assailed him as he bent above the Judge and began a careful examination to which the older man submitted quietly and with calm courage.

The Sniper completed the examination.

"Steady now!" he admonished as his competent hands sought for a purchase. "I'll try not to hurt!"

There was a swift twist and a tug, and the victim felt the dreadful constriction relax. Then, to his amazement, his friend let out a whoop that was anything but lugubrious, and rolled over in an unseemly spasm of shouting mirth.

"That's no way to behave when you're in the presence of death!"

protested the Judge in shocked, vigorous indignation. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing's the matter with me—nor with you, either! Get up if you want to—your back ain't broken! You just had a hardhack sapling twisted through your belt. And no wonder you felt cold—you haven't any more pants on you than that cherubim in the window of the Congregational Church! You're bare as a bullfrog! That bear must have slapped 'em off in one swipel! There ain't a scratch on you, but from the waist down you look like an orang-outang in a zoo."

"I suppose that's what I ought to expect from going coon hunting with a fool," snapped the Judge as he rose slowly to his feet.

Sometime later, in the small hours of morning, when the Judge was once again decently clad and the big bear had been hung safely in the garage in readiness to receive the admiring inspection of the village inhabitants in the morning, the Sniper sat with his friend over a cup of hot coffee in the latter's library. His left hand rested on Bozo's tawny head, and the big dog worshiped him with his yellow eyes.

"It's more fun than I ever thought," said he, addressing the Judge. "I apologize for everything I said about coon hunting. You said it was exciting, and, by criminy, you proved it!"

His fingers stroked the wide, high arch of Bozo's skull.

"You've got a grand dog, Judge."

"Do you want him?" asked his friend.

"What?"

"I said, do you want him? Are you deaf? He seems to have taken up with you—and I doubt if I go in much for coon hunting hereafter. I want to live out my days in peace and quiet with woodcock and trout. Take him, boy, he's your dog. As for me, I feel that I'm lucky to get out of this dangerous business."

GRANDPA MAKES TRACKS

by Ben East

THERE are nights that are made for coon hunting. Nights when Old Man Blackcheeks just naturally knows it's his time to prow. He comes down from his den tree as soon as the wet November dusk begins to thicken on the hills. He roams hour after hour along the creek bottoms and through the cornfields, reluctant to go home. He feeds and loiters and enjoys himself until the first pale band of gray begins to brighten along the eastern skyline. It's his kind of night, and he makes the most of it.

The hounds understand about such nights too. They become restless before dark, tugging at their chains, whining in their throats at the smells that come on the wet, raw wind. The Boss does the milking and the rest of the after-supper chores, and they rattle the chains and wait. When he finally walks out to them, with the lantern and the gun, they throw up their heads and their deep baying rolls across the fields, and every wild note says this cold November night was made for the business in mind. They know, the hounds do!

I knew, too, as I sat there at my desk and studied the dull, thick sky through the window. It was four o'clock and already a hint of dusk was gathering outside. There would be fog on the hills at dark, or maybe a fine, misty rain. Trees and brush would drip with it, and the crying of the dogs would ring loud and hollow through the night.

I wasn't surprised when the phone rang or when the operator reported Caledonia calling. Caledonia dovetailed nicely into my thoughts at the moment. Three of the best coon hunters I know live there. One of 'em is Frank. The other two are Red and Brownie.

Frank is maybe in his middle forties, and he's been hunting coon something like thirty-nine years. He hunts seven nights a week as long as the season is open, barring snow and other acts of providence. He knows coons, and he likewise knows dogs. If there are two better hounds in the Thornapple River country than Red and Brownie, I haven't followed 'em. Red is old and wise with the things he has learned

fall after fall, cautious and steady, as sure on a track as death. Brownie, the bitch, is young and impatient and smart, full of the vim that a coon hound ought to have in her early years.

Before I heard Frank's voice, I knew what a call from Caledonia meant on that kind of afternoon. He went to the point as soon as he heard me on the wire. "Can you come out tonight?" he asked, and before I could answer he went on. "Be here by seven, or a little after. We want to get an early start."

"Listen," I cut in on him, "you don't have to coax me."

"O.K." he retorted. And then he broke the real news. "Remember Grandpa?" he asked.

Did I remember Grandpa? Do you remember your first black eye and the kid who gave it to you? Or the first trout you caught, or the first deer you shot? Yeah, I remembered Grandpa, all right.

We had struck his track along the edge of a huckleberry swamp beyond the Thornapple, one night early in the season. We took one look at his footprints in the wet mud of a cornfield and named him then and there. Maybe he wasn't the granddaddy of all the other coons in that section, but he could have been. He was big enough and old enough. And, as things turned out, smart enough.

It was near midnight when the dogs opened on him. The gray dawn was less than an hour away when they barked up, in voices that had a touch of weariness, on one of the biggest den trees left thereabouts. Meanwhile we had been all over the township. We'd floundered through marshes, waded a couple of creeks, slogged through mud halfway to our knees. We had explored drain tiles and grape tangles, woods and brushy pastures, rail fences and a lot of other places that a wise old coon keeps in his address book. There wasn't a chance that I'd forget Grandpa. I reassured Frank on that point.

"Well, we're going to get him tonight or bust," he informed me. "We hit him two nights ago, the first time in two weeks, and we know what to do now. He holed up for the cold spell, and we figured maybe he wouldn't come down again. But this warm weather was too much for him. He don't travel far. Comes down right after dark, feeds for an hour or so, and goes back up again. That's why we got to get an early start. Roy and I kind of think we've got Grandpa figured out this time. If we strike him tonight, he's goin' to be our coon!"

"I'll be there by seven," I promised. "If I break a leg between then and now, I'll come in a wheel chair!"

After I hung up I had a happy hunch. This was the night to take Aurey along. All fall Aurey had wanted to go coon hunting. Nothing I could say discouraged him. It was one sport he had never tried, and he was burning with the fever. Well, this was as good a time as any.

I phoned him, and my conscience pricked me gently when I heard the enthusiasm in his voice. "Sure, I'll be ready," he promised. "We'll have supper early. I can start any time after dark. Just honk in front of the house!"

As darkness came down the night turned wild. The wind freshened, carrying a fine, stinging rain. On the way out to Caledonia dead leaves blew across the pavement in front of us in brown flurries.

We drove into Frank's yard. He came down the back steps to meet us, hip boots flapping around his legs. "We'll start from Roy's house," he explained.

In Roy's yard the four of us huddled in the lee of a shed, half sheltered from the weather, while Frank and Roy mapped the night's campaign.

"We'll hunt into the wind as much as we can," Frank said. He studied his lantern flame, dancing and guttering in the wind. "You couldn't hear a hound a half mile away right now if he was down-wind from you," he commented.

He opened the dog box, and the hounds came bounding out. We climbed the barnyard gate and swung off across the fields, our hats turned down against the sharp pelting of the cold rain. We crossed Roy's pasture, came into a boggy marsh, wallowed through a wide ditch, and clambered over a fence into a muddy cornfield. Still the dogs, ranging by themselves, made no report.

Beyond the cornfield we came down into a tongue of swamp timber, and Frank and Roy halted beside a towering old elm, holding their lanterns up to scan the rough bark. Suddenly I recognized the tree. It was Grandpa's den, where we had put him up three weeks before.

"This is the end of the line," Frank announced. "Somebody's got to get off here and wait."

"I'll stay," Roy volunteered.

Aurey was looking from one to another, torn by indecision. If this was where the climax would take place, if this was where the coon was due to face the hunters, then Aurey wanted to stay with Roy and see the finish. But that meant missing the chase, and, after all, it was the chase he had come along for.

Frank settled his problem for him. "You better come with us," he suggested. "Won't nothing happen here. Roy'll just stand there, with his back up against the den tree and his lantern burning, and when Grandpa sees him he'll turn off and go up on some other tree where the dogs will have a chance at him.

"But listen," he added earnestly to Roy. "You keep your eyes peeled. He's a smart old coon. I've seen 'em go up one side of a tree when a man was standing on the other side, if the dogs was pushing 'em hard enough."

Roy nodded. "I'll stay awake," he agreed. "If that coon tries to go up here tonight, he'll get his hash settled. But you fellows push him along. It won't be exactly hot sittin' under this elm tree for the next hour or two just waitin' around."

"We'll push him if the dogs can find him," Frank promised.

We crossed another cornfield, slogging through the heavy mud. When we came to the fence, Aurey made his first discouraged observation. "You know," he remarked, "it wouldn't surprise me if Grandpa was enjoying his own fireside tonight. And I don't know as I'd blame him. It ain't such a bad idea."

"Wait and see," Frank suggested.

He got no farther. Far ahead of us a hound bayed uncertainly and the single note rode the wind in a broken thread of sound.

"That's Red," Frank said quietly. "He never talks till he knows!"

We tumbled over the fence and turned into the wind, hurrying through the wet underbrush. Behind me I heard Aurey trip over a log and thud into the leaves, grunting and mumbling under his breath, and I chuckled as I ran. Then the hound spoke again, in long rolling syllables, and a second dog voice joined in. Brownie had found the track.

"They're warming him!" Frank called back over his shoulder. After a minute he stopped to listen. "They're goin' into the swamp," he said. "That'll be a tough place to get to if they tree down there."

We scrambled on, and far out in the swamp Red sounded the tree signal and the bitch joined in.

"There they go," Frank grunted. "I'm not much surprised. I sort of guessed that old coon wouldn't make a long run tonight. It's late in the season, and he's gettin' lazy. Well, he picked a tough place, but it's going to cost him his pelt."

Frank hadn't made any mistake when he predicted hard going in the swamp. The mud and water was knee-deep when we stepped off dry land. Tag alders and button brush were so thick that we had to worm under them, almost on our hands and knees. After the first hundred feet the swamp got drier, but the brush stayed as tangled as the bottom of a splint basket.

We stopped on a little dry knoll to get our breath and listen to the dogs.

"Something's wrong," Frank said quickly.

Red's throaty baying had changed to a resentful barking, like the racket of a farm dog disturbed in the night, and Brownie was voicing an occasional listless outcry with long silences between.

Frank dived into the brush again. "Skunk?" I yelled at him.

"Naw," he answered, "but not much better."

We came into a little arena in the tag alders, and there sat the two hounds, ranged on either side of a low hummock, staring indifferently aloft and fussing in a halfhearted fashion. Frank lifted his lantern above his head, and I reinforced him with my flashlight. In the alder tops a dozen feet from the ground a young possum was perched comfortably, peering steadily down at the dogs.

He wasn't a great deal bigger than a full-grown rat, and he wasn't much more afraid of the hounds than we were. He clung to his perch, watching the excitement on the ground with an indifference that bordered on sleep. Every now and then Brownie or Red blasted forth a few gruff notes, more in disgust than interest.

"This couldn't have happened around here twenty years ago," Frank remarked.

He was right, too. The opossum was almost unknown in southern Michigan up to about 1925. He invaded the southwest corner of the state then, migrating in from Indiana, and he has increased and extended his range steadily ever since, despite the handicap of hard winters and deep snow.

"Sometimes," Frank added, "I wish for the good old days."

He walked into the tag-alders clump, grabbed the bush that promised to do the most good, and gave it a vigorous shake. Things looked bad for the possum for a second or two. He lost his hold and came tumbling down through the branches almost on top of the dogs.

They dived for him as he hit the ground, but somehow they missed the target. Maybe he was too small for 'em. I saw something slip around the hummock like a gray ghost, and then there was a streak through the brush with the two dogs in wild pursuit, shaking the swamp with their outcry. But the chase didn't last long.

In a shallow den in the black muck of a little dry island the hounds ran their quarry to earth. Frank cut short their digging and yammering. He dragged them back and snapped on their leashes.

"We'll get out of here!" he said emphatically. "That possum certainly upset our coon hunt. If Grandpa was down anywhere within hearing, he's long gone by this time."

Aurey was down on his hands and knees at one door of the den, looking it over with his flashlight. "Come here a minute," he called eagerly.

I walked over to him.

"What's that?" he asked.

The beam of his light showed a wad of gray fur underground, just beyond reach of the dogs.

"You got something, Aurey," I told him.

I slid an arm into the burrow and got a good grip on a long hairless

tail. The possum came out hissing mildly, not greatly upset, and somehow the idea of throwing him to the dogs didn't appeal to me. I shoved him into the roomy side pocket of my hunting coat and pinned the flap shut.

"That," I announced, "is going to be somebody's pet possum."

Frank looked at me as if he thought I wasn't quite normal. Just then we saw a lantern winking through the swamp. It was Roy. He came up, panting, muddy, and puzzled.

"What's going on?" he wanted to know. "First I hear the dogs, and then they're barking tree. Then I don't hear 'em, and then they're running again. What you got, anyway?"

Frank jerked a thumb at me. "He's got it—in his pocket," he explained. "He's collectin' for a zoo. I hope it chews his arm off on the way home!"

We worked our way out of the swamp, and Frank and Roy held a council of war.

"We might as well go home," Frank said glumly. "It's close to midnight. That coon went back up two hours ago, if he came down at all tonight."

"Every coon in the county is up by this time, with all that hound music floatin' around on the wind," Roy agreed.

We turned toward the edge of the woods, homeward bound, and Aurey said just two words. "Aw, gosh," he muttered. But from his tone I knew he had joined the ranks of the Confirmed Order of Coon-Huntin' Halfwits and was coming through his initiation with flying colors.

Frank kept the dogs on leash until we were across the first cornfield. As far as I was concerned, there was no call to let them go at all. I wasn't exactly enjoying the walk home. I got along pretty well on the straight stretches where I could pin the possum down in the bottom of my pocket with one arm. But every time I climbed a fence he broke loose and went clawing and scrambling, still inside the pocket, up to the general neighborhood of my neck. Each time I worked him down where he belonged we would come to another fence and there'd be another sparring match.

I was contemplating unpinning the pocket flap, dumping him out, and praying that the dogs wouldn't fall over him when, a long way ahead of us, a hound yelp rang out, sharp and positive. The dog yelped again and rolled into a long, wailing outcry.

"Brownie," Frank announced, "opening cold."

"Damnation!" Roy yelled. "If that's Grandpa, it's too late to beat him back to the den and head him off."

The four of us stood there, looking helpless and foolish, while the dog untangled the track. She straightened it out finally and hammered into full cry, and we hurried that way. When we came up with her, she was working along a brushy ditch, talking coon in steady syllables, sure but painfully slow.

We turned our lights on the wet ground, and Roy discovered the track. The coon's footprints in the mud were half as big as the dog's. "It's Grandpa," Roy said shortly, "but he's home by now. He made them tracks about the time you struck the possum back there in the swamp."

Frank was fidgeting. "I wish Red would come up," he said. "He's got a lot more experience behind him than Brownie has."

The bitch nosed along by herself, and every time she bayed she told us the track was as stale and scentless as a cold flapjack. She stayed with it until it led into a patch of timber and lost itself in the dead leaves. She was casting in big circles, barking hopefully now and then.

Suddenly Red opened on the ditchbank behind us, and I felt my heart jump at his first thundering horn notes. He came along the ditch, moving fast and sure where Brownie had felt her way. He went past us into the woods, and his baying faltered for the first time. It was hard going on the leaves.

Once the hound spoke in gruff syllables, the tree signal, but even as we swung around to listen he fell silent, realizing his own mistake. Frank shook his head. "Old Red's wrong there," he said. "That coon never was foolish enough to go up in a place like that when he didn't have to."

The silence dragged on, and we stood there on the ditchbank, waiting and shivering. The wind bit deeper and the cold rain dripped off my hatbrim and ran down my neck. The possum clawed around in my pocket, and for a counterfeit nickel I'd have signed a pledge never to hunt coon again as long as I lived. I looked around at Aurey, and he appeared about as comfortable and happy as a young rooster on a fence in a thundershower.

Then Red's voice rang from the woods again, the wild clamor of an old hound who has found a homing trail and knows it, and we popped our heads out of our collars to hear him better. He was going hell-for-leather down the fence at the side of the woods, talking every jump. Brownie loped past us in the wet field, hurrying to give him a hand.

Red's tune changed in a split second to the throaty baying that means tree, and this time he was exultant and sure. Aurey had never hunted coon before that night, but he knew by now what Red was saying, and deep down in him something answered the old dog's wild urging.

We started in close formation, with Frank and his lantern in the lead, Roy and Aurey neck and neck on his heels. I was trailing a few yards, and the possum didn't do anything to help me catch up. The mud in the field was deep and soft, and we sounded like a moose herd leaving a wallow in a hurry.

We were almost at the fence when Aurey went into overdrive and passed Frank in three jumps. He couldn't see any too well with the lantern behind him, but that didn't bother him any. He went through the fence like a greased eel. In the same instant there was an odd ripping sound, and the lantern light showed a three-cornered patch of Aurey's pants streaming out behind him.

He let out a fervent "Damn!" but he didn't stop. He kept the lead, and he was first at the tree where Red and Brownie were making the night ring with their fierce music. The white pencil of his flashlight was running in and out among the high branches when Roy and Frank came up. They laid their lights on the tree with his, and all three searched together.

It was a big oak, and dead leaves hung in a thick, wet screen. The forks and crannies were shadow-filled, and there were a dozen places where a coon could hide and never face the lights at all.

"I'm afraid it's no go," Frank said after a minute. "We can't climb that tree, and we'll never find him from the ground."

"Then we'll be here till Christmas," Aurey announced. "The dogs put him up, and we'll never leave till— Hey!" He broke off with a yell that would have strained the throat of a college cheerleader. "I got him! Come here!"

In a fork forty feet above our heads Aurey's light was steady on a gray ball of fur. We could see a black-ringed tail hanging down, but the dark shape showed no eyes. Grandpa was too old and canny for that.

"Is that him?" Aurey asked hopefully.

"That," Frank agreed soberly, "is certainly him!"

He backed off a few steps to get a better angle with the rifle, and Roy laid the beam of his light along the barrel. Frank has done a lot of that kind of shooting in his day. We heard the "chuk" of the bullet striking home, and there was a brief flurry in the tree crotch, a gray bulk hurtling down. The dogs nailed him as he hit the ground, but Frank had finished the job for them. The old coon was stone-dead when he left the top of the oak.

The hounds had their minute of mauling anyway, and Aurey danced around them like a Sioux medicine man. Frank finally took the coon away from them, and then, for the first time, Aurey reached a hand back to the seat of his pants. "Gosh," he admitted, "that barbwire sure

took a chunk out of me! But that's all right. Mom will have that all patched up by tomorrow night."

Frank winked at me. "What's going on tomorrow night?" he asked.

"Going on?" Aurey snorted. "My gosh, some guys are dumb! We're going coon huntin' again, of course!"

On Crow and Woodchuck Shooting

These two critters fit nicely into the shooter's scheme of things, for they afford good off-season sport and practice. Furthermore, the crow is unquestionably one of the worst predators we have, and each one killed is a service to more desirable species. The rifleman will find the chuck a splendid target for his superaccurate high-powered rifle, and most farmers in regions that are not too densely populated will be glad to get rid of him, for he is a nuisance—not only does he raid vegetable gardens with thorough effect, but he digs holes in hayfields that are a menace to work horses and farm machinery.

Both the crow and the woodchuck are worthy objects of pursuit, being difficult to bag much of the time. Pennsylvania has put the chuck on the game list, with an appropriate midsummer season that protects the young when they are dependent on the mother. Some states have paid (and still do, I believe) a small bounty on crows, and in the Middle West crow shoots are often highly organized affairs. The best sport with the black devils, however, is to be found in such tactics as described by Pete Barrett, where the similarity to duck shooting is sometimes fairly pronounced. Both crows and woodchucks are excellent for training beginners in the use of firearms.

CALLING ALL CROWS

by Pete Barrett

THE car came to a quiet stop under the sheltering branches of a large maple. We slid off the front seat carefully, opened the rear doors to get guns and shells, then latched the doors quietly and eased ourselves into the woods. Indians couldn't have been stealthier.

It was an early July morning, with the sun just rimming the hills behind us. The faint trace of haze foretold a still, hot day that promised to be just perfect for our purpose. A catbird scolded us gently from an elderberry bush as we picked our positions, carefully bending back a branch here and there so as to allow the guns full swing.

My partner swatted a mosquito, looked at me to see if I was all set, then lifted the crow call to his lips. The low caw of a timid crow floated out on the morning stillness. If a medium-sized crow had been flying past and thought it saw a tough red-tailed hawk at breakfast, it would have uttered just such a cry. It was just a passing crow remark, nothing more.

We waited. Thirty seconds passed. My friend again raised the wooden fraud, and three more tentative calls went across the valley. This time it sounded as if our Mr. Milquetoast Crow had found himself a good thick spruce as a vantage point, so that he felt safe in maligning the innocent hawk a little.

A long minute passed. We strained our ears almost inside out for an answering cry. Once more the crow call was lifted, and from it poured louder, more insistent demands to all crowdom to come witness the illicit feast in the morning woods.

From afar we heard answers, three short, hurried, yet commanding notes that seemed to say: "We hear you, brother. And, boy, are we coming." This was what we had been waiting for, the reply from sucker crows. My partner's fingers fluttered about the end of the call, helping to make the raucous clamor of a crow that has found a busy hawk to cuss and knows full well that his black friends are on the way, hell-bent for the day's first free-for-all.

Gradually the tempo increased and the pitch descended to the gut-

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rural, harsh invective of a lone crow long run out of words, but so mad that his eyes are pure red, summoning every bird in the country to the righteous cause. We could see them plainly then, flying at us in fighter formation from across the valley, flying so hard and straight on the course that every encouraging cry was a gasped effort.

We raised slightly to battle stations, let the whole seven pass over once, and then, when they came about diving, we poured the chilled sixes into them. Four crows fell to the ground and bounced.

I sat back on my haunches and grinned at Ray Holland, a bit ruefully, perhaps, because I felt that I had shot his own crows. If he had let them, I believe they would have dived at the very bush in which he was hiding. Certainly I would have if I had been a crow. The sounds which he sent reverberating out over the valley were better than many a real crow could make. That also was why I was feeling a bit guilty, because I thought I knew something more than average about this crow-calling business.

We walked back to the car and pushed on, looking for more likely territory. Ray lit his pipe with the curved stem and talked through the smoke: "It's swell when they come at you choking-mad like that. It repays a man for a little earnest calling. The way it's going, we may kill thirty before we hit Connecticut."

Thirty crows in a morning! I thought of all the wind I had misspent many a day and how the birds reacted. I remembered how I used to get them coming sometimes, circling and wary; how once in a while one or two would come within range, no doubt in strict disobedience to orders, perhaps thinking: "There could be some sort of crow down there in trouble, or something." So down he would come, and I would go into action, feeling mighty proud of myself for having lured the crafty black one. There was no system to my calling.

I began to go over in my mind the plan behind Ray's calling, remembering how he first sounded out the immediate neighborhood with the low calls. No doubt, had there been a crow in the woods, he would have come over immediately, and we would have shot him without causing undue alarm to the others that were across the valley.

Then came the louder and angrier cries, more distance-carrying and in natural sequence. Finally he had let go with everything in the vocabulary, this too in conformity with what had gone before. As a result of this carefully built-up climax, it was only natural that any crow with a drop of red blood and a touch of inherent curiosity would drop everything to get to that all-out fight.

Ray interrupted my reverie, pointing to the right.

"Pete, will you quit driving past all this good crow cover. I'm just itching to call 'em again."

With an apology for the reverie, I turned off the road into a thick oak grove situated at the edge of a swampy patch of woods. Just ahead was a grassy knoll topped by a dense plantation of Austrian pines, a common sight in our watershed area and perfect cover from which to call crows. We walked up to the pines and plunged into their green depths in search of a natural open amphitheater, which we soon found—a grand, wide opening exposing plenty of blue sky, yet affording protection.

"This time," Ray whispered, "we may really raise a few crows; so when they are right over us, start growling into your call. Keep it up, low and mad. Try your darnedest to sound like a crow with a mouthful of live cat meat."

He started on them then, perhaps a little more vigorously than before. Almost immediately we heard a whole chorus of answers. "This is going to be something!" my friend muttered, laying shells on the ground.

He called again, insistently, furiously. The answering cries revealed that they were almost upon us. We braced ourselves, guns raised.

The first few came in low over the pines right to our hole. Three of them fell, one almost at my feet. I tried to imitate the low-pitch crow cussing of my friend and, if nothing else, at least added to the general noise and confusion.

Crows kept on coming—diving, coasting, and circling low—focusing their attention on that hole, apparently unmindful of their brethren falling from the sky. My gun got hot. I noticed Ray yanking shells from his pockets, having used up his handy pile. In the excitement it seemed to me that my calling grew higher and squeakier. Perhaps it helped; I don't know. We just kept shooting and growling.

Suddenly it became very quiet. A lone crow flew high over the hole, Ray folded him with his tight barrel, and that was the end and climax to our show. How many did we kill? I'll be darned if I know. I was too busy to count, and we doubled on some. But it was a sizable amount, somewhere under twenty.

The important question is why did they keep on coming after the first sound of the guns? Well, it would seem that a group of crows, especially a large gang, will not become alarmed right away when some of their number dive at an objective and then get shot. Either they become so enraged and excited when they are willing to come down to the center of attraction that they do not heed the shooting or the sight of the killed birds falling does not appear unnatural to them.

In the case of our crows, many of them fell to the bottom of the cone from which we were shooting, and in the general confusion this may well have looked from the air like the normal completion of a dive—

that is, the shot birds may have appeared to be merely landing, which was entirely natural under the circumstances.

Personally, I believe it is a combination of the two thoughts. Since that day I have killed quite a few crows, and in nearly all cases noted that, if you smack the diving or low-flying members of a group first, some of the remainder will keep on coming to you. This proved to be particularly effective where the crows fell out of sight, as in the woods or down through a hole in the trees—any place where the boys up above couldn't notice that they just fell, bounced, and stayed put.

That is one reason why it seems a good plan to shoot from the interior of cover rather than the very edge of it. I have spoiled a lot of perfect setups by taking a stance at the edge of some woods so that I could watch them come in and perhaps get easier shooting. In most cases where three or four crows fall in an open field, the others catch on quickly. And when you pick off the high fliers, thinking perhaps that the close birds can be cracked apart later, you will likely find that the whole pack is wise to your shennigans. Concentrate first on the diving, reckless fellows and your old batting average will improve.

It was hardly midmorning as we rolled along toward the foothills of the Berkshires. There had been one more foray after the to-do near the swamp, but as the action was very similar to that already described, there is no point in recounting it. Just let it be said we were two very happy crow shooters, still after the black rascals. I kept scanning the broad carpet of the valley, which was dotted with farms and their attendant corn and grain fields. It was ideal crow country. We were just topping a ridge, the first spur projecting into the meadows, when Ray broke the silence.

"We'll stop on this ridge," he said, "and then drop down the slope about eighty yards."

So out we got and, guns in hand, picked our way carefully down a steep rockslide to a point which seemed to satisfy my partner. Just why, I couldn't imagine, because there we were, halfway down the hill, surrounded on all sides by tall trees, with hardly an opening showing in the dense green roof. Far below I could make out the flat bench of the bottomlands. I started to look for a hole.

"When you quit looking around like you never saw woods before, we'll call some crows," Ray said. "Hide behind that rock, Pete."

I hid behind the rock. Something new was going to be added to my knowledge of calling crows!

He began much as before, urging them to leave the cornfields for the second feature, about twenty feet to my left. From far below we heard a few faint cries. Unmistakably they were in answer to us, but not a sound more did we hear.

Ray Holland didn't go into the loud song and dance that I had heard earlier. Instead he kept to a lower but nonetheless urgent brand of talk. Then the tone changed swiftly to the close-in crow-fight growl. At a signal from him I swelled the chorus of cussing which permeated the woods. Suddenly my friend's calling stopped.

He raised his gun a little, staring downhill through the trees. I let the call drop and, following the direction of his glance, saw them for the first time—five crows flying up toward us through the narrow trunks of the silver maples, silently winging their way up the incline under forced draft, straight for us.

Almost before I knew it the guns boomed and it was all over. I killed a flaring crow with my second barrel and felt quite proud of the deed. In some miraculous manner three fell to Ray Holland, the first pair a double, the third the result of a hurriedly procured shell. I happened to see it when the shot struck; a fine mist of black breast feathers spread out about the bird, and it dropped to the ground like a stone. If the lone escaping crow got a good look at the carnage in the woods, the story of Custer's Last Stand will take up little space in future crow history books.

Discussing the incident during the climb back to the car, I mentioned that I would have called from the ridge itself, expecting them to fly over just above the trees, not from below. Ray conceded that this plan might have worked, but he pointed out the additional excitement in watching them sweep up the hill and the resulting fast shooting when they were dodging through the tree stems close in.

Then he went on to explain that, when faced with a long uphill pull, crows will frequently fly up through the trees, resting in them occasionally. In such instances, when the trees are tall and not obscured by leafy undergrowth, you actually have a great advantage over the birds because you catch them while they are still climbing, and although the pace may be fast, it is nothing compared to their speed in clear air. Also, jot down the fact that climbing crows cannot easily mark your position from their low altitude, for not only are they busy dodging trees but they lack the valuable perspective of their usual flying height.

Unexplained noise and good crow shooting do not go hand in hand. Dogs barking, car doors slamming, people talking and yelling along country roads are some of the commonest offenders. Let me tell you of an incident that happened that same day.

We were calling from a little patch of woods that was separated from a swamp by some two acres of young corn. It was one of the prettiest setups I ever saw. The crows had answered immediately from the other side of the swamp. That they were really coming was common

knowledge to anyone with ears. In turn, we offered all-out encouragement from beneath the spruce trees.

In no time at all a large flock swept over the treetops and began to eat up the distance to us. Ray later claimed their wing tips touched underneath at each stroke, so hard were they flying. They were almost within range when from behind us came a loud "Hey!"

To a bird that flock wheeled. You perhaps have seen a dog's feet fly from under it when negotiating a very sudden change in direction. If a cat came up and bit a bull terrier in the rear, you would have an excellent example of what I mean. That, in a way, was how those crows reversed themselves. You could practically hear them gasping with the effort. The whole countryside was bathed in deep silence. I looked at Ray. He looked at me.

"Shall I say it?" I asked.

"No, let me."

He had hardly begun when the "Hey!" came again. In dead silence we got up and started toward the noise. At the bend of the dirt road, near where the car was hidden, we found its source. It was an old man, just standing there.

"I don't know you fellers," he said as we came up to him.

With remarkable self-restraint Ray replied, "We were just calling a few crows."

"I don't know you," the old man repeated.

"Look," I put in, "crows eat your spring corn, your young game. You don't like crows, do you?"

"Never et crow," he replied.

Ray scratched his head. The old fellow looked us over, turned, and took a few shuffling steps up the road, then stopped and spoke again: "All I know is I live alone."

Then he was gone. There just wasn't any answer to that one, so we climbed into the car and drove off, chuckling.

The rest of the day passed without much unusual happening, unless you count the affair of the little yellow dog, which more than anything was just an exciting exception to a general rule. The scene of the fracas was the right bank of Connecticut's Housatonic River, in the farming district.

A few crows had come to our calling, and we potted three in rapid succession, one of which fell wounded to the newly plowed ground at the edge of the field. At the sound of the guns a small yellow dog burst from a near-by outbuilding, spotted us, and charged, barking loudly. The outburst had a tonic effect upon the crow, and it started to make a limping retreat. This attracted the attention of the little dog, which promptly grabbed the crow by a wing tip.

Immediately Ray Holland started in with his call, making the darnedest wounded-and-about-to-die crow calls I have ever heard. The dog began to growl, and the crow flapped its good wing. Ray poured on the anguish. Soon there were more crows over that field than we had seen all day, and we had seen plenty. I believe there were even a few Massachusetts crows in that brawl.

We shot all the shells we had with us. Still they dived at the little yellow dog. It was a great pity to break up our perfect decoy team, but we had to cross the field to get back to the car.

Earlier I said that crows which had fallen in view were poison to other crows coming in. This is generally true, especially when a number of dead birds are on the ground. But just let one of those crows recover a bit and attempt to drag itself from the field of battle! His friends in the air will throw away all rules of safety and come down en masse to help. To the crow shooter this good Samaritan spirit is wonderful indeed.

Further, it might serve as an illustration to some of the "why" in calling. If Ray had sounded angry after the birds had departed the scene of the shooting, the fraud probably would have been detected right away. You can stay mad at crows while they are still with you, but don't expect them to return for the same gag. However, it was quite logical to adopt the help-boys-this-thing-is-going-to-kill-me-any-second line of crow talk. Often this trick, after a short wait, will bring them back time and again.

During the afternoon it became quite cloudy, although this did not seem to affect them much. They kept on coming and we were willing, but finally it was decided to try just one more place. So we picked a likely-looking spot for the last effort.

Ray called, and shortly three of the rascals answered from fairly close by. They soon came at us from the right, strongly, as if they meant business. When they were about a hundred yards away, I raised up to get a better view. Immediately the crows flared.

"Those sons of guns can see unusually well," I said, turning to Ray.

"No, Pete. That's only standard 20/20 crow vision. Just remember that on a cloudy day they can spot you easily, unless you are well concealed and don't move about. But on a bright, sunny day you can stand in a deep shadow and spit in their eyes as they fly past."

He explained further that there is a great lack of contrast in color on a cloudy day, which makes it relatively easy for the birds to spot your movements. On the other hand, the effect of sunlight is to punctuate the landscape with blacks, these being the shadows, and the lighter colors of the general countryside. When you stand in the black you are relatively invisible so far as the crows are concerned.

Since that epic day I have made a lot of noise with my crow call. Some of it has been fair, some unnatural. I have learned that you cannot expect to call a group when its sentinel has spotted you first. I have learned to lie in the weeds adjacent to a field of feeding crows and shoot them when directly overhead.

And I have found that on some days they just won't come at all, no matter what you do. Rain and fog generally find them keeping the home fires burning, although not always. Cloudy days can be exceedingly good at times, very disappointing at others.

In particular, I remember one cloudy day when I hadn't lured one crow to within reach all morning. It got along toward noon, and I heard a crow caw twice from a patch of hemlocks in one of my pet grouse covers. For no particular reason I decided to put on a wounded-and-in-mortal-danger act. To do this I merely hid behind a bush at the road's edge and started to give out. Once I changed the position of the reed so that the call would sound a trifle shriller. Then I poured it on some more.

The crow never answered. I began to wonder about walking toward where I thought it was hiding. Maybe it was deaf. There must be deaf crows. In fact, I was positive the woods were full of deaf crows. Still cawing, I half stood up.

There, not thirty feet away, sitting in the middle of the road, was a gray fox. Its ears were pricked up, its nose was pointed right at my bush. Astonished, I peeped over for a better look. The roar of the gun caught the rascal as he whirled for cover. Right away I began to feel better. I even whistled on the way home. There's nothing that's a better tonic for low spirits than a little grouse-shooting insurance.

WOODCHUCK LEGACY

by Bert Popowski

CHUCKS are where you find 'em, but you'd hardly expect a flourishing village of the portly marmots along French Creek, a turbulent little waterway in whose gravel the first gold was found in South Dakota's Black Hills. True, there were fine stands of white clover in the meadows bordering the stream, with here and there little stands of aspen and birch crowding it so closely as to get their feet wet. But the woodchucks denned up under slanting slivers of shale or amid the huge granite slabs which frowned down on the winding valley.

Years ago I had driven up the valley on a lurching trail that threatened to dislocate my vertebrae, meanwhile wringing agonized creaks from my car's weary joints. But after a half dozen shots at the chucks that presented themselves with unconcerned boldness, I welcomed the approach of a whiskery individual whose worn overalls barely held together. He waited while I squeezed off a shot at a gray-nosed grandpappy chuck, and then we both watched the critter roll down the slanting rock with that peculiar rubber-bag-filled-with-water action.

"Old one," he observed, his eyes squinting against the high-altitude sun.

"Yeah," I admitted. "So old that he was nearly white around the muzzle."

"How'd you know?" he demanded, his pale blue eyes appraising me. "I could see it through the 'scope."

Then I watched as he climbed stiffly up the hundred feet of hillside and brought back the carcass.

"Mighty tough eatin'," he commented as he dumped it at my feet. I studied him closely, but there was no glint of humor in those sharp eyes.

"How do you cook 'em?" I wondered aloud.

"Boil until the meat softens, then fry. Or just plain stew 'em."

That was my introduction to Woodchuck Bob, and before I left that

afternoon I shifted my cross-hairs from the portly old ones to kill him a couple of half-grown kid chucks. He led the way back to the small dugout, roofed with poles and sod, which served him for a house. While I watched he dipped the two carcasses in the stream to rid the pelts of vermin, then expertly removed the pea-sized glands high inside the front legs.

Gathering up a handful of the loose hide midway along the backbone, he sliced it open with a razor-sharp knife and, matching the strength of one hand against the other, literally turned that chuck's hide inside out. The tail was cut off at the root, the feet at the wrists, and the nude carcass was beheaded. He split the crotch to remove the entrails in the usual fashion, sheared off the ribs along the backbone, and had three pounds of as fine game meat as one might wish. For the woodchuck is as clean a feeder as they come, putting on its poundage by devouring huge meals of vegetation, the more succulent the better.

"When you come through again, give me a call," suggested Bob. "I'd like to have a couple any day, but I like to clean 'em right after they're killed, else the meat gets a musky taste."

That was years ago, when gold sold for fancy prices. Woodchuck Bob ran French Creek gravel through his sluice box, panning out the gold concentrate each evening, and once a week he expressed his gleanings to the Denver mint. On these weekly jaunts to Custer he took along a burlap bag and in it brought back the staples for his scanty meals. The lone time I visited him his only visible food consisted of a half dozen small cubes of woodchuck meat and a halved cold boiled potato, set in the grease of the frying pan atop his cold stove.

Last summer I drove up that valley again. Many things had changed. The road was still dirt, but it ran at an easy grade and over bridges in excellent repair. Gold-mining dredges had obliterated the bed of that creek and left successive mounds of gravel and dirt and boulders. Of Woodchuck Bob's dugout only the outlines remained. The roof had caved in, one door swung open on a lone hinge, and chipmunks raced along the ridgepole, which had worn through the sod roof.

Only the woodchucks were the same. As we rolled along they whistled piercingly at us from the hillsides or lumbered across the roadway in their clumsy gallop. The chief reason for our trip was to provide Jerry, a lively twelve-year-old, an opportunity to try out his new 'scope-sighted rifle on targets more substantial than prairie dogs or gophers. Zeroed for seventy-five yards, it needed precious little hold-over to plunk them on the button at one hundred yards, though it was seldom called on for shooting at that range.

Jerry sputtered like a jay bird when we sighted two chucks in two

hundred yards of roadway. John, the elder by two years, sat on in dignified silence. After all, hadn't he already killed woodchucks? So it was an old story to him and nothing to raise duck bumps along his spine.

"There's one—right at that big rock," chattered Jerry as I pulled off on the shoulder. "And there's another just above it."

"Got your clip filled?" I demanded. "Or are you planning on saying *bang!* when you pull the trigger?"

In five minutes we had climbed a rocky shoulder from which we could command the meadow for one hundred yards in three directions. Even so, the first challenging whistle came from above us as a grandpappy, bold with long immunity, inspected us from sixty yards away.

"Hold a half inch under his ear and be sure your cross-hairs don't wobble," I instructed. "Lay across this rock for your shot."

The solid "*whock*" of that hollow-point put a broad grin of delight on a sun-browned face and repaid me many times for the hours we had spent on acquiring a solid hold and a smooth squeeze. Time would attend to unraveling the vagaries of wind deflection and sharpen a perception of range.

"Nice shot, Jerry," was John's honest compliment. "He didn't even kick himself over the edge of that rock!"

"Johnny, there's a shot for you," I pointed out. "That youngster sitting atop the mound in front of its den. How high do you think?"

John studied the shot through the scope before he spoke. "He's one hundred yards away," he reported. "About an inch high?"

"Better make it a shoulder shot," I advised. "He's moving that head around quite a bit. And don't forget the wind."

I put the glasses on the target as John flattened out for the long shot. A plume of dust jumped straight into the air just to the leeward of the chuck as the crack of the rifle echoed back to us from the far side of the valley. The chuck dropped to his forefeet and sat immobilized by surprise.

"Not enough allowance for drift," I observed. "Two inches more, at least."

This time the bullet told its own story of a solid hit. But that chuck gathered its feet under it and started crawling for the den mouth. John needed no coaching on this. He covered the black hole with the cross-hairs, and when the chuck filled the doorway he pulled. That chuck died on its doorstep.

"Too good for me," I admitted. "Go right ahead and pick your own shots, but talk over each one before you shoot, so you learn something as you go."

"What are you going to do?" demanded Jerry.

"I'll be right here, taking a few pictures," I admitted. "And if I get a chance, I might try my handgun on a couple."

For the next hour I thoroughly enjoyed myself. Through the glasses I could see the boys conferring on the chucks they sighted and talking over the best ways of getting in range. There was no sloppy stalking in evidence; they kept out of sight as if those chucks were as wild as gun-shy coyotes. But when the valley curved around a far shoulder, I sighed and looked around for some chucks of my own. In the meantime I sniffed the rich pine scents of the high places and watched chipmunks drift along logs and over rocks like wind-blown leaves. It was a nice, leisurely, lazy feeling.

Out of the corner of my eye I caught motion on a rock a few feet away and whisked my handgun out of its holster. But the chuck I saw stared boldly back at me; so I gambled with my camera and, seconds later, knew I had a prized shot in the box.

I reached for the handgun again and was just bringing it up when a half-grown chuck popped up beside the oldster. Again I resorted to the camera, and for the next hour I jockeyed the two around until I'd pulled the last tab off the pack of film.

Still those chucks were utterly absorbed in this strange invader of their home stamping grounds. I moved around on hands and knees and tried crowding them a bit, at which the oldster reared up and clicked his teeth at me in warning, the youngster observing closely. I hissed threateningly and the chuck dropped to a crouch, his teeth beating a faster staccato warning.

Finally I circled upwind, watching carefully as the scent hit their nostrils. The youngster reared to his full height to sample this strange aroma, but the old chuck let loose with a piercing whistle that froze me in place. Well, that was something. The old one recalled that man spelled danger; the youngster had evidently never scented a human. Together they told me that Woodchuck Bob was probably the last man up this valley.

From far away off in the distance the sound of the rifle came faintly. It had been silent so long that this came as a surprise. Then came four more shots in rapid succession. The kids must have run into a covey of chucks, I thought.

I turned my attention back to the chucks and got one more picture before the rifle sounded nearer, much nearer. A moment later I saw the two of them, single-filing to a new vantage point. And I picked up the object of their stalk, a chuck at the edge of that stump-studded meadow. John had the rifle when I put the binoculars on them, and I swung over to watch the chuck. Suddenly Jerry was the front man, crawling up through a notch in the debris of piled rocks. I was glad

to see the big guy yield ground to his kid brother. Maybe the lessons in sportsmanship were beginning to pay off.

A sharp whistle spun me around. My furry playmates were again curious about me, and the boys about them, for John immediately put the scope on me and sighted the old chuck farther up the hill. I saw him say something to Jerry before they started forward.

"Need any protection against the ferocious woodchucks?" he yelled up at me.

Five minutes later we were all leaning against the same big rock. The boys were full of the afternoon's adventures and found me an eager listener. Meanwhile we watched the two chucks trying to unravel the mystery of these three intruders on their favorite stamping grounds. We took turns in using the rifle scope on them, but I noticed that neither of the boys even mentioned shooting at them. Their very nearness suggested an object lesson.

"Jerry, if you were to try to hit that chuck right in the eye, how much over it would you center the cross-hairs?" I asked.

"Why, I'd hold under the eye, wouldn't I?" he replied questioningly.

"No; about two inches over. Why?"

Jerry looked at me, at the rifle, and at the chuck, obviously puzzled. John chuckled.

"Aw, you're kidding me," remonstrated Jerry.

"No, I'm not. How far is the cartridge below the cross-hairs?"

"About two inches," he replied, looking at the rifle.

"Then at that short distance it would stay two inches low, so you'd have to aim high the same amount. Try it on that tiny knot on that log. Aim right at the knot and see how much below the bullet strikes."

That object lesson completed, the boys suddenly turned on me with knowing looks. I squirmed a bit but decided to sit it out.

"Maybe we'd better just show him," suggested John. "Maybe Jerry can't call his shots close up, but he sure can out there a ways," he added, turning to me. "Just come with us."

So we dropped down that hill and followed the creek bed around the bend. Then the boys started to climb a shoulder blanketed with jackpine, and I plodded in their wake. Halfway up the slope they stopped.

"There it is," pointed John. And in the shade of those scrub pines lay a young dog coyote. "After Jerry shot this one we had it hanging on a branch beside that pine," pointed John. "But we took it down when we started back so no one would come along and notice it."

"Who killed it? How far was it? How did you ever happen to get within range of it?" Questions spilled out of me.

"Well, we were sneaking up on a chuck when Jerry saw the coyote sneaking down on the same chuck from the other side. So he ups and lets him have it right through the shoulders. That coyote's head went down on the ground and its tail whirled like a windmill. Jerry put two more bullets into it and knocked it down for keeps," explained John.

"That's a pretty fair day's work for you, young fellow. Do you know there's a five-dollar bounty on coyotes? How's for letting me have half of it for teaching you how to shoot?"

We sat there a half hour while Jerry told us the details—just how he did it. A couple of chucks alternately galloped and whistled at us from across the valley as I told them the story of Woodchuck Bob and his fondness for fried and stewed chuck.

"I wonder how they taste," said John.

"I've never found out," I admitted. "But we can, very easily."

So, while the boys lugged the coyote back to the car, I took the rifle and picked off a pair of youngsters. We skinned them at the edge of the creek, wrapped the meat in the wax paper from our sandwiches, and lit out for our cabin, some thirty miles away.

"You know, Woodchuck Bob left us a chance to enjoy a fine day of sport," observed John thoughtfully. "If he hadn't been gone a year or two, the chucks would have been so wild we mightn't have seen many."

"What I'm most pleased about, John, is your yielding most of the shots to Jerry. He got to know his rifle and what it could do, and that confidence will stay with him all his life," I responded. "So Woodchuck Bob gave us a number of things I wish we could tell him about—wherever he is."

On Getting There—and Back

Sooner or later everyone who goes into the woods is probably going to get lost—at least for a while. The experience need not have any serious consequences in most regions of our country. Unfortunately, it too often does, but that is almost always the fault of the individual. As all writers have stressed, panic is the real danger, and even the most calm and unemotional people are subject to it. One self-assured man I knew of lost himself in the Maine woods when deer hunting. They found him the next morning, a crazed and babbling wreck. He had thrown away his expensive rifle. He had taken off his shoes. He had thrown away his heavy coat. And he had run aimlessly through the night, banging into trees, falling over logs and into brush piles. Had he simply sat down the moment he realized his predicament, built a fire, enjoyed a smoke, he would have been found by the searching party before midnight. As it was, his panic very nearly killed him.

Why do people act that way? The woods are friendly. Only children are afraid of the dark, supposedly. Well, the fact remains that terror does come over the bravest man, and that is the worst of getting lost.

Most sportsmen today travel by automobile, and in going into the back country you can get yourself in some pretty serious jams unless you know how to make your car do things it was never designed for. Burt Trueblood's article on this subject is perhaps the most helpful that has ever been put together. Better memorize his various suggestions if you plan on going "back in there."

HELP! I'M LOST!

by Forest Crossen

THE young hunter realized that he was lost. For a moment he was stunned. Then strength—the mad strength of desperation—returned into his legs. He leaped forward, not knowing, not thinking. He must get somewhere—anywhere.

With a supreme effort of will he caught himself up short. He stopped, trembling, and forced himself to sit down on a log. He clenched his fists, fighting down panic.

"I won't run," he told himself grimly. "I'm going to sit right here for a while."

In him raged a battle. Stark panic made him want to run; reason told him not to let go his grasp. Sweat broke out on his brow.

Thus he sat for five tense minutes. Then he took out his watch, noting that it was nearly four o'clock.

"My landmark doesn't look right," he told himself.

He looked back toward a high peak in the heavily wooded Medicine Bow Range of Wyoming. It looked different now, far different from when he had set out from camp. Suddenly he laughed in sheer relief and exclaimed, "I'm on the other side of it!"

He recalled his inquiries about the physical features of these Wyoming mountains. He saw a gulch on his right and realized that if he followed it down he would come to the river. So he picked up his rifle and set out slowly, keeping himself under control.

As the sun was sinking he reached the river and set out up the stream, expecting soon to see the camp. Finally his way was barred by a creek emptying into the river.

Again he controlled a sense of panic. The first shadows of night were commencing to steal across the deep timber. There was no sound save the rush of the river. All about him was the savage wilderness, ready to take his life if he made a false move.

"Camp is downstream from the mouth of this creek," he told himself after considerable thought. "But I won't travel at night. I'll stay here and wait for daylight."

Swiftly he gathered dry wood and started a fire in front of a caved-off section of bank. This would reflect the heat. Then he cut spruce boughs with his hunting knife and spread them out for a bed. Next he went to a spring along the river and filled his canteen.

As darkness fell he lay back on the spruce boughs and faced the fire, feeling the grateful heat. He took out a bar of chocolate and munched it slowly, drinking from the canteen. When he became drowsy, he roused himself and put two heavy sticks on the fire. Then he fell asleep, rifle under his hand.

The next morning he set off down the river. An hour later he found his comrades ready to organize searching parties. After he had eaten a hearty breakfast, he related his experiences.

"I had matches in a waterproof case, hunting knife, watch, and rifle. When night came on, I camped. This morning I found my way back by remembering what that old rancher said a few days ago about how the streams in this section ran."

Today this young man believes in locating his camp as near a central point as possible. If two streams or dry gulches come together, the junction is a good place for a camp.

"Locate landmarks and memorize their shape," he said. "If you become confused, stop and try to figure where you have traveled. Try to retrace steps rather than attempt to take short cuts. Above all, keep under control."

Another young man was riding through the heavily wooded country of the Adirondack Mountains of New York. He had a good horse, rifle, hunting knife, compass, matches, and small supply of food. But he strayed off the trail and found himself surrounded by timber and underbrush so thick that it was impossible to see more than fifty yards. He was lost.

Fighting down panic, he made camp, securely tying the horse. Then he located north with the compass and set out, traveling possibly two hundred yards, blazing his path on trees with the hunting knife. When he did not find the trail, he returned to his camp.

For three days he remained there, taking trips in each direction, always carefully following the method used on the first trip. Finally he located the trail.

In the years that followed, this man had much experience in the wilds. He learned how to avoid becoming lost.

"First of all," he says, "get a map of the country you intend to travel through. Anyone can send to the United States Geological Survey in Washington, D.C., for maps. The Survey will send free index maps of the state desired, showing the districts, or quadrangles, which have been surveyed.

"These topographical maps are very complete, showing rivers, minor streams, mountains, towns, roads, railroads, hills, and valleys. They list different kinds of vegetation, animals, and game birds. These maps are easy to read and sell for ten cents each.

"If you cannot get topographical maps—not all districts have been surveyed—then secure the best commercial district or state maps. A highway map is better than nothing.

"Don't lose your sense of direction. I always carry a compass. However, if you do not have a compass, the next best thing is a watch to locate north.

"Point the hour hand toward the sun. Place a match or pencil upright on the watch's rim, so that the shadow falls exactly across the center of the hands. Then locate a point halfway between the upright match or pencil and twelve. A line from here through the center of the hands is north."

Years ago three men started across the high Continental Divide of Colorado. They rode saddle horses and had one burro to carry the supplies. At the foot of the range they became lost.

"We got off the main trail onto a game trail, which brought us up into a country that was mighty hard to travel through," one of these men told me. "The altitude was about 10,000 feet, and the country very broken. As the timber was heavy and lots of it down, we couldn't see far. We helped the burro over fallen trees until we were almost exhausted. Steadily we traveled north, expecting to cross the trail to Buchanan Pass.

"We went on like this for six days, our grub running dangerously low. We did not find the trail—afterwards we learned that we were north of it. Things looked serious:

"Finally we struck an open space and managed to climb to the top of the range. At once we recognized the lay of the land and found our way to safety. What saved us was getting on high ground, so that we could see our surroundings."

A mining man told me of an experience in the Klondike. The country was rolling, with good stands of timber. There were many swamps thickly grown with brush.

He started to walk down the summer trail from his claims to Dawson City, twenty miles away. After he had traveled eight miles he came to a party with a woman in it. She was exhausted. Fortunately, they were at the Klondike River. An Indian with a canoe offered to take them to Dawson City. My friend went along.

When he started back he was on unfamiliar ground. He strayed onto the winter trail, which ran through a swamp. In winter this was frozen over, ideal for sled travel. Soon he was wading knee-deep in ice-cold

mud in the ten-foot slash cut through the dense brush. On and on he went, expecting either to come to a roadhouse or strike better going.

About four o'clock in the afternoon he came to an open space, where he tried to warm himself in the sun. However, the mosquitoes would not allow him to rest.

"This was the first open space I had seen," he said. "I remembered that the trail I had come down on ran well up on the hillside. I decided to go uphill, climbing over the fallen timber to warm myself."

He did so and, to his great joy, reached the hard-packed summer trail. A short distance beyond, he came to a roadhouse, where he found a warm meal and bed.

"Then and there," he told me, "I decided that never again would I set out on a trail I did not know unless I had my directions right. I had taken it for granted that I could find my way back, although I was totally unfamiliar with the lower twelve miles of the trail."

A cowboy friend was "wrangling" a party of dudes in the mountains west of Boulder, Colorado. He was perfectly familiar with the country and had started back to camp.

"Then," he said, "some heavy clouds blew in from the east. We were in a fog so thick that I couldn't see thirty feet ahead. I was lost, but I dared not let my party know it. They crowded around me, some of the women whimpering a bit. They depended upon me utterly. I had to do something quickly. I jabbed my horse with the spurs and gave him his head. He brought us back to camp safely."

Men who are familiar with the wide prairies and deserts of the West place much faith in the instincts of a horse or a mule to take them to safety. They say it is unwise to alter an animal's course.

Another friend and his partner were riding northeast of Boulder one night in late autumn in the days before a great tract of land known as Gunbarrel Hill was fenced. Suddenly a blizzard came in from the northeast, flinging heavy snow in their faces. They kept their horses going, guiding them.

Suddenly my friend stopped and peered down at the ground. He and his partner had crossed the tracks of two saddle horses. They got down to investigate and found the trail fresh.

"We've been going in a circle," he said. "These are our tracks."

They followed their tracks farther, finding that they kept to the left. So my friend veered to the right. They reached their destination without further trouble. Had they given the horses their heads, they would have been taken back to Boulder and safety.

The hunter should know everything possible about a prairie country before starting across it. Especially he should know the direction of the prevailing winds, which is a help in any sort of terrain. If you are trav-

eling across country and wish to return by the same route, look back every few minutes at landmarks, fixing them firmly in mind. Remember always that landmarks look different from different directions. In this way, learn to recognize landmarks as they will look on the return trip.

Hundreds of persons are lost each year. These accidents are largely uncalled for. Many occur in National Parks and Forests—so many that a few years ago the Forest Service published a bulletin with a list of what to do should one become lost. This was compiled by rangers who had spent their lives in the wilderness. It should be memorized by everyone who goes into the wilds.

1. Stop. Sit down and try to remember where you are. Use your head and not your legs.
2. If caught by night, fog, or storm, stop at once and make camp in a sheltered place. Build a fire in a safe spot. Gather plenty of dry fuel as soon as possible after selecting a stopping place.
3. Don't wander about. Travel only downhill.
4. If you are injured, choose a clear spot on a promontory, if possible, and build a signal smoke.
5. Don't yell; don't run; don't worry, and, above all, don't quit.

A warning may be added to inexperienced youths and adults who venture into a wilderness covered by deep snow. Always accompany someone familiar with the country and this type of travel, or don't go. A landscape looks different under a blanket of snow.

The main thing, of course, is not to become lost. Know the principal features of the country you intend to travel through. Go prepared with compass, watch, matches in a waterproof case, hunting knife, and small package of concentrated food. Above all, don't lose your wits and start traveling in a circle, for it is a vicious circle which has brought death to many.

WHICH WAY OUT?

by Burton L. Spiller

SQUIRE Deal was the big toad in the little puddle of a town where I cut my eyeteeth. Storekeeper, lawyer, justice of the peace, constable, surveyor, and choir leader, it was all duck soup to him, and in an emergency he could also act as judge, jury, undertaker, gravedigger, and hearse driver.

Local tradition has it that, despite the axiom concerning a Jack-of-all-trades, he was proficient in all save one of his callings. The Squire was not a woodsman. As proof of it there was still extant in my youth a local saga of some fifty-three verses, setting forth in rather loose rhyme the perplexities of the Squire on a memorable fall day.

Boiled down, the essence of the tale was that, pursuant to one of his callings, the Squire was "lining out" a woodlot on the edge of the big swamp. With a ten-year-old boy to drag the chain, he ran the lines without incident, checked back into the northeast corner to verify his findings, then shouldered his compass and struck off toward the distant road and the waiting team.

It was then that his troubles began. When he reached the spot where he had left his horse, he found that not only the animal was gone, but the road also, and in their place stretched a dreary waste of bogs and rushes. As you may imagine, the Squire was a man who had considerable confidence in his own ability, and when he found the swamp barring his way he was a trifle incensed at its effrontery.

With the boy at his heels and the compass over his shoulder, he plowed out into the morass, and such was his persistence that he kept doggedly on until he won his way through. There, on every side, deep woods stretched, and it began to dawn upon him that he had not chosen the shortest way out. Reasoning quite logically that if this direction was wrong some other one would be right, he turned at an abrupt angle and started off once more.

As history has it, the compass tripod began to chafe his shoulder; so he shifted the instrument to the other shoulder and, alternating thus, he came presently again to the swamp. Once more he plowed through

it, chose another direction, and a half hour later found himself back in the same spot. Pausing a moment for breath, he noted with dismay that daylight was fleeing and that his confidence had already fled. The Squire was scared, and this time he started off at a lope, which was ill advised, for his accelerated pace brought him all the more quickly back again to the starting point.

Through it all the boy had clung doggedly to his heels, saying not a word, but now he spoke his mind.

"You told me it would only take three or four hours," he said accusingly. "It's past suppertime, and I'm hungry. I ain't goin' to work no longer—not for no fifty cents. I'm goin' home."

The boy struck off determinedly. Because the Squire could think of nothing better to do, he followed. Fifteen minutes later they were in the buggy, jogging briskly toward home.

I'll not vouch for the accuracy of the story, even though I have modified it in the telling, but it has all the earmarks of truth. How much the Squire knew about woodcraft it is impossible for me to say, but I know that the fellow who immortalized the incident in song knew his stuff. Sometimes to stray from the straight and narrow path is a human propensity, and the result is not always pleasurable to the fellow who does the straying.

It is generally supposed that there are some men who are gifted with an unfailling sense of direction, but I have never met any of them. My personal opinion is that there is little of fact to substantiate such a belief. Blindfold any one of those prodigies, cart him off into a country with which he is unfamiliar, blot out the sun and stars, and I'll wager that my guess concerning the place where the north is hiding for the moment will be as good as his. But if he is a real woodsman, he will not be frightened by the situation. He knows the fundamental principles of woodcraft, and if the distance is not too great he will eventually find his way out.

On dozens of different occasions I have stopped short at the sudden realization that I had not the slightest idea as to what part of the universe I was heading into, yet only once was I forced to spend a night in the woods against my will. The peculiar part of that affair was that there was not a moment of the entire two days when I did not know exactly where I was; and although I rambled through some twenty-five miles of forest, I could at any time have gone straight back to the point from which I started. The only reason why I did not do so was that my guide was hopelessly befuddled; and because he was one of those mulish individuals who know that they are right because they can't be wrong. I thought it my duty to stick around and see that no harm befell him.

For years I had known of the existence of a small trout pond on the eastern side of the Bigelow Range in Maine. To reach it, one had to climb the first summit, drop down into a ravine, toil up over the Saddle, traverse another ridge to the Horns, and then work down again to the pond. It was said to be some seven miles of hard travel, and for that reason I had not undertaken it; but one day while fishing Dead River I had an irresistible urge to drop a fly into that practically virgin water. That night I located a guide and arranged for a daylight start the next morning.

We were on the first summit at sunrise, but no sooner had we started down into the ravine than the guide began to swing toward the north. Checking our course by my compass to be sure I was right, I called his attention to the fact that we were bearing too much to the left. He resented my interference. He informed me that he knew where the pond lay, and implied that all I had to do was to keep my legs working and my mouth shut. I did exactly that, checking our course at each of our turnings, until a drizzly and misty twilight began to fall.

For an hour we had been climbing steadily, but not in an easterly direction. Instead of that, we were headed due west. A few minutes later we came to a bare and wind-swept crest, and there in the valley before us, but still a mile or more away, lay our pond.

The guide said, "Well, I'll be damned!" and the idea met with my wholehearted approval; but when I saw how humiliated he was and how timid about spending a night in the open, I forgave him. I built a brush shelter for him, got a fire going, and tended it through the night. Then, in the morning, I led him safely home.

I'll venture to say that if a man started out with his pockets filled with matches and ammunition, and had a fixed determination to find out how long he could exist in the woods, he would surprise himself. In the forest the only thing to fear is fear. The stimulus of fright is not in itself injurious. Men do not die of it, but because of it. It tends to induce overexertion, and when a half-crazed man drives himself to the point of exhaustion he is nearing the end of the last act.

The pathetic part of these seasonal tragedies is their utter needlessness, for in all the great wildernesses of the world there is no place so friendly toward man as the forest. Within it and close at hand is everything needful to sustain life. It offers food, shelter, a comfortable bed, and an unlimited fuel supply. What more could one have within the security of his home?

Although we may deny it, nevertheless in most men there is an inherited fear of the dark. Put one of them on a great plain, set the nearest town on a hilltop a hundred miles away where it could plainly be seen, assure the man of perpetual daylight, and he would not be afraid.

He would estimate his resources and physical strength and conserve both in an effort to get safely out. Place the same man in a thick forest where his vision is restricted as it is at night, then confuse him concerning the points of the compass, and immediately his inherited fear will start shouting to him to hurry before complete darkness sets in.

I count as my friend a guide whose stamping ground is the territory lying around The Forks in Maine. He was one of the hundreds who searched for a lost hunter there a few years ago. Middle-aged, born and brought up in that locality, he knows every ridge and mountain and stream for miles around. For him to carry a compass appeared to him to be as nonsensical as for you or me to tote one around in our back yards. He boasted of his knowledge of the country, but one gray day during the search it suddenly dawned on him that he did not know in which direction home lay.

One would naturally say that, being a woodsman, it would take him only a moment or two to find out, and that was what he thought—at first. He opened his knife and balanced the point of the blade on his thumbnail, but the sky had thickened to such an extent that in the deep woods the metal would not cast a shadow. Experience had taught him the fallacy of trying to determine direction by moss on the trees or the length of their branches. Hoping to locate a neighboring mountain, he climbed a tall poplar, but the gray haze had blotted out all except the nearest objects. He had been hunting for a lost man, but now he knew that he was lost too.

It was a serious predicament, for these were big woods, but between him and the other unfortunate there was one vast difference: he was a woodsman, while the other was not. He had the advantage of knowing the country, and he knew that if he followed a straight course in any direction it would eventually bring him to a landmark that he would recognize. So he started off, lining up trees as he went and—here is the queer part of it—fighting with all his will power to control the unreasoning terror that urged him to run, shouting, through the quiet and friendly wood.

An hour later he came to a stream that he thought he remembered. He followed it to a pond that was an old acquaintance, took his bearings from it, and finished the day's search without further incident.

There is, of course, a moral to the story. Two men were lost in the same woods, and each was beset with the same primal fear. One managed to control it and found his way out without difficulty. The other ran heedlessly and blindly along, falling headlong, then struggling up, only to run and fall again and again, until the time came when he could no longer rise. Somehow I do not like to think of that, or of his dying alone there, within a few miles of the camp.

Most people in the East are familiar with the story of Don Pendler, the 12-year-old boy who was lost on Mount Katahdin, Maine's highest peak. He wandered away from his party in a fog and for nine days fought his way along, his clothing torn to shreds, his canvas sneakers worn out and discarded. How he won his way to civilization is an epic tale of adventure. I doff my hat to him for the pluck and the courage he showed. Amid all the turmoil of his brain, one thought stood out. He remembered the Boy Scout precept that if one followed running water far enough it would eventually lead him somewhere. Don followed it—and it did—after something like ninety miles of heartbreaking travel.

Aside from the mistake of getting lost, Don made only one other. He tried to find his way back, and his chance of doing so was, roughly, only one in eight. Had he stayed where he was when the realization came to him he was lost, the searching party that was immediately formed would have found him before night, or the next day at the latest. But even at his age Don felt the inherent urge to get out under his own power, and he was luckier than many.

Whether a fellow roams the big woods or an area only a few miles square, it is nothing more than plain, everyday horse sense to carry a compass. No one knows it better than I, yet on several different occasions I have found myself in trouble because I did not have mine with me. It usually ends the season in my deer-hunting shirt. Then when I don my sleeveless vest the next fall, to go out to the near-by runs to miss a few woodcock, I always forget it. As the season advances we spread farther afield in search of grouse, and then invariably there comes a day when I need a compass and it is still at home.

One of our best-loved grouse areas lies in the foothills of the White Mountains. Although it can hardly be called dangerous, it is nevertheless big country, and one could choose several directions that would require a hard day's travel to cross; but we have hunted it for years and know every brook and hill and distinguishing landmark.

We were in it last fall, scouting a succession of alder runs for some late-flight woodcock. It was one of those cool, gray days that delight a bird hunter's heart. The ground was moist, the scent hung heavily, and the dogs were clicking with the regularity of champions. Late in the afternoon a thin land fog began to rise, creeping up the hillsides and shutting them from our view.

We had taken nearly our limit of birds and were on the point of starting home when we ran into a flock of grouse. With a great roar of wings they went fanning out over the alders, and we did what any other bird hunter would have done. We went after them.

Soon the dogs nailed a single, and I killed it. Then, as the dog went in to retrieve, two more got up and cut back to our right over a low

ridge. The country was more open there; so we changed our course and followed them, but once more they got up wild and swung back toward the point where the main flock lay.

Back we went, too, and over a stylish stance we each downed a bird; but mine was a broken-winged one, and for a few minutes the dogs were puzzled to find it. We went in to help them, wandering back and forth without any thought of direction, kicking fern clumps and peering into holes among the alder roots—and all the while the fog was thickening around us.

At last a dog nailed the bird beneath a decaying stump, and as I stowed her away a thin spatter of rain began to fall. It was past the hour of sunset, and night was less than an hour away.

"We'd better get going," my companion said. "It will be dark early tonight."

I agreed. "Yes," I said. "That's right. Well, lead the way."

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Are you turned around?"

"Like a top," I said. "I haven't the slightest idea which way is out."

He grinned at me. "Some woodsman you are. You've been here fifty times."

"I know it," I confessed sheepishly, "but just the same I haven't any idea where the car is."

"You needn't feel so proud about it," he said. "Neither have I."

So there we were in a country that we knew as well as we knew our own faces in the mirror, yet neither of us knew which direction to take. There was only one thing to do if we wished to get out that night: we could travel in one direction until we came to a landmark that we recognized and then orient ourselves by it.

We struck out, hurrying, of course, and traveled steadily for an hour. Then, in almost absolute darkness, we came to the shore of a pond. Although we knew that we knew it, it seemed to be on the wrong side of us, so completely were we confused. But cold reason straightened us out, and we were able to lay a course to an old logging road that would lead us out.

We reached the car at eight o'clock that night. When I got home the first thing I did was to transfer my compass to my shooting coat, but as I write this it is back in my shooting shirt. I shall undoubtedly forget it again next fall.

Any hunter who has a family dependent upon him is guilty of criminal negligence if he does not make provision for an emergency that may confront him any time he goes into the big woods. If he is familiar with the territory, a good compass and a waterproof match safe will probably be all the insurance he needs; but if he plans to hunt or fish new country, he had better have a rider attached to his life-

insurance policy. It would do him little good to know the points of the compass unless he knows which one of them he must follow.

A good map is indispensable, and by "good" I mean one that is drawn to a large scale. Road maps are cold-blooded companions at best; but when one is lost, it gives him a tremendous all-gone feeling in the pit of his stomach to spread the map out on a stump and learn that he is in the approximate center of a blank space that the scale shows to be fifty miles square. But with a friendly, large-scale map it is different. Reassuringly it points out that off here a mile to the right is a spotted trail leading from the mountain, and that over there to the left is a brook which winds down to the lake, on the shore of which is the camp that for a moment you thought someone had misplaced. It takes the error out of terror and bolsters up a fellow's confidence to the point where he can do some rational thinking.

Don't make the mistake, though, of thinking that the mere ownership of such a map is enough. Unless you know the approximate part of it to which you have wandered, you might as well throw it away first as last. The obviously necessary thing is to establish a mental series of boundaries around the territory you propose to travel and check your relation to them each morning when you start out. If your camp site is on the bank of a river that flows east and west, and you hunt on the south side of it, it is a self-evident fact that in order to get back to your starting point you must travel north. An occasional check on your drift to west or east through the day will enable you to tell whether you are above camp or below it when you come again to the river.

There are certain fundamentals of safety that every outdoorsman should know, and the first, obviously, is never to become lost. A mariner checks his course frequently and allows for deviation caused by wind and current, and the forest traveler should do no less. It is always easy to get back if you know where back is; but it is a human trait sometimes to believe that some practical joker has moved it around to the front, and when a chap falls into that state of mind he may well be in for a bit of unpleasantness.

Curiously, too, it isn't always necessary to wander off for miles to bring about such a phenomenon. There's an automatic rifle leaning against a tree somewhere down in the Maine woods, simply because a friend of mine forgot that important fact for a few moments. Pausing to rest after several hours of tramping, he stood his rifle up against a tree and sat down on a fallen log beside it. Some minutes later a flying squirrel came out on the top of a 20-foot stub, looked around for a moment, then launched out into space and landed at the foot of a sapling a short distance away.

Anxious to get a closer view of the little chap, my friend strolled over and watched while it climbed the sapling's tallest branch and planed away again. Twice more he repeated his error, then turned around and started back to his log and gun. He never found either of them, yet when he began his search he was less than a hundred yards from them.

In a slightly different form, that is one of the commonest and most glaring mistakes that hunters annually make. Stationed on a runway by a guide, and given explicit directions to stay there until called for, hundreds of men persist in disobeying the command. The most common cause of the mistake is their curiosity to learn the result of a shot at game, and off they go, hotfooting it in the direction the quarry has taken, without having the slightest idea toward which part of the universe they are heading.

The majority find their way back without difficulty, while some of the others wander safely out, but miles from camp. Most of the remainder are found by the guides. But always there are a few unfortunates who are not so lucky, and they help to swell the total of those who went out with high expectations but never came back.

When a guide places you on a stand and tells you to stay there, obey him to the letter. If you insist on having your own way and find yourself in trouble because of it, don't make the mistake of running frantically about, but stay where you are. You are still within shouting distance of the spot, and the guide will find you when he comes back. You will be properly ashamed, but not half so much as though it took a hundred men to locate you.

Another frequent cause of trouble arises from the common practice of arriving at camp late at night after one has become confused concerning direction. The next morning the sun is quite likely to rise in the west, and if a chap starts out while suffering from that delusion he has set the stage for melodrama. Straighten the thing out in your mind first, and don't be misled by the sun's apparent capriciousness. Although you may ridicule the idea, it is you who are out of step.

Study the country before you explore it. Locate the rivers and roads, and try to hunt between them at first. It gives you two chances instead of only one if things go wrong.

Plan what you will do in the event you become lost. Can you build a brush shelter, or are you one of those who leave their building problems to an architect and contractor? Do you know how and where to build a fire so that it will provide you with a maximum amount of heat through the night? Can you construct a bed of evergreen tips, or does your activity in that direction resemble something that rightfully belongs to the Spanish Inquisition? If you cannot do these things

and do them quickly and well, go out to some small woodlot and master them, and until that time never tackle big country alone.

Have you appraised your mental qualifications and, if so, are you sure you have appraised them correctly? When fear attacks you, have you the assurance that you can master it, or will you become a craven creature with no more reasoning power than a trapped animal? These are things that it is each man's duty to learn about himself.

Unfortunately, despite every precaution, accidents have a way of happening; and even though you may be as fussy as an old maid about your equipment, some unforeseen thing may rob you of a vital part of it. What you do then will depend largely on the preparation you have made for such an event and the sort of man you really are.

The first thing to remember is that panic breeds panic. Man rose to his present level by using his reasoning power, and it is not going to help any if you throw yours overboard in an emergency.

Sit down somewhere, relax and cool off. A few minutes of quiet thinking may set you right. Unless you know that a few hours' travel in a straight line will get you out, don't try it until morning. A broken leg or a sprained ankle will not help your situation any. Gather enough wood to last through the night, and remember that it requires just twice as much as you think it will. Keep a cool head and a warm body and you will last a long time.

Things will look different in the morning. You might hanker for a platter of ham and eggs, but a squirrel roasted over the coals is not too bad. Then, if you are certain of your direction, you may start out; but if you are still confused, stay where you are. By this time the alarm will have gone out and men will be searching for you, and nothing you can do will help so much as staying put for a few hours. Build a bigger fire and pile it with debris that will make heap big smoke. It can be seen for miles, and you may rest assured it will be investigated. After all, it's a small world, and someone will find you if you give him half a chance.

At its best, a night in the woods is a pleasurable experience. At its worst, if you use your head, it will not harm you. And when you get back to camp, you will not only have a nice story to tell, but you will have the assurance that you are a real Daniel Boone. You have conquered not only the forest but yourself as well.

BACK-COUNTRY DRIVING

by Burt Trueblood

CLAYTON and I were bouncing and grinding down the last five miles through Leslie Canyon, on a bass-fishing trip to the backwater of Owyhee Dam in eastern Oregon. Suddenly a rock about the size of a basketball loomed up behind a sagebrush. It caught under the front of the car and brought us to a jarring halt that spelled disaster. Neither of us said anything for a minute; it was too serious. We were thirty-five miles from town and at least ten miles from the nearest ranch—which had no telephone.

Finally I crawled out and looked. The right-front steering assembly was torn completely loose. I must have looked as though I had lost my last box of shells, because Clayton asked, "Is it that bad?"

I didn't answer his question directly. I just said, "I wish I had a horse!"

Our misfortune occurred at 9 A.M., and it was six that evening before we were back on the main highway trying to thumb our way to town. We had no car, no bass, and we were dog-tired from our ten-mile hike. Finally we got home about 2 A.M., and then had to return the next day with the necessary repairs.

Several years have passed since that ill-fated expedition, and I have come to realize that it was one of the best things that ever happened to me. It was the last time I had to walk back to town without my car. In fact, I haven't done the slightest damage to it in driving thousands of miles over bad roads. Then and there I decided that if I continued to hunt and fish in the back country I would have to devise a system that would keep me from breaking up my car all the time. I spent a lot of time and thought on it, but very little money.

I have found that one can travel roads that are almost unbelievably rough and rocky without too much effort, or damage to his car, if he drives carefully and takes the proper precautions. Most of the roads which Westerners travel when they go hunting and fishing are merely old logging trails, camp-wagon wanderings, or mine roads that were laid out years ago and forgotten. They are steep in spots, muddy in

others, and rocky most of the way, with a sprinkling of sand thrown in here and there for variety.

Rocks are among the worst obstacles when driving over the back roads, especially with late-model cars, which are so low-slung that a cockroach has to stoop to walk under them. Sharp rocks are particularly hard on tires; so it usually is a good practice to carry about five pounds extra air pressure.

I make it a practice when going over a rock that appears high enough to cause damage—and that is not more than six inches with some cars—to slow down to turtle speed and put the car over so that the rock is not directly under the center. The crankcase is the lowest part on most modern cars and can withstand the least abuse. Slowing down stops any springing action of the front end of the car, which has a tendency to bob up and down like a mud hen on a windy bay.

If the rock is too high to straddle and I can't go around it, I put a couple of small rocks on both sides of the big one and force one wheel over. In that way I can get over rocks up to a foot high. Anything higher has to be attacked with a bar and pick, which are necessary items of any man's equipment on the worst roads.

Dust and rocks usually go hand in hand during the summer, and for that reason I have installed on my car an oil-bath air cleaner of the type used on tractors. The shop foreman where I get my car serviced told me he believed it would postpone a major overhaul for 15,000 miles, and that is good economy.

The man who originated the toast "Here's mud in your eye" must have been thinking of me, because I have been in plenty of it—sometimes for only a few minutes, but occasionally for several hours. I never yet have had to be pulled out, however, even where there was help available.

When I come to a gooey-looking spot I always get out and look it over, trying to plan the best way through. If it is less than ten inches deep and has a solid bottom, I usually put on chains and breeze right through. I would much rather put on chains on dry ground, where I can get a solid foundation for my jack, than to do it in ten inches of mud.

Once in a while, however, the bottom drops out from under the car and you find yourself held up by the frame with the wheels spinning futilely. Don't sit there and spin them. That is a good way to dig yourself in so that you won't get out until dry weather. Mud is like snow in that respect, and the faster you spin your wheels the more hopeless the situation becomes.

If you really are stuck, however, the only thing to do is to jack up the car and put rocks and brush under the wheels until the car is clear

of the mud. I usually put a big rock down under the rear bumper to support the jack, although it is easier at times to put a rock beside a wheel and, after taking off the hubcap, put the jack under a lug bolt.

When you get the wheels on solid foundations, clean out in front of them and make little rock or brush paths for them to run on. As you start, apply power slowly so that the car won't lunge sideways and slip off the rocks. One final thought: remember, the faster you are going when you hit a mudhole, the harder it is to get out.

By all means avoid the mud flats that border lakes in the late summer. They look deceptively dry, but three inches under the surface they are as soft as a feather bed and as sticky as a wad of bubble gum. Grassy meadows with subsurface water are equally dangerous. The alkali flats that occur in some sections of the West are also tricky.

Good driving and ingenuity will get you through many a seemingly impassable piece of road, however. One time another fellow and I were driving along the bank of an irrigation ditch just after a heavy rain. The "road" was slicker than a greased pig and no wider than a double bed, and we didn't dare slide off because there was a deep ditch on one side and a bottomless mud flat on the other.

The driver eased the car along in second gear at about four miles an hour while I rode on the rear bumper. Whenever we started to skid I jumped off and pushed the rear end onto the road again. It was exciting, but we made it safely. If we had failed, we would have had a long walk.

A set of chains and a good shovel have got me out of many a mudhole, and, of course, a good jack is essential. By "good jack" I don't mean the bumper bender that came as standard equipment with your car, either, but one of hydraulic or screw type. A capacity of one and one half tons is sufficient for a light car.

I have found that driving through mud washes and grinds the grease out of the exposed bearings under the car, so I make it a practice to get a grease job after a session with mud, even though I may have driven only a couple of hundred miles since the last greasing.

Ice and snow present a hazard that may stop you halfway up a steep hill and can also be a serious threat to the safety of the driver as well as his car. Several years ago a friend and I were driving up a canyon road which wound around and up and down the face of a mountain several hundred feet above the river. There was a particularly steep pitch nearly a quarter of a mile long, and when we were about a hundred yards from the top the wheels started spinning and refused to push us any farther.

The driver set the brakes, but the car started to back down the hill with all four wheels sliding, even though we had on chains. I began

to say my prayers in a most convincing manner. The driver was a man with wide experience in herding cars over slick roads, however; so he put it in reverse and applied just enough power to pull the car faster than it was sliding. This drew it out of the skid. As soon as he had it running under its own power he pressed his foot lightly on the brake, continuing to give it gas at the same time. Thanks to his excellent driving, we backed safely down.

His trick of stepping on the gas and the brake at the same time was something new to me, so I asked him why he did it. He said giving a car the correct amount of power made it hold the road, which I could understand because I knew that feeding gas on a sharp turn will prevent skidding.

From there on it was simple. The brakes slowed the car by holding the front wheels, while power on the rear wheels held it on the road.

This trick will work going forward as well as back. It is the best and safest way to stop if the roads are extremely slick, although the brakes must never be applied hard enough to slide the front wheels. Incidentally, we did get over that hill. We wrapped ropes around the rear wheels, putting them through the spokes, which made cleats on the tires almost like those of a tractor.

The safest rule to follow when on icy roads is never to do anything in a hurry, whether it be driving out hunting or stopping at an intersection. I have reached the point where I seldom use any brake in driving on slick roads, and when I do I apply it very sparingly. Compression will stop a car in a surprisingly short distance when properly used.

Take your foot off the gas entirely and let the car slow down to about 20 miles per hour in high. Then shift into second, but have your motor speeded up so that it won't act as a sudden brake when you let the clutch in. You can practice this on a dry road, and when you get skillful enough so you can shift down without jerking the car you may be sure that on a slick road you won't set your car into a dangerous skid. It always is a good idea to try to shift both up and down without jerking the car, since this is hard on the clutch and gears.

A good rule to follow on slick roads is to use the highest gear that has power enough. This is contrary to most rules of good driving and admittedly is hard on a car, but safety should come first, and when roads are slick you often can climb a hill in second that you couldn't get over in low. You even can start a car from a dead stop in second many times when the wheels would only spin in first because it is too powerful. Once the wheels start to spin, you'll never get off the spot.

Going downhill, of course, is always more dangerous than going up. One day last winter while I was serving as a deputy game warden

I went out on a beaver complaint and spent the night at the home of a hospitable rancher. During the night it rained and froze, so that everything was covered with half an inch of ice. Next morning I had to return down a narrow mountain road that had worked the car hard in second going up, and that canyon had me worried. The road was too narrow to pass another car, and there were bad washes wherever a side canyon entered the main one.

Ordinarily, when there is only packed snow to contend with, it is a good practice to keep up enough speed so that the centrifugal force will keep you from sliding off the road on banked turns. This time that much speed was not safe because of the impossibility of stopping if I should happen to meet another car.

I started down with some misgivings. When the road made an inside turn, it was fine. The car would slide into the gutter against the mountain and pull out when the road straightened out, but outside turns were a different story. I had to dig the ice off the tracks with a shovel. It took me four hours to go 27 miles, but I made it without bending a fender.

Ordinarily mountain driving, when the road is fairly smooth, doesn't present any problem. Always try to keep on the right side of the road and always be able to stop within your field of vision. By that I mean you should go around hairpin turns slow enough so that you can stop within the few feet you can see ahead. On a road too narrow for two cars to pass, it is customary for the one going up to back down until a wide place is reached, but if you are a good driver don't argue the point. There has been many a bloody fight when two scared men met on a narrow road.

Never try to climb a hill in high just because your car can do it. Most cars are made to operate most efficiently at about 2,000 motor revolutions a minute, which is between 40 and 50 miles per hour in high and from 20 to 30 in second. When you pull your car down to 15 or 20 miles an hour in high, you are doing what truck drivers call "lugging" your motor. Ten miles of lugging will do more damage to a motor than 500 at 60 miles an hour. It will cause the motor to heat and lose power, and may cause a vapor lock which will stop you cold—or, rather, hot. Always shift gears in plenty of time, not only to save your car but because shifting is easier with plenty of speed.

One day last summer I came to a hill that was almost too steep to climb. I got nearly to the top the first try, but the wheels started spinning and digging. I had plenty of power, but not enough traction, even though the "road" was dry. I backed down to the bottom and put about five hundred pounds of rocks in the luggage compartment. Then I made it over with speed to spare. While climbing a steep hill

don't allow your wheels to start spinning if you can avoid it. If they do, ease off on the gas until they take hold again.

Going downhill is more dangerous than going up, because it takes longer to stop on the downgrade. Consequently I always go down slower than I would climb the same hill. It is a good plan to put your car in second gear or, possibly, even first, depending on the grade. Compression will hold the speed down, while depending on brakes alone on a long, steep hill will burn them out.

I have found that, with a little care, I can ford rivers on a riffle if it isn't much over eighteen inches deep, the bottom is solid and is not covered with big rocks. The exact depth you can ford depends on the make of your car. Some are harder to drown out than others.

In fording a strange stream it always is wise to wade across first and pick out the best route, marking it with sticks stuck into the bottom if necessary. Stifle the impulse to go fast, since that would splash water over the motor and short out the spark system. If your car has the distributor in front of the motor, you will have to take off the fan belt to keep water from being thrown up and causing a short. On some cars water will work into the clutch housing and cause the clutch to slip on a long ford; it also will get into the exhaust pipe and cause a back pressure which will kill the motor.

If the river just has to be crossed, however, as they must when I like the looks of the country on the other side, I plug up the holes in the clutch housing and unhook the exhaust pipe. Then I give it all I've got. If it isn't more than two feet deep, I usually make it. If it is deeper, I have wet feet before long.

Even if the motor drowns, the situation isn't absolutely hopeless. Remove the spark plugs, put the car in either reverse or low, depending on which way you want to go, and crank out by hand. It's a slow job, but it will get you out. [Ed. note: Cars nowadays don't come with hand cranks any more, but if your battery is good and strong you can usually go a few yards on the starter.] If you're in deep and long, take out the oil plug and let the water drain out of the crankcase before starting the motor. Put the plug in when the oil starts to run.

Soft, granular sand is a good thing to leave alone unless you are going uphill. Then if you get stuck you can back down. If you can keep moving in sand, you're usually all right, but once you stop and the wheels start spinning they will dig down until they hit something solid—and you'll need a periscope to see out. If sand stops you, don't spin the wheels. Let about two thirds of the air out of the back tires and back out, or pull on through—whichever is shorter. Be sure to pump up the tires again as soon as you have solid footing.

In the back country you're on your own. You can't depend on serv-

ice stations or passing motorists—there aren't any. You should have a set of tools which contains all the necessary wrenches, a hammer, file, tire irons and patching kit, shovel, ax, chains, towrope, cable or chain, tire pump, a good jack and a block to set it on in sand, friction tape, and a scrap of insulated wire. A few emergency items such as a spare fan belt, a couple of spark plugs, an extra quart of oil, and spare fuses may save you a long walk back to town sometime. And don't forget a good flashlight and some spare batteries.

If you do a lot of driving in out-of-the-way places, you should get a motor tune-up every three months by a competent mechanic. It will catch any trouble as it is developing rather than after it becomes serious and more expensive to repair—or causes a breakdown miles from help.

Of course it would be nice to own a pickup truck or a jeep, but most of us can't afford to buy such an expensive piece of equipment to be used only for hunting and fishing. If you drive carefully and take good care of your car, it will haul you to spots where the fish don't know what a man looks like and the game has to make a trip to town to learn that a hunter doesn't eat grass too. Just don't be in a hurry—and carry a spare!

On Various and Sundry

These last four items escaped classification, but I wanted them in the book. Most shooters, I think, have shared at least a few of those "Last Chances" Mr. Rutledge recounts—the pair of grouse breaking into the sunset's afterglow, the woodcock curling upward from the brook bottom to be etched for a brief moment against the twilight's luminous silver. Or, failing that, at least the good taste in the mouth for having stuck with it to the end.

Mr. Rutledge's plea that we "Know the Wilderness" is certainly a good one. Many people who would not dream, say, of venturing out in a sailboat without prior study and practice, nevertheless will pull on a pair of boots, grab up a rifle of which they barely know one end from the other, and sally forth to shoot up the countryside—and, as likely as not, such calm and innocent citizens as you and me. Licenses are issued to anyone who applies; they ought, I think, to be issued only after close and careful examination of the applicant's fitness both to get around in the woods and to use firearms. Apropos of this point, "How Do You Rate with Your Guide?" exposes some of the less pleasant aspects of a job that seems to some people pretty nearly ideal—imagine being able to shoot and fish all the time and getting paid for it!

It may seem strange to conclude a book on shooting with an article about shots a man has missed. Yet those are the shots, it seems to me, which stay longest in the memory. I don't altogether agree with Mr. Rutledge's idea that the hunter should always be hunting, but I recognize my own frequent need for that kicking machine he mentions!

LAST CHANCES

by Archibald Rutledge

I BELIEVE not only in recounting for fellow sportsmen some of the adventures that have befallen me in the woods and fields, but in trying to suggest to them ways whereby their own enjoyment may be increased. Over a long period of years I have become convinced that many a man comes home defeated from a hunt because he has stopped just too soon. Indeed, so often has the very last chance afforded me my best luck that I have become almost superstitious about this business of last chances.

Time and again the whole aspect of a hunting trip has been completely changed for me by a fortunate turn at almost the last moment. Hence I have become a great believer in never giving up until black dark sets in on the last day. Perhaps I can treat this subject most convincingly if I tell of some of the good fortune that has come to me when most people would have quit in disgust. And this thing of hoping for success to the very end has brought me some most extraordinary experiences.

There was, for example, my experience with a master buck on January 4, 1914. How could I ever forget the day and the hour? A man might forget the day she gave him her heart, and all that; but the day an old stag came his way? Oh, never!

For two weeks I had been deer hunting on my Carolina plantation. Several friends were visiting me, and I was trying to give them shots. They had their shots, and they had perfectly illustrated how easy it is to miss deer.

Sunset came on my last day, and nary a deer had invaded my bailiwick. I had to leave at nine o'clock the following morning. The season for me was over, and I had not killed my buck, which, for a confirmed deer hunter, is a matter akin to disgrace.

I could not sleep well that night; and as I lay awake I heard a rain set in, coming down as it does in the South, as if all the water in the world would have to fall before that rain ended. My rather hopeless

dream of getting out at daylight for a last chance appeared more hopeless than ever.

Day broke on a sodden and misty world. It was still raining. Remorsefully I packed my things, trying to comfort myself with such noble sentiments as that, after all, bucks are entitled to their lives. But I knew I was fooling myself, and that if a buck should come within range I should overlook all his inherent rights. On my door came a soft knock. In came my faithful Negro woodsman, Prince, with wood to replenish the fire. My bad luck throughout my trip had bowed down his heart. It was really a personal and massive grief to him.

"Well," I said, keeping a stiff upper lip, "we'll get him next time."

"Why not now, Cap'n?" Prince answered. "It's yo' las' chance."

"I have an hour and a half," I said. "Do you have a hunch?"

"I dreamed about the Little Corner las' night."

"All right. I'll go to the Pond Stand. Turn the hounds loose at the Thickhead in fifteen minutes."

In a few minutes I was out of the house. For a mile and a half I sloshed through the rain. The weeping woods seemed dead of all life. At last I came to the spot I sought. The wind had come up, slashing the rain in my face and making the tall pines rock and mourn.

Why had I come out on this fool's errand? Why should a buck run to me here when he could go in a thousand other directions? Why should I take another beating? Hadn't I had enough?

The wind and the rain made it impossible for me to hear the hounds. Water streamed into my eyes. If a man would only love with the same insane zeal with which he hunts, there would be many happy girls and women in the world, I thought.

Now what was that yonder through the rain? Horns? Yes. Heading my way? Yes. Incredible as it seemed, here came a ten-pointer as straight for my stand as if I were a magician who had charmed him. Within three minutes the whole thing was over. There lay my stag, as fine as I had ever killed.

But someone is coming through the brush. Who could it be? Why, good Prince himself. Where are the dogs? They are coming, but he had outrun them.

Faith, superstition, persistence—call it what you will; but I know that the luck of the last chance has, often and often, taken my empty cup of bitterness and disappointment and brimmed it with the wine of achievement. I can recall killing not fewer than sixteen stags on last chances, the latest one falling on New Year's Day of 1936.

I never believe in giving up hope; if you do that, you lose the game. Of course you may lose it anyhow; but if you quit too soon, losing it

may be your fault. If you stay with the business to the very end, you will at least have the feeling that you did all that any hunter could do. The actual shooting of game is usually a thing of a moment; the only question is whether you have patience to wait for the moment. Often the last moment is *the* moment.

I remember that on a cold January day I had put a much discouraged friend on a last deer crossing. He had not seen a deer in a ten days' hunt. It was near sundown, and an icy wind was sweeping out of the north. For the greater part of the drive there seemed nothing doing; but in the last five minutes the woods rang with the shouting of the drivers and the wild clamor of the hounds. Finally, after a grand milling back and forth, they headed straight for my friend. I was close enough to see what was going his way. It was only a 12-point stag, a famous old personality in our parts. He was running easily, presenting a perfect shot.

I listened for the gun, but I listened in vain. The buck escaped. On returning to the car, I found my friend huddled disconsolately in it, unaware of what had been going on and of the wonderful chance he had missed. I hardly had the heart to tell him; yet I did, in the hope that he would mend his ways. In fact, the charm of hunting is due largely to this same dramatic element of uncertainty; a few moments more of caution and endurance will often separate defeat from victory.

One perfect November morning I went grouse hunting here in the mountains of southern Pennsylvania. It was back in the days when four grouse filled the bag limit. I drove my car as far as I could up an old trail, leaving it on the edge of a clearing. Up into the mountain I followed a dim and dewy trail which led by gullies full of wild grapes, raspberry vines, and greenbriers and flanked by thickets of dogwood. It was ideal grouse country, and I knew the birds were there. But for four hours I hunted without flushing a single grouse.

I naturally began to feel that it was a bridge game in which I simply did not hold the hands. As I had to be home at noon, I hunted back toward the car; and when within a few hundred yards of it, came back into the same old trail up which I had gone. For some reason, even when I came within sight of the car and was traveling the same road over which I had already passed, I kept on my guard. Game moves; and if it isn't here when you go up, why, it may be here when you come down.

When within a hundred yards of the car, and just as I was stepping over the last log that had fallen across the trail, an old cock grouse hurtled out of a little white pine right over my head. Gentlemen, I missed him. And it went hard with me, for I thought I had been given my last chance and had muffed it.

I opened my gun idly, uncertain whether to take out the one shell remaining or whether to slip in another. For some reason I put in another. As I closed the breech two more grouse got up out of some grapevines right beside the trail. Boys, I made a double. You know how you'd feel to do that after four hours of not seeing a thing. Before retrieving the birds, I reloaded, whereupon two more grouse zoomed out of those same grapevines, making off up the mountain through a heavy growth of tall dead chestnuts. I missed one and killed one.

Well, I thought, that is the greatest piece of last-chance luck I ever had. Heaven knows, it should have been over. But for some reason I loaded my gun again. As if they were just waiting for me to get ready, two more grouse tore out of that grapevine smother. These were headed eastward, and they were going as if they had to make a transatlantic crossing in record time. As one of these fell at the first barrel, I did not shoot at the other. I had my day's limit.

Here had been seven grouse—probably a whole family. I had never jumped so many before out of one grapevine. After the old sentry in the pine had left for parts unknown, the others got up in pairs, timing their getting up perfectly to my advantage. And it was all over in five minutes—and those the last.

It will be foolish for anyone to claim that luck is sure to come; but it may, and it is a great mistake not to give it a chance to arrive. I have always been a strong believer in the principle that if you stay with your game long enough it is likely to be yours.

I remember one year when I had been after a flock of wild turkeys for ten days. Repeatedly I saw the birds; and just as repeatedly they made me out too soon. Then came the last day of the year—and of my vacation. I repaired to the sunny Carolina pinelands about three o'clock in the afternoon, in a region where I knew these great birds roosted. For nearly two hours I watched and called, but I saw and heard nothing.

The sun got low, suffusing the lonely forest with golden lights. There was not a breath stirring. The last day it was, and the last hour.

Just as the sun began to burn down into the tops of the pines I saw a big gobbler fly up to roost. He was on a bare limb of a huge leaning pine, three hundred yards away. I didn't dare move. The pine stood solitary, in that it towered above the second-growth timber near at hand. I could hardly believe that the big bird would spend the night so exposed, for turkeys like to camouflage themselves by bunches of moss, mistletoe, or the like, and often sleep completely hidden in the dense tops of pines.

From that wary old veteran I never took my eyes. The sun went

down. Twilight came. I would have to stalk him. I must let the light fade, but not too much. Such a stalk is a very sporting proposition, for almost every chance is against the hunter. It is largely a question of catfooting it and of timing the light exactly.

When the afterglow faded, I crept back over the pine needles for a hundred yards; then I stole forward in the dusk, my approach shielded by some young pines. Before I reached the great tree, the stars had begun to appear. A night mist was rising.

Without looking up, I sneaked toward the leaning pine. When I had almost reached its base, I looked upward. I saw the limb on which the gobbler had been, but he was not there. My heart sank. Here was a last chance, and it seemed gone.

Then I reasoned the thing out: that old tom had not been scared, but he must have decided that he had chosen too naked a place for his night's rest. Perhaps he had dropped into the top of one of the smaller pines near by. These I began to study. I almost shot at a bunch of cones; I almost blasted away a heavy crooked limb. But in looking for a turkey in a tree, the hunter should look for what does not belong there. At last, with the light barely glimmering, I made out his long tail in the dense top of a young pine, almost directly under the limb to which he had first flown. I made my shot and retrieved a magnificent bird that weighed twenty-one pounds.

Often, especially in duck shooting, it happens that something has upset the routine of the birds. Flights which are supposed to appear at a certain hour do not show up until later. I have known some men to retire in disgust from blinds without having a shot, whereas their comrades, who waited, brought home the limit. And while a man may try to comfort himself by saying that what he really enjoys is the outing, not the killing, yet I for one like to bring home something more than disappointment and hunger. It pays to wait, for waiting frequently brings the opportunity that leaving can never afford.

Once, in the time of a great freshet in the delta of the Santee, I had a strange experience with quail. The lowlands and marshes for many miles were deeply flooded. All the wild things had come to the mainland of my plantation, which faces the delta.

I was hunting the broom-sedge fields along the river with two friends. We were surprised to hear a great clamor from what were apparently countless quail, collected on a broom-grass point that jutted out in the freshet tide.

When we went there we must have flushed well over a hundred birds, most of which headed for a pine ridge two hundred yards out across the freshet tide. On that mighty rise we got only two birds. One of my friends declared that the day's shooting was over. I advised the

other to stay with me, for if we waited, the birds would likely recross the water for the mainland.

This they eventually did—after an hour and a half. Streaming across the yellow tide, they alighted in the broom sedge, and then we had as fine quail shooting as I have ever enjoyed. Nor were we taking advantage of flood conditions for our sport, for the birds had plenty of cover and no unusual handicap.

As I have watched hunters, the successful and the unsuccessful, I have come to believe that many of the latter have themselves to blame, and that a standard reason for failure is the tendency to give up too soon. Stay in the game until the end; then, if you lose, there are no regrets. I know that my entire life as a hunter has been greatly influenced by a faith in the possibility of last chances.

KNOW THE WILDERNESS

by Archibald Rutledge

A MAN'S full enjoyment of hunting, his ability to get all there really is in it—and there's a lot aside from the mere killing of game—depends a great deal on a genuine understanding not alone of the game he is after, but of nature in general. It is fair and reasonable to regard the hunter's world as distinct from the everyday world in which all of us try to make a living. It is a brave new world, and a man should know a good deal about it before he enters it.

A wild bull of Bashan in a boudoir is a mere circumstance compared to a brash and ignorant hunter who bursts into the quiet and ancient realm of nature, not knowing why he is there except to kill; not certain where he is going, what to expect, what not to shoot—in short, not knowing how to behave. Kipling's rough old sergeant, referring to a lady he has known, says, "She learned me the way to behave." In a sense, nature is a lady; and if we understand her character, she can wholesomely discipline all of us.

But the main trouble is that tyro hunters, by being uninformed, miss most of what is best in outdoor sport. They lose the pleasure that comes from certain knowledge. They remind me of the old Indian chief who went into a Christian church and had pointed out to him the pulpit. "Ugh," he muttered. "I see bullpit. But where bull?"

Perhaps in no other realm does a lack of knowledge so handicap a man as in the world of nature. By inheritance it is his; he has a title to it. As a rule, however, he has a little information concerning his grand legacy. He may see it, but he does not comprehend it.

Possibly in an earlier day there was some excuse for a hunter's knowing little about nature. But now there are so many admirable books and magazines about hunting that one has only to read in order to learn. And if it does not appeal to him to acquire knowledge in that way, God gave him eyes and ears and a tongue with which to ask questions of those who have attentively traveled farther along the wilderness road.

All my life I have had to do with hunters. Rarely have I been irked

by a man who misses game if he really knows what he is shooting at. What troubles me is the man with the gun or the rifle who will do such a thing as a visiting hunter once did: shoot a skunk on a deer stand. Before I reached him, the prevailing odor made it easy for me to figure what had happened. Yet he was quite proud, telling me that he had killed a little black-and-white bear. "But I never realized before," he said, "how strong a game scent a bear has."

It is amazing how many hunters cannot tell the age or identify the sex, or even the species of the creatures they kill. I have known more than one man to shoot at a turkey buzzard, convinced that it was a wild turkey; to shoot a wild turkey hen with a beard, claiming that only a gobbler wears a beard; to call an immature bald eagle a golden eagle merely because it had not yet developed a white head; to call a mink an otter; to call a redhead a canvasback, a black duck a mallard.

All of us, of course, make mistakes about nature. Though we live with her a whole lifetime, we are likely to remain but children in her kindergarten, having turned only a few pages of her huge, mysterious book. Surely it robs the hunter of half his genuine sport if he does not know what all of us can easily learn about the woods, the plains, the mountains, the marshes, and their inhabitants. Without the freedom that real knowledge alone confers, one is no more equipped to enjoy himself than is a monk at a frolic. He may, indeed, kill game; but he remains a stranger to real sport. He is an alien, something of an intruder in a world in which he should rightfully belong.

It may be said with some truth that in the old days only hunters hunted. To be a woodsman then called for a considerable degree of manhood. In general, the larger animals had not learned the craven fear of man that they now generally manifest. They were far more widely distributed, and they were everywhere more numerous. For example, old Meshach Browning, the mightiest hunter of western Maryland a hundred years ago, sent his wife from their cabin to the spring at the foot of the hill. "She killed," he tells us, "three rattlesnakes, and she jumped four wolves out of the bushes."

Guns and ammunition were scarce and of the homemade variety; there were practically no transportation facilities. Considerable hardship, privation, and danger at all times attended the life of the wilderness hunter. As a rule, only those who were by nature and training real woodsmen ever took to the woods. Boone, Crockett, and the four famous Whetzel brothers illustrate what I mean.

Formerly a hunter had to be a frontiersman and an explorer. But now that hunting has been made easy by good roads, cars, and modern firearms, all kinds of people of both sexes and all ages arm themselves with death-dealing weapons, of which they have little or no un-

derstanding, and march forth to slay whatever appears, be it bird, animal, or human. I recall on one occasion, walking through the snowy open woods during the deer season in Pennsylvania, getting a considerable setback as I approached an old road. For proper identification I had on a red hat and a scarlet sweater. Yet as I came sauntering along in full view, no fewer than nine high-powered rifles in the trembling hands of boys, women, and men were leveled at me, though my resemblance to an old buck must have been remote indeed.

The great trouble is that unless people really know the wilderness and its inhabitants a man may look to them, in their ignorance and excitement, as much like a deer as any other object of the landscape. And if there is anything which is well calculated to take the edge off hunting, it is the feeling that you are in an area where there are a lot of other people, fully armed and out to kill, who may see in you the deer or the bear that they want. I once actually knew a man to shoot a bony old white mule, convinced that he had secured a grand trophy in an albino stag; and another gent who blasted down a brindled cow, presumably believing that any animal that has horns is a deer.

As every experienced woodsman knows, there is much luck in hunting, but it has never seemed to me that what we call sport is necessarily determined by what we bring home. Of course, when a man is out merely for meat, he is naturally disgusted if he comes home empty-handed. But he ought to be able to enjoy more than killing.

I used to know an old fisherman who said he enjoyed the times when the fish weren't biting, for then he had time to see and to hear all kinds of interesting things that he would miss if he were too busy hauling in the trout or the bass. If one is ignorant of nature, he is capable of seeing little in the natural world about him; or if he does see it, he is unable to understand it or to interpret it. But if he really knows nature, regardless of what luck may enable him to bring home in his hand, he can always bring back much in his head and in his heart.

It may seem strange, but many so-called old woodsmen may by no means be safe guides to a comprehension of the ways of nature. For one thing, they are prone to superstition; and if an error has been handed down to them, they will stubbornly maintain it. You know how one will insist that a copperhead is a rattlesnake pilot, and that whenever the former is seen, the latter will soon appear on his trail. You no doubt have heard what I have many a time: a deer hunter still questioning whether a buck really drops his horns. One has insisted that the strange, shrill cry of the wood duck is made by its wings, and that the ruffed grouse drums with his voice. Some believe that each segment of a rattler's rattle, each point on an antler, represents exactly a year's growth. Others declare that all hawks are vermin and

should be killed. And they are among the hardest people in the world to convince that they are wrong. People who should know and do not are usually confirmed in their false beliefs.

On the other hand, all of us have a right to mistrust the opinions of these armchair biologists and museum scientists. They seem to learn from books only; and when they write, their work is made up largely of quotations from other men. Recently a Government scientist took me to task for saying that a wild turkey can fly great distances. I think he can fly as far as he has to, and on many an occasion I have seen one fly more than a mile. But he said that a turkey, being a gallinaceous bird, would get heated up if he flew more than a hundred yards. I guess the wild turkey has not read the book that says he is gallinaceous; therefore he just keeps on flying.

A ruffed grouse is in the same classification; yet I have seen one hurtle across a valley more than a mile wide. In fact, all of us should be very careful about saying what these wild things can do and cannot do. They are full of surprises; and if they were not, few would survive. You cannot pigeonhole their behavior any more than you can that of a human being.

Every hunter should have a good knowledge of nature. It may be acquired in part by observation and experience, in part by conversations with real hunters, in part by reading good hunting books and magazines. We should, I think, be careful about trusting as final truth the reports of a single observer, however accurate. Nature is very variable, and all of us have different experiences with the same kind of bird or animal. The accumulation of many facts established by many competent observers will bring us to the truth. The whole consideration amounts to this: hunting is serious, and should be gone about intelligently.

"But," the boys will ask, "what are some of these pleasures that a true knowledge of nature will afford? Be definite."

Surely there is a natural satisfaction, even a delight, in being able to recognize in the wilds the trees, the grasses, the vines, the bushes, the wildflowers, especially as these are related to wildlife. The true grouse hunter knows that he can find his game at feeding time where the greenbrier berries are and the bittersweet, the fox grape, and the dogwood.

Any kind of triumph in hunting is incomplete unless the hunter fully appreciates the background of the wild creature he has brought to bay. I have seen a man slay a noble stag with no more elation than if he were killing an ox. He never appreciated what such an animal suggests: the shaggy wilderness; his incredible wariness; the huge and thoughtful night in which he freely wanders; his mysterious mating in

the moonlight of autumn; his rugged and tireless strength; the great escapes he has made. A whitetail stag invests the woods with wonder, a wonder that increases with one's knowledge of nature.

But I will not try to list all the pleasure which that knowledge adds to our lives. I could not. However, if one has close hunting pals, perhaps his own sons, it certainly improves his standing with them to have a true understanding and appreciation of nature.

HOW DO YOU RATE WITH YOUR GUIDE?

by C. Ingals Fisher

MANY times during the years that I have been running hunting camps in the Adirondacks, I have had sportsmen ask me, "What do the guides really think of us?" And having been on both sides of the fence, I can appreciate this question. In years past I have hunted with guides, and more recently I have acted as a guide. Consequently I believe I know how both feel.

Now it is only human nature that the more a person likes you the more he will do for you. Guides, after all, are only human. So, assuming that you have a good guide worthy of the name for your hunting trip, check the answers to the following situations and find out for yourself how you really rate with him.

SITUATION No. 1. You have been hunting all day with a party and are following your guide back to camp. Suddenly at a sharp turn he leaves the regular trail and heads in a new direction. What would you say?

1. This isn't the way we came out this morning. 2. You missed the trail back there at the turn. 3. Why don't we follow the trail? We are liable to get lost this way. 4. This must be the best way to camp, isn't it?

SITUATION No. 2. You have been helping make a drive and suddenly realize that you can no longer hear the other drivers and do not know just where they or the watchers are. What would you do?

1. Start running back in the direction from which you had come. 2. Sit down where you are and be quiet, and when you are sure the drive is over fire three shots and wait for an answer. 3. Fire a shot, run a hundred yards ahead, fire another shot, and continue to do this until you hear an answering shot. 4. Keep going and continue barking as you have been doing.

SITUATION No. 3. Your guide has placed you on watch at the edge of a clearing and shortly after the drive has started a doe and a buck appear about 150 yards away at the other end of the clearing. You shoot twice at the buck, but he is too far off and runs away unscathed. What would you say to the guides when they arrive?

1. Why don't you drive them closer? 2. Why didn't you put me on watch at the other end of the clearing? 3. I missed a nice buck that time. 4. This gun is no good. I should have had that buck, as it was an easy shot.

SITUATION No. 4. The first three men that your guide puts on watch are in open hardwood and have good visibility. But when the guide puts you on watch as last man, he places you in a thick spot where you can see only a little way. However, to the right and to the left of you it is quite open. What would you do?

1. Stay in the place where the guide left you. 2. After the guide has left, move over to the right on a little knoll where there is better visibility. 3. Ask your guide to place you on watch farther in toward the drive, where you can see better. 4. Follow your guide over to the left and watch there in a little clearing.

SITUATION No. 5. If your guide asked you how much hunting you had done and it is your first time hunting deer, what would you say?

1. I have done a lot of bird hunting, and I don't think any deer can run as fast as a bird can fly. 2. Just brush an old buck by me, and I'll show you what I can do. 3. I have never yet missed a buck. 4. I don't know a darned thing about deer hunting, and I will sure need your help.

SITUATION No. 6. On a mild day off in the big timber in company with your guide you wound a buck several miles from your base camp. You are still trailing the buck about a half hour before dusk when your guide says, "We had better make camp here and trail him in the morning." What would you do?

1. Try to trail the buck farther, so as to attempt to get a shot at it before dark. 2. Tell your guide to forget the wounded buck and suggest going as far as possible toward your base camp in the remaining light. 3. Agree with your guide and say, "All right, what can I do to help you?" 4. Suggest to your guide that he get camp ready while you go off still-hunting until dark.

SITUATION No. 7. Upon awaking in the morning you find that your guide is drying out your socks and shoes before the fire. What would you do?

1. Give him a tip for this small additional service? 2. Ask him if he would do that for you every morning. 3. Tell him not to bother doing that, as you don't mind wearing wet socks and shoes. 4. Make arrangements in the future to dry your own socks and shoes.

SITUATION No. 8. You are sitting around the campfire in the evening with your guide after a hard day's unsuccessful hunting. What would you talk about?

1. Through leading questions, endeavor to get the guide to talk about

his experiences and learn from him all you can about wildlife. 2. Try to analyze and get your guide to talk about why the day's hunt has been so unsuccessful. 3. Give your guide an educational talk on the stock market and how it operates. 4. Relate to your guide about the wonderful country you hunted last year.

SITUATION No. 9. You are one of a party of five hunters and two guides. On a drive some distance from camp an extra driver is needed, and upon drawing lots it falls upon you to help the guides drive. In making the drive, you get pretty well soaked while crawling through dense evergreens that are laden with wet snow. What would you do?

1. Ask one of the guides to take you back to camp. 2. Offer to go back to camp yourself, although you are not sure of the way. 3. Refuse to complain about your predicament, but ask the guides to let you keep driving the rest of the day so that you may keep warm. 4. Tell the rest of the party that it is the last time you are going to drive and that in the future the guides can do it.

SITUATION No. 10. There is fresh snow on the ground, and it is very cold. Your guide has placed you on your watch point, where you have been what seems an eternity. Finally you get so cold that you feel you have to do something or run the risk of frostbite. What would you do?

1. Quietly retrace your steps to the rear, keeping out of range of those on the other stands until you reach a point where you can run around and get warm without interfering with the drive. 2. Collect some dry twigs and brush and build a fire at your watch point so that you can get warm. 3. Leave a note at your stand saying that you are going back to camp to get some warmer clothes. 4. Jump up and down and run around your stand in a small circle.

The correct answers to the situations are as follows:

Situation No. 1—4

Situation No. 2—2

Situation No. 3—3

Situation No. 4—1

Situation No. 5—4

Situation No. 6—3

Situation No. 7—4

Situation No. 8—1

Situation No. 9—3

Situation No. 10—1

If you average 90 per cent or over, you are a grand person to hunt with and have an unusual amount of good common sense. Any guide will find it a real pleasure to hunt with you.

If you score 80 per cent, you are still above the average sportsman and any guide will be mighty glad to have you along and will do all in his power to make your hunt successful.

If you score 70 per cent, you are still better than the average and no guide would ever kick if all the sportsmen were like you.

If you score 60 per cent, you are probably about average. Don't be surprised if your guide barks at you sometimes—maybe you need it.

Once again remember that the answers to these situations are based upon the assumption that you have an expert guide, one who is universally recognized as such. Some that claim to be guides are not worthy of the title.

In the first situation we have a common occurrence—the guide takes a short cut on the return trip to camp. Don't think for a minute that any guide is going to take a tired party of hunters on a longer or more difficult route on the return trip. You can bet your boots he is going the shortest, easiest, and quickest way back. In fact, the chances are pretty good that your guide may have laid out the trail you are following. Don't be foolish and make some inane remark to the effect that he has missed the trail.

In Situation No. 2 you are momentarily lost, and the best possible thing for you to do is to stay right where you are. If you do this, the guides will have little difficulty in finding you; they know the territory that the drive took in and that you can't be very far off. On the other hand, to start running back would be foolish, as you would probably get even more completely turned around and thus harder to find. Of course, to run ahead and keep shooting, as well as to keep going and barking, would be foolish. Such a procedure would, in all probability, either lead you farther astray or spoil the drive.

All guides and sportsmen are familiar with a situation similar to No. 3. If you miss a buck, own up to it. Above all, don't alibi. There is nothing that irks a guide more than to hear some sportsman belly-ache that his gun is no good, that his ammunition is bad, or that he was in the wrong spot. In fact, a few hunters have a habit of blaming everybody and everything except themselves. It certainly is no crime to miss a buck. There is an old saying among guides of the North that "If you have never missed a buck, you have never shot at many."

Situation No. 4 is a condition which, no doubt, puzzles the green hunter. Why should a guide place him in a thicket when the other watchers are in the open? If he believes in his guide, he will stay where he is put and not ask any questions.

On many drives there is often only one runway which affords concealment between two localities. A wary old buck will usually take advantage of all the cover possible to sneak out of danger. Therefore, if your guide puts you in a thick spot, you should congratulate yourself on probably having one of the best stands. The other watchers in the open, true, can see more, but their stands are not a bit better than yours and probably not as good. Remember, your guide is not placing you on your watches haphazardly, but is putting you there on the basis of

years of experience. If you want to get the most out of your hunt, have faith in his judgment.

Some hunters, as in Situation No. 5, seem to think that they can fool the guide as to their past experience. If you do not know anything about hunting, don't be afraid to say so. Then you will find your guide ready and willing to help you. On the other hand, if you try to bluff your way along, he will know you for what you are in about thirty seconds. Once you lose his respect and he considers you one of these armchair know-it-all hunters, he will treat you as such.

Situation No. 6 or one similar to it often confronts a guide. Anyone who has spent much time in the woods knows that a real guide or woodsman plans on making camp while there is light enough left to see. Experienced woodsmen know that one of the easiest ways to get one's eyes put out or to break a leg is to try to travel through the woods in the dark.

Under the existing circumstances, the only smart thing for you to do is to help your guide make camp. Getting firewood, making a bough bed, and preparing some kind of shelter is going to keep you both plenty busy in what little light you have left. The less waiting on you require, the more respect your guide will have for you.

To try to trail the wounded buck farther for a shot or to go off still-hunting by yourself is foolish at this time. Either way you'd probably end up trying to stumble back to camp in the darkness, with a good chance of injuring yourself in the process. To suggest to your guide that you give up the wounded buck would certainly put you in the doghouse. It is an unwritten law among real sportsmen and guides that no wild animal be allowed to suffer a lingering death if it is humanly possible to prevent it. Therefore you would plan on following the buck in the morning.

In Situation No. 7 we have an example of a guide taking care of an inexperienced hunter. The fact that your guide sees fit to dry out your socks and shoes should be hint enough to you to do it yourself in the future. And don't try to be tough and pretend that you don't mind wet socks and shoes. You will not make any impression on the guide by doing this. On the contrary, he will consider you a darned fool heading for a lot of raw blisters—which he will probably have to nurse back in camp.

Above all, don't copy one certain sportsman who gave his guide a tip for drying out his things. Remember, there is a lot of difference between your guide and a valet, and he doesn't want to be considered as one. A guide thinks of his job as a profession.

In No. 8, of course, the thing to do is to get your guide to talk about himself and learn about wildlife from him. If you can earn your guide's

respect and liking, he will work like a beaver for you. If your day's hunt has not been successful, don't dwell on it; your guide has done his best, and it is all water over the dam. Furthermore, don't go into detail about what marvelous hunting you had in some other section of the country; your guide's reaction will be to wonder why the devil you didn't go there this time.

Above all, don't treat your guide as an illiterate and try to give him educational lectures on remote subjects. You may have more money, degrees, and titles than he has; but if you were in his shoes and had his job to do, could you do it as well?

The ability to take it without complaint, as outlined in Situation 9, is one of the prime requisites of those who go into the woods. And yet it is neither good judgment nor fair to your companions not to take care of yourself. A sick man in camp is an added responsibility, and it may be necessary for one of the party to stay with him. Therefore, if you were very wet, the best thing for you to have done was to keep moving until you returned to camp.

To ask one of the guides to take you back to camp when there are only two in the first place would tend to spoil the hunting for the rest of the party. In such weather to offer to go back to camp by yourself when you are soaked and not sure of the way is foolhardy. If you should become lost and were not found in a hurry, your chances of pulling through would be mighty slim.

During cold weather to remain immobile on a watch point is sometimes real torture, as outlined in our last situation. The thing to do, of course, if the cold is unbearable, is to go to the rear, where you can jump around and get warm. But to stomp around your stand or to build a fire will certainly not please your guide. After all, he has been working hard to bring a buck within range.

Time and again I have followed a buck to within a few rods of a watcher, only to find that the stag had stopped short and had headed off in another direction. And invariably when I arrived at the watch point I would find where the hunter had trampled down a large area, while in one instance one of them even had a fire going. Such actions as these are going to discourage your guide. If he feels that you haven't any more respect for his effort or for a buck's slyness than this, he will probably lose interest. He will figure that if you aren't stomping around on your watch point you are probably reading, eating your lunch, fidgeting, counting squirrels, or sleeping.

To leave a note saying that you are going back to camp to get warmer clothes would indeed be poor judgment for several reasons. You might head right into the middle of the territory that your party plans to hunt next. And not knowing your whereabouts, they would

hesitate to continue. Moreover, in cold weather it would mean that one of the guides would have to follow you to camp not only to see that you got there all right but also to bring you back to the next hunting area.

When you go on your next hunting trip you will, of course, want to make the most of it. And to make your trip really pay dividends you will need your guide's wholehearted co-operation. Treat him with the respect that you would any professional man. Above all, don't order him around. You will find that he has a wealth of information at his fingertips; but since it is knowledge that has taken years of experience to acquire, it probably won't be yours for the asking.

Degrees, titles, and money mean little to a guide. All of them together will not help you one tenth as much as will good common sense, a readiness to co-operate, and a spirit of true sportsmanship. Just remember that once you have earned your guide's respect and liking he will do everything possible for you. The chances of your trip being a real success will be increased a thousandfold and, what is more important, you will have found a true friend for years to come.

GREAT MISSES I HAVE MADE

by *Archibald Rutledge*

FOR many years I have been telling the boys of the big bucks I have killed, the wild turkeys I have slain, the grouse and ringnecks and quail that have been blasted by my blunderbuss. And, strange to say, I have been telling the truth. But my soul feels sinful; dark secrets lurk in it. The reason for this apprehension is that I have been confining my tales to what I did, keeping artfully suppressed what I did not do.

I have made some famous misses, and about these I have kept mighty quiet. About some of them, until now, I am the only living soul who knows a thing. But now I am coming out in the open. I am going to confess; and I do this not so much to clear my own conscience as to try to account for my failures, and by so doing to keep others of the outdoor fraternity from making the same dumb mistakes I have made.

I do not consider it exactly sinful for a man to miss occasionally; but to make a great miss is always a crime. At times I have been a marvelous misser; that is, I have lost chances that I know will never come again. For example, there was the case of the buck of Wildcat Branch. I had him dead to rights; but when I got through shooting at him, he remained in the same unimpaired condition as he had been before I started the war.

True, it was raining, and I mean raining—a black December down-pour—and I had been out in it for four hours. The crown of my hunting hat was a puddle, and water from this affluent source coursed down my back, over my face, into my eyes. A wind was blowing. I had none of the advantages which the hunter has who, on a deer crossing, is comfortable and has perfect functioning of his eyes and ears.

To tell the truth, I was about licked. When a hunter is licked, he should go home; if he doesn't, what happened to me is liable to happen to him.

The deer drive was coming up Wildcat Branch toward me; at least I had been given to understand that it would. But I had my doubts. It seemed to me that I had been standing there and taking the weather

since Adam was a baby. All I could hear was rain and wind. The glue on the pad of my gun melted, and the pad fell into a puddle.

I lost my alertness. I began to feel the wicked heresy that I didn't care if I killed a buck or not. That's bad. If you can't keep killer-minded, don't stay in the woods. To tell the truth, I felt that I was afloat and that at any moment I would either have to begin to swim or would drown.

"Phooey!" I thought. "Who ever heard of hunting on a day like this? I believe all the other fellows have gone home and are even now having their toddies in front of a roaring fire. Baloney! There aren't any deer in these woods."

Immediately before me was an old causeway that spanned the swamp known as Wildcat Branch. The man who had posted me at that spot told me that it was a favorite buck run and that if one came out he would cross the road not more than twenty yards from me. I had heard that sort of thing before and had no faith in the assurance. In fact, I didn't have much faith in anything except the belief that all deer hunters are crazy. For the tenth time I took off my hat to squeeze out the waterfalls. Then it happened!

A ten-point stag had crossed the road exactly where I had been told he would cross. He had come within twenty yards of me. I had never seen him. When I did see him I had my gun under my arm and both hands full of hat and water. I meant to drop my hat and get my gun up. Instead I dropped my gun and got my hat sighted on the deer. By the time I did the right thing the old buck was going fast and far; yet I should have killed him. I did not. Away he went into the swamp, his tail flaunting derisively.

That was that. I was not only wet and cold; I was licked. I had made a great miss, likewise a great mess of things. Why was this so? We ought to learn from our mistakes. Well, I had tried to kill one of the craftiest of all American big-game creatures when I was more busy thinking of other things than I was of the matter in hand. To kill a stag, a hunter has to devote to the business his undivided attention. If he is the least lacking in interest or alertness, he may fizzle the whole affair, just as I did.

Then there was the matter of the lone gobbler of the Pasture. While I was home one Christmas for a hunt I was cautioned by my father, on our first drive, to be on the lookout for an old man with a beard—the same being a huge lone gobbler that he had lately seen several times in that particular deer drive.

"Son," he said, "the chance of seeing him here is so good that it might be a wise plan to load one barrel with buckshot and one with

turkey shot. Be sure to remember in which barrel you have which load."

All right. The idea appealed. I usually get as much thrill out of killing a fine wild turkey as I do out of tripping up an old stag. Dutifully I loaded my gun for both chances. Whether a buck or a turkey came, I was ready. But was I?

On this occasion also a rain was falling, but just a little sleety drizzle. I was warm and dry. Yet the sleet made an insistent and continuous sound on the dead leaves that still clung to the scrub oaks. I could hear nothing walking or running. After a time something made me look back—just one of those curious hunches that a hunter occasionally has.

Behind me in a white sandy road, fifty yards away, stood my gobbler. He must have walked past me without my seeing him, and even now he did not see me. He was still within good gunshot. Yet I knew that at my first motion he would be on his way, in that fast and furtive manner characteristic of his breed. I knew that I had to get my gun up and to shoot at about the same instant—just as a professional ballplayer scoops up a grounder and sizzles it to first almost in the same motion.

I got the gun up and the sight on the great bird before he moved; but, old-timers, I didn't shoot. That is, I didn't shoot then. I had forgotten in which barrel my turkey shot were chambered! I had a furious brain storm while my finger edged from one trigger to the other. In a couple of seconds the gobbler took a little run to fly. I let drive and was certain I had it on him. But he evidently didn't think so, or didn't care. He quit that country for keeps. It was another great miss.

I had shot at that gobbler with buckshot. Now buckshot will, of course, kill a turkey if you hit him, but one of the most difficult feats in all woodcraft is to kill a wild turkey with buckshot. The reason is simple: the shot are few, they fly wide and handsome, and they don't pattern for a turkey's body.

To show how wide buckshot may fly, I might say that on one occasion I shot a buck running broadside, killing him instantly. Upon examining him, I found that one shot had gone through his head, above the eye, and the only other one that hit him had broken his tail! It sounds like Munchausen, but it's true.

How shall I account for missing that old gobbler? I had had full warning that I might expect him; when I saw him, he was within range and standing still. The trouble was that I had forgotten what I had in my gun. While it may happen that this kind of mistake may not prove fatal, yet it should. So careful are some old hunters about this matter that they always examine their loads when they are about to begin operations.

I once gave an old pinelander some high-grade buckshot shells. After having posted some other standers, I passed his way again. He had all the shells unloaded! He was examining them down to the powder to see whether some newfangled city slickers who load buckshot shells might not make him miss a great chance.

I have killed plenty of game with loads not designed for them; but, especially when hunting big game, where the chances are likely to be few and of a major degree of importance, a man can't be too careful to be certain that his gun is properly loaded. Many a famous opportunity to make sporting history has been lost because a gun wasn't loaded at all!

In the old days of the muzzle-loader a hunter sometimes rammed home a fine load of powder and then neglected to put any shot in his gun. I actually knew a man who had done this to shoot at a flock of about thirty wild turkeys that came right up to him. Naturally he never cut a feather, and he could not understand it at all until he found the turkey shot that was supposed to have been wadded safely in the gun reposing instead in a saucer on the table beside which he had loaded (or half loaded) his gun the night before.

I know there are some men who claim that they don't mind missing game. I don't believe them. Having failed, they are excusing themselves by saying that they really didn't care; that it doesn't matter; that it is, after all, such a pity to kill a lovely wild thing. Alibis—that's what they are offering. They are all broken up over having lost fine chances, but they won't be honest about it. As soon as they get through talking to their friends in that airy, noble, nonchalant fashion, they will go behind the clubhouse and kick themselves and curse themselves. No good hunter likes to miss.

A man in North Carolina has invented a kicking machine. When you feel the need of what it has to offer, you walk up, face about, stoop over slightly, and throw the lever. Every hunting club should install one for the boys who make light of making great misses.

Many years ago I saw a man with an 8-gauge gun miss a herd of eleven deer, all running gently together, at a distance of not more than thirty feet. When the smoke of battle had cleared away, I began to look for deer littering the landscape in every direction. Nary a deer. Nary a drop of blood. And do you know how that guy tried to pass it off? He said that he shot "just to see the pretty little creatures run"! Prince of prevaricators, he really tried to kill them all. He had joined me eagerly enough in my vain search for all he had slain; and when there weren't any, he said he hadn't even tried! Some hunters, having achieved a colossal miss, claim that they shot just "to turn" the game

toward some other sportsman. Generous souls! I mean they are generous with their fibbing.

To me it matters little if I miss a quail, or a Wilson's snipe, or a woodcock. Even to miss a mallard or a teal is trivial stuff. But I hate to miss an old cock grouse. Of course where there is much snap-shooting at this grand bird, there must be a proportion of misses. But when the bird is a beauty and the chance is fair, it slays me to muff.

It slew me to miss a great old cock that many of us who had been after for three seasons had christened the Herd Bull. He lived (and still may live, as far as I am concerned) in the fragrant wilds of Orquic Valley, in the mountains of southern Pennsylvania. In the heart of that valley there is a great swamp, drained by a fine trout stream. From either bank of this stream stretch away acres of wild roses, greenbriers, alders, little pines, smothers of wild grapes, with here and there a towering hemlock.

The place is secret and remote, with abundant food and perfect cover, and not far off are sunny hardwood ridges where birds can dust and drowse. This is a spot beloved of grouse. I have found them here when they have been missing everywhere else. And it was here that the Herd Bull had his home. We called him that because of the magnificence of him—due in part to his spectacular size, in part to his gorgeous plumage, and not least because of his superb intelligence that, to my certain knowledge, had carried him through three seasons. And now it was the beginning of the fourth.

As I took to the woods alone on that first morning I wondered if he were still in the land of the living and if I'd ever behold him again. For, though no hunter had killed him, I knew that, especially in the bare and bitter winter, he had had other enemies, such as foxes, wildcats, and great horned owls, all of which are found in his home woods.

Daybreak on the first day! What memories come thronging back to me! I wonder what men live for who have never known the thrill of the early start on the first day of the season. The woods have been hunterless for almost a year. There has been a new breeding season. There is a fresh crop of food. The world is old, but on the first day everything seems new. Certainly we have a fresh supply of hopes and ambitions.

My particular aspiration was to gather into the fold the famous Herd Bull. Some of the other boys had, I knew, made the same resolution, so that the business had begun to take on the aspect of one of these who-is-the-best-hunter affairs. Well, here I was, right in the Bull's bailiwick, and ready for action. Oh, but was I?

It was one of those soft and mellow mornings when everything seems ripened and about to drop. It was like a summer's day returned

—a blue-and-gold mistake. As I ambled down an old trail that wound beside the stream I knew that at any moment I might flush grouse out of these low laurels, these alders, these clumps of wild raspberries and teaberries. Windless and dreaming lay the shimmering swamp.

Far off I heard some opening guns. But a mood of calm rejoicing in the beauty about me took from me the essential edge of my alertness. I knew I was hunting grouse, and I knew that it takes all a man's speed and unreserved attention to hit scared lightning. But I dillydallied. I drank deep of the fragrances. I listened to the modest music of the brook. I dreamed my way along as if I were wandering down a primrose path to meet a long-lost ladylove. You know how it is. I was not attending to business.

Just a little off to my right and ahead of me were two old chestnut logs, moss-covered and almost hidden by laurel. All along their sides the leaves had drifted deep. Still dreaming, idly enjoying the beauty and the peace of those aromatic solitudes, I heard a sound on the leaves; I saw certain leaves beside one of the logs tremble and dance. And in that same second the Herd Bull was in the air, right before me!

The chance for which I had been waiting for nearly a year had come, and it was an easy chance. Of course the great cock did some aerial stunts, coming over the trail at a curious corkscrewing angle. He was so big, and at the critical moment was so much in the open, that I should have had no trouble. But my mind was full of other things. To hunt grouse you have to hunt grouse, not moon along inattentively.

With the blue morning sky for a perfect background, with no wind to stir a leaf, with a good gun and the right shells, I registered a great miss of the Herd Bull. I just didn't hit him at all. And he had crossed the road rather high in the air, as if presenting me as fair a target as he could. And the distance was perfect. I just fell down on the job. Why? I am sure it was because I was not giving the proper heed to what my real job was. It is all right to go into the woods and fields to study nature, to pick posies, perhaps to dream and sigh. But not on the first day—not if you are a hunter.

Mind you, I am mentioning just a few of my master blunders. I am not writing a book about them—although maybe I could. My first occurred when I was a barefoot boy about eight years old. In time of freshet I was running down an old rice-field bank over which the water was just beginning to brim. In my little gun I had my one and only shell

Before me I saw what I supposed was an old log lying across the bank. I jumped it, and as I did so I saw it move curiously. As I stopped and turned the thing swam off into the freshet tide—a huge diamond-back rattlesnake. It was a monster. Jerking my gun up, I shot, putting

the whole load just under the chimera's chin. He swam safely away.

For a matter of twenty years thereafter our plantation was haunted by a great rattler. Many Negroes saw him; and, seeing him, they set sail. At last he was killed, and he measured 8 feet 3 inches. I have always believed this may have been the same serpent I missed. Why did I miss him? I shot too fast. And I might say that a great deal of barren shooting may be attributed to that same cause.

Anyone familiar with the features of the Southern landscape knows how Negro cabins have a habit of staggering and careening. Once I heard a Negro minister pray, "O Lord, prop us up in all our leaning places!" And as I think of the great misses I have made, and why I made them, now when I take to the woods, with fewer hunts before me than those I have had, I say to the Lord, who loves all honest hunters, "Prop me up in all my leaning places!"

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