

GAME  FOXES

F. W. MILLARD.



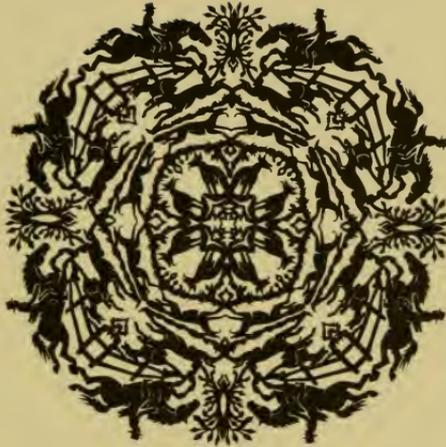
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# GAME AND FOXES

OR,

The Protection of Foxes Not Incompatible with  
the Preservation of Game.

BY

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## PREFACE.

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THE subject of the joint preservation of game and foxes has long been "a bone of contention" between the respective votaries of shooting and hunting, and for this reason it is a theme which few have attempted to deal with exhaustively, for fear of incurring the displeasure of one or both the disputing parties. It is a difficulty, however, which for many reasons ought to be faced; and, while making an attempt in the following pages to solve the vexed question, the writer is not without hope that the advice which he ventures to give will, if accepted, go far to allay that feeling of irritation which in many hunting districts at the present day too often prevails.

If the reader will only lay aside prejudice, and attentively consider the facts presented to him,

and the suggestions offered, it is hoped that he will end by being convinced of the possibility of preserving both game and foxes on the same estate and in the same coverts without serious detriment to either. It will be found that the case both for and against foxes has been stated with strict impartiality, and it may be said at once that the writer's inclination is to advise as little interference with foxes as is consistent with the reasonable requirements of game preservers, and at as little cost as possible.

For naturalists who may not be particularly devoted to either hunting or shooting the following pages should nevertheless prove of interest, for they will be found to contain original observations on the habits and life history of the fox which it is believed will be new to many. Humanitarians, also, may be glad to learn that there are ways of defeating the wiles of a fox without destroying him.

A point which the author would seriously urge upon all who are interested in the question at issue

is that whatever branch of sport may be to a man's liking, whether hunting or shooting, he should have some regard and toleration for the sport of others. In this way it should be possible to arrive at a *modus vivendi*, and to carry on both sports side by side to the satisfaction of all concerned.



# CONTENTS.

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## CHAPTER I.

GAMEKEEPERS AND FOXES . . . . . *page* 1

## CHAPTER II.

PROTECTING NESTS AND SITTING BIRDS . . . . . 3

## CHAPTER III.

USING ARTIFICIAL EGGS . . . . . 27

## CHAPTER IV.

FOXES AND THE REARING FIELD . . . . . 32

## CHAPTER V.

HAND-REARED PHEASANTS IN COVERT . . . . . 42

## CHAPTER VI.

PARTRIDGE COVERTS AND FOXES . . . . . 53

## CHAPTER VII.

WATERFOWL AND FOXES . . . . . 57

## CHAPTER VIII.

MANGY FOXES AND GAME . . . . . 62

CHAPTER IX.	
FOXES ON SHOOTING DAYS . . . . .	<i>page</i> 65
CHAPTER X.	
HOW TO MANAGE A VIXEN AND HER CUBS . .	70
CHAPTER XI.	
TRAPPING AND SNARING IN A HUNTING COUNTRY	83
CHAPTER XII.	
GENERAL REMARKS . . . . .	93
CHAPTER XIII.	
FOXES AND LAMBS . . . . .	116

# GAME AND FOXES.



## CHAPTER I.

### GAMEKEEPERS AND FOXES.

HUNTING men are reluctant to acknowledge the fact, but it is indisputable that game preservation is necessary to the continuance of their sport. Foxes are now required in much larger numbers than formerly, it cannot be denied that they subsist principally on game and rabbits, and the more game there is the less they resort to the hen-roost for food. Were the game to disappear there would be little else but fowls for the foxes to live upon, and the farmer would never put up with losses which the shooting man willingly endures for the sake of a kindred sport. If hunting men would acknowledge freely and openly their indebtedness to game-preservers for protecting and maintaining foxes the latter would feel well repaid, but what shooting men dislike to hear is their statements regarding losses scouted, and the vexatious assertion made that foxes do no harm.

Upon his good friends the gamekeepers of the United Kingdom the author has nothing but praise to bestow, for they hold the balance between foxes and game most cleverly, and that this book may assist them in such good work is his earnest wish. To judge by what is commonly said, a keeper might be supposed never to do justice by foxes, but it is only necessary to point to the rarity of a blank day with hounds to prove that there is little ground for such insinuations. On the one hand, they are accused of accomplishing the destruction of foxes by every means in their power, and, on the other, of shutting foxes in the earths when hounds are expected; but why keepers should destroy them on the one occasion, and strive to save them on another, is a question which needs explanation.

The majority of gamekeepers do their duty well, but one and all should remember that there is no greater proof of skill on the part of a keeper than his ability to show both game and foxes, and plenty of them, on the same estate. The men who are capable of doing this deserve every encouragement and due recompense and they in the near future will most certainly command the best situations.

## CHAPTER II.

### PROTECTING NESTS AND SITTING BIRDS.

DRIVING methods have so increased the sporting capabilities of partridges, that as game birds they are held in far greater esteem than they were a few decades ago. Consequently, more attention is paid to their increase, and it is a pity the partridge is not as amenable as the pheasant to artificial assistance in that direction.

Several methods of affording protection from foxes to partridges during their breeding season have been evolved, the most notable of these being the French and (so-called) Euston systems, which latter recent events have proved never to have been carried out on the celebrated partridge estate of that name. With reference to the first, little comment is necessary, although it has been reported a great success in the country of its origin; but on this side of the channel failure, whole or partial, has been the fate of nearly all who have endeavoured to put it into practice. In

addition, the expense of carrying out the French system is so heavy that it is never likely to be popular in this country, even were it a success, so no more need be said.

While engaged in sitting, the partridge is very vulnerable to attack by foxes, and the losses occasioned by birds being seized while on the nest have often been enough to break a game preserver's heart; but it is satisfactory for the author to be able to relate that a better state of affairs is soon likely to exist, owing to the attention paid on all hands to the protection of the nest. The Euston system, concerning which such a furore was lately made in the sporting Press, sprang from a desire to insure the hatching of each nest, but the advantage of it is difficult to see, while the labour connected with it is all too plainly apparent. For the benefit of those unacquainted with this system it shall be explained in as few words as possible.

Under the Euston system the eggs are removed from a partridge's nest as the bird lays, and artificial ones substituted, on which she goes down, her own eggs meanwhile being brought to hatching point in incubators or beneath fowls. They are then given back to the bird, special precautions being taken to protect her from interference by

foxes during the few hours she has to remain and complete the hatching process. On the face of it, and without seeking farther, this looks a step decidedly in the right direction, but the practical reader possessing knowledge of the ways of foxes will at once see that little is gained at the expense of much labour. For instance, on the Euston estate the average bag of partridges is about 5000, and the eggs necessary to produce this number of birds may safely be placed at from 6000 to 7000 on the lowest computation. Now, try to imagine the labour involved in collecting all these as-layed, bringing them to hatching point, and returning them to the nests! And this was reported to be done upon an estate where a fox is never allowed to roam at large during the breeding season of the game! Had those who ventured to name the system after this estate given the latter fact the least consideration, they would have sought further afield for a more suitable title.

Every keeper who reads this book knows full well that in nearly every instance a sitting partridge or pheasant is perfectly safe till the eggs commence to hatch, and then, if special precautions are not taken, she is likely to be sacrificed. To some readers it may be a puzzle why and how a fox detects the presence of a nest

at this critical moment, but the reason shall be explained in due course, and, the statement being perfectly true, in what rests the advantage of the Euston system? The eggs are removed during a period when they are invariably thoroughly safe, and once more committed to the care of the parent bird at positively the most critical stage—this being during the process of hatching. What is gained is hard to see, as in any case and under any circumstances the nest might be safeguarded during that process.

Sitting game birds are popularly supposed to be devoid of, or, rather, to emit no scent while incubating, but it is more reasonable to suppose that any absence of scent is solely attributable to the quiescent state of the bird when sitting. She remains practically immovable on her eggs, and for this reason stands a chance of escaping detection by eye, ear, or nose. Nevertheless, that she is not wholly devoid of scent the author has had frequent proof, and in a rather lamentable manner. On wet days the sitting birds are inclined to linger on the nest, and if it comes fine in the evening, as is often the case, they all leave to feed. If this is seen to occur, the keeper should be on the alert that night, for a bird off the nest late means that scent will not have vanished

from her tracks before foxes commence to prowl. Again, if the bird herself is wet, the heat of her body causes steam to evaporate, and this carries scent with it to be diffused over a wide area on the night air. Lots of nests have been known to disappear on occasions such as described, and it is certain that in the main the foxes discovered them by simply following the trail of the bird back to her eggs after having been off late at feed. This is pretty plain proof that a partridge is not devoid of scent while engaged in incubating, for both partridge and pheasant nests are destroyed in the manner stated. The birds cannot be prevented leaving the nest when they like, but a little extra care may well be taken to protect them when it is known that a trail which will guide foxes to the nest has been left late in the evening.

The liability of a nest just about to hatch to be destroyed is entirely attributable to the rupture of the shells; directly this happens a powerful and not altogether agreeable odour is apparent even to human nostrils placed in close proximity to the nest, and how much more strongly this must appeal to those of a fox! This odour increases in strength every moment till the brood runs, for the inner membrane of the shell and all matter attached thereto commences to decay, so the

danger is increased as time progresses. Fortunately for the partridge she seldom tramples upon or otherwise kills any of her chicks, but it has been noticed that if the nest does contain a dead chick, the possibility of a fox discovering it is vastly increased owing to the smell emitted by the defunct nestling. If eggs are late in hatching the cock bird will take charge of chicks ready to leave the nest, and hover them close at hand while his mate endeavours to bring off the late eggs. Should a dead chick be in the nest, its smell becoming stronger with each hour that passes, readers will understand the risk run by the whole family.

During cold, wet, and unfavourable weather the parent partridges are sometimes reluctant to leave the nest with their brood, although the latter may long have been fit to run; but if they do remain it is at great risk, as readers will gather after having perused what has been written.

Another reason for a fox discovering a nest at hatching time is that the sitting bird becomes restless as chicks begin to emerge, sits higher on the nest, ruffles her feathers, and is altogether plainer to be seen. A partridge breeding for the first time is even more restless than an older bird which has already passed through a similar

experience; these young hens therefore suffer more from foxes, and their nests are more likely to be destroyed.

Before proceeding further the author wishes to commend highly the plan of mapping out the exact position of every nest which can be found. Each keeper is provided with a tracing of his beat taken from an ordnance map of the district, together with a notebook, is instructed to find all the nests possible, and mark their locality on the map. His next duty is to ascertain when each bird commences to sit, and to jot down this information in the book; then he will be in a position to determine when every nest of which he knows will hatch, and able to afford it protection at the critical period. Before this occurs no extra precautions need be taken, although the nests should be visited occasionally to determine that all is right, in case vermin may be stealing eggs. However, too much interference should not be allowed, or a track will be made leading to the nest, of which a cunning old fox may at once take advantage. The keeper, too, should bear in mind that when visiting nests his actions may be watched by human egg-stealers, who are quite cute enough to profit by his pauses to examine nests. This last remark is made because losses

of eggs through poaching have before now been ascribed to foxes.

The best way of protecting nests when the hatching period does arrive must now be considered, and as all partridges bring off their chicks from first nests within a few days of each other, the keeper in charge will have a rather busy time. There is much to be said for the tainting fluids now so generally used for sprinkling round nests, from asafœtida to gas-tar, and especially for the best and most effective of all which is sold under the name of "Renardine." This was the first on the market, and still retains its position of superiority. It possesses a vile, tenacious odour: so much so that, to employ an Americanism, "it grabs the atmosphere and monopolises it to the extinction of all other smells." Its efficacy rests in the fact that the scent of a sitting bird (if any exists) is drowned; a passing fox can never detect her presence by aid of nose alone, and it is on this organ he principally relies. Should a fox *see her* no tainting fluid in the world will prevent his trying to seize her; but the chances of this occurring are very remote. The bird on the nest does not object in the least to the offensive odour of the fluid, for a desertion owing to it has never been

known to occur; and, indeed, when she is so near hatching it will take much more in the way of interference to cause her to desert. In the earlier stages of nesting she more quickly takes offence. It is useless to sprinkle the fluid on one side of the nest only, for it is possible that a fox may approach on the other and never smell the odour if a wind is blowing from him over the nest. Sprinkle it in a circle, in the centre of which is the nest, and then the odour will meet him from whichever direction he ventures to approach. Whatever means of protecting a nest are preferred or employed, this fluid should always be used as an accessory, because it drowns all smell arising from the shells as the chicks hatch. Do not forget that a heavy rain washes the fluid into the ground and destroys its power, so in a wet time frequent renewal is necessary. Sun and heat, on the other hand, develop its odour, and render it more potent than ever.

At one time game-preservers were advised to surround each nest with a small ring or fence of wire-netting of four-inch mesh, through which the bird might escape if a fox dashed at her; but wherein rests the advantage? If a fox fails on the first attempt he will try again, and the bird is eventually caught or forced to desert. It is

useless to take such measures as this, for if a fox cannot be prevented discovering a nest all else is futile. He is not in the least afraid of wire-netting; and how can a circle of such material be fixed round every nest in the centre of a fence and other awkward positions? The labour involved would be enormous.

A favourite device of old-fashioned keepers was to place near each nest old traps, chains, plough-shares, or any iron article of at all complicated-looking pattern. These were efficient as a protection, but a hundred nests would need a cart-load or more of such articles, which collection would be difficult to move and hardly obtainable. For a few nests, sufficient may be available, but such a protective measure is not easy to adopt widely.

Human urine is as satisfactory a protection as anything to a nest about to hatch, and no fox will dare to go near it, but its influence does not last longer than one night. If stale the urine is more effective, and it may be employed with every confidence in the absence of other protective fluid.

It is a pity the merits of luminous paint in the game preserve are not more widely known and acknowledged, for here is a protective medium

easy to apply, cheap to procure, and it has been found most valuable and reliable wherever tried. It is very simple to use, for all that is required are a few round pieces of flat tin, about four inches in diameter, fastened to short pegs which may be fixed in the ground so that the discs stand at about the level of a fox's nose. These circles of tin should be treated with luminous paint upon one side only, and from one to three will be required for each nest. They are light to carry, and their luminous properties are retained for at least one season. One will be sufficient to guard a nest beside and close to a wall or stack, two (one on each side) will be required for a nest in a fence, and three should be fixed at intervals round a nest in the open. Each one should be placed with the luminous side from the nest, and then the bird will not be in the least alarmed. By day they will be just plain white circles, but quite sufficient to scare any fox which ventures abroad by day, and at night will glow with a strong phosphorescent light which Reynard can never muster up sufficient pluck to venture near. Luminous paint is a protection which can be highly recommended as cheap, simple to use, and most successful, and every keeper should utilise it in the nesting season. In fact, the discs described are as

efficacious as lighted lanterns, and require no trimming or other tedious attention.

The excrement of a sitting bird has been known to prove the salvation of a nest. This is of a very foul nature, and is generally dropped before the bird has progressed far when leaving the nest to feed. A dog passing along the side of a fence containing a nest has been noticed to diverge, leave the side of the fence, and go several yards into the field, attracted by excrement of this description, afterwards returning to the fence lower down. The dog thus follows a semi-circular course for a short space, which takes it out of scenting distance of the nest. The tracks of foxes on arable land beside a hedge containing a nest show that they act in a similar manner to the dog, but some keepers are of opinion that the sitting bird's excrement brings about the ruin of a nest if a cunning old fox passes that way. The latter recognises what it is, and forthwith hunts the neighbourhood closely till the wretched bird is found and seized.

There is not the slightest doubt that some birds, both pheasants and partridges, have the misfortune to give off a stronger scent than others of their kind; or perhaps their nests are in positions which admit of scent being more widely

diffused around. When this is suspected a keen-nosed retriever, or, better still, setter, will prove of the greatest use. The keeper should pass close by the nest with the dog at heel, and watch for the slightest manifestation that it scents game; should a dog smell the bird a fox is *certain* to do so. There are keepers intent on doing their best who never feel satisfied that a nest is properly protected and the scent of the sitting bird drowned till a setter has passed and re-passed without detecting it.

A writer in "Country Life" some time ago advocated putting down a few yards of wire netting, extending at right angles from the fence both above and below a nest, this having the effect of turning a fox out of its course and away from the vicinity of the nest. Such a plan is hardly practicable in a field containing horses or cattle, and would be sure to cause trouble.

If a nest is near the outside of a wide fence, or the centre of a narrow one, it is an excellent plan to implant a few bushes so that the hedge at this point is made wider and thicker; then passing dogs and foxes are kept at a greater distance. These bushes may be added one or two at a time when the bird has been sitting ten days or so, as she will not then readily take offence. There is

no better plan than this of safeguarding a nest in a bunch of nettles, thistles, tuft of grass, &c., which is in danger of being trampled underfoot by cattle in an open field.

A certain keeper in Leicestershire is most successful in saving his partridge nests from destruction, although in the centre of one of the most fashionable hunts, and in a country teeming with foxes, and not too much game for them to live upon. He carefully watches each nest for the critical hatching period to arrive, and then at night places beside each lump of dried cowdung, which is set on fire. This smoulders all through the hours of darkness, shows a faint glow, and yields quite a small continuous cloud of smoke. The cowdung for this purpose he collects from feeding cattle in winter, and it is carefully dried and stored away for use. Should it not smoulder freely it is dipped in a weak solution of saltpetre and water and again dried. A slight wind only serves to make it even better, but if rain should be falling the dung must be placed beneath a slate, ridge-tile, or other shelter. It is a bold fox which will approach near this smouldering dung, and it would be a simple matter to add something which would enable it to emit a much more powerful odour. Probably lots of readers will be

glad to adopt this idea, but they are advised not to carry it out near heather, dry grass, or any crop of an inflammable nature, or a general blaze may result.

A suggestion has been made that, as a means of decoying a fox from a fence or other spot at which a lot of nests are located, something in the way of food should be placed close by, such as a dead pigeon, rat, or rabbit. A vixen having a litter is of all foxes the most assiduous hunter, and on finding the meal laid ready for her she at once makes off with the prize to her earth. On the face of it this appears a valuable suggestion, but the author happens to be acquainted with an energetic keeper who practised it with anything but success. He had a thick bit of hedge a few score yards in length which several pairs of partridges had adopted as a nesting site. A vixen passed near it almost every evening, and a dead rabbit was put down for her, to induce her to return and not go too close to the hedge. It had good effect for a time, but the vixen learned to look for this regular meal, and what was first done as an experiment became compulsory. One morning the keeper found two nests ruined, although he had not omitted to provide the customary rabbit, and after a thorough investigation arrived at a conclusion that the nightly feed

had attracted other foxes, which took it before the vixen arrived. As a result, she hunted the vicinity more closely than ever with a hope of finding it, and discovered the sitting birds. A better plan would have been to place the rabbit so as to intercept the vixen before she reached the fence in question, but some considerable distance from it towards her earth. The dead rabbits, if continually laid in one place, are also certain to entice vermin to the spot, and if the nests are near it will be to their danger.

Foxes are so much in the habit of running and searching fences each night, especially when they learn that sitting birds are to be had, that they omit to range in the open; for this reason a nest in a tuft of grass, &c., in the centre of a large field is generally in the safest spot. Such nests invariably hatch, and the broods run, if not otherwise disturbed. Hungarian and other foreign partridges are accustomed to nesting on the open plains, taking advantage of any means of concealment there happens to be, and several seasons may elapse before they consent to nest in fences when introduced into this country. In nearly every case they lay in the open, in all sorts of unexpected places, and their nests are missed by the foxes; therefore, the release of a few pairs on an estate

troubled by foxes often results in a welcome increase of game, and it is beneficial to turn down these birds. Strangers unaccustomed to open downlands, where a hedge is perhaps not to be seen for miles, are often astonished at the number of partridges to be met with in such a country, and wonder where they breed. All nest in the open as described, and foxes do not get a chance to interfere with them. In an inclosed country, by confining his attention to the fences, Reynard may happen to find a large majority of the nests, but it is beyond possibility that every foot of the spacious downland can be hunted, and a big percentage consequently escape his interference. Matters work out exactly the same as regards other vermin, and this explains the presence of the good stocks of birds so frequently seen on the open downs and fens.

During a dry season, when grazing is scarce, cattle are often the indirect cause of nests being destroyed in the fences. Being short of grass they bore right into the hedges, eating every weed and tender shoot within reach, and laying nests perfectly bare to the eye, let alone the keen nose of a fox. In a season when this is to be anticipated, precautions to avoid it should be observed, and if the surrounding herbage is

sprinkled with some noxious fluid it will be left severely alone by the cattle.

It is to be regretted that the old-fashioned wide fences, which often encroached to the extent of yards into a field at places, and yielded the best and safest of nesting accommodation, are now fast giving way to narrow, closely-clipped hedges. In fact, in some districts live fences are rapidly disappearing in favour of those constructed of wire, for farming has been in such straits that it has become necessary to utilise every foot of ground, and there is no room for waste. On many farms fences are not considered necessary between cultivated fields, and such have been grubbed up and dispensed with altogether; this has had the result of concentrating nests in the few fences that are available, and of driving birds to the roadside, where hedges must still be maintained. It cannot be said that wire fences are as good for game as live hedges, if only because of the number of birds killed by dashing against them, but barbed-wire fences are better for nesting than those composed of plain wire. Cattle learn to respect the sharp barbs, and beneath and around the bottom strand of wire springs up a wealth of herbage which they dare not attempt to graze off. Amongst this a partridge may nest

in perfect safety, and even a fox dreads to make a dash at her, for he, too, may have had a taste of the barbs in his pelt. The author was once shooting upon an estate in Scotland, a large area of which was divided into inclosures by means of barbed wire strained on posts five inches square. At the bottom a couple of strands had been nailed on each side of the posts, one six inches above the ground and the other at a height of a foot; between these nettles and other rough herbage grew, and therein the partridges nested in peace and safety from disturbance by cattle, and in nearly every instance from interference by foxes. Tar applied to the wire about nesting time would probably have additional good effect. This is an excellent plan of providing nesting accommodation in a district which would otherwise be almost devoid of it.

In a stonewall country nests escape destruction which would certainly be found by foxes if hedges were in the place of the walls. Reynard nearly always passes along a wall on one favourite side, and a nest on the other escapes detection by him; but when he traverses a hedge there is nothing to prevent the scent of it reaching his nostrils. A fox is also very fond of running along the top of a low wall, and if this is his habit there is no

risk to nests at its foot. Nevertheless, when a fox does discover a nest at the foundation of a wall there is little chance of the bird eluding him, as the wall is an obstacle in her way, and she is obliged to fly upward or directly over her enemy. It is a very slow fox indeed which is not able to seize a bird under these conditions. Should a partridge be sitting on one side of a fence she is able to pop through to the opposite side, and thus get away. A bird which has been sitting on a nest for many hours is not always in a fit condition to make best use of legs or wings as a means of escape; she is more or less stiff, and this gives the fox a great advantage over her. Those readers who have noticed the cramped, helpless state of a fowl when suddenly removed from a nest on which she has been sitting will recognise the truth of this statement.

The loving attention of a cock partridge for his mate often saves the latter from a fox, for the male bird is seldom far distant while the hen is sitting, and at night watches a few feet away. Should a fox pass close by it is the cock's part to simulate a wounded bird, and so decoy Reynard for some distance beyond. This the bird is ready to do, and his cleverness frequently saves a nest from destruction.

When a partridge has hatched her eggs and taken the brood away most people would say that nothing further is necessary, but there is still great danger of a fox securing the lot, especially if an old and cunning one. As before stated, the shells left in the nest give forth a very strong odour, and a fox on finding them must know that a brood has but recently gone. He also knows that the little family cannot at that stage be far away, and at once sets to work systematically to hunt the neighbourhood till the brood is found. What occurs then is easily imagined, for the author has known this to happen on several occasions. In some cases, too, a partridge is given to returning to her nest with her chicks at night, particularly if it be wet or cold, and she runs a tremendous risk while spending the hours of darkness near a lot of stinking shells, or in a nest containing, perhaps, a dead chick in the first stages of decomposition. For this reason every vestige of shell and any dead chicks should be removed, and all traces of the nest erased. This is a precaution few know, and of which fewer still take advantage.

The author once had a unique opportunity of watching the actions of a fox which had found a brood of pheasants. The hen in an endeavour to

decoy him away fluttered along the ground as if hurt, and Reynard promptly followed till both went out of sight over a bank. This manœuvre on the part of the mother bird appeared to have been a success, and the watcher was about to leave his hiding-place when the fox came trotting back. He knew the chicks were scattered in the grass at the spot where the hen was first seen, and he "nosed" around till each had been found and devoured. One would have thought he would now have been content, but further proof of his devilish cunning was forthcoming. Crouching out of sight in the herbage he lay perfectly still for over a quarter of an hour, and then the peevish call of the hen pheasant for her chicks could be heard plainer and plainer as she approached. At last she came within reach, and would have been seized like the rest had the fox not been scared at the critical moment. Reynard knew full well that the faithful mother bird would return to the spot where she left her little ones, and that he had only to be patient and wait. Could an instance of greater cunning on the part of a fox be quoted?

Where scares of a mechanical nature are employed for frightening foxes, the old adage that "familiarity breeds contempt" should not be forgotten. The efficacy of such scares rests in their

strangeness, and a fox will brave them all when he becomes accustomed to them. Therefore, change the scare every few days, or alter it in some way, if it is expected to remain effective.

Every method of protecting a partridge nest which has been advised is just as useful for safeguarding that of a pheasant, although the latter bird has not been quoted so often, for partridges are the real anxiety in a hunting country. Pheasants are so easily reared by hand that the contents of nearly all their nests are collected for home hatching, and certainly those from nests in situations at all risky. Few are allowed to remain to need protection, but where such is necessary those means suggested for partridge nests may be adopted with all confidence.

It should act as a spur to a keeper when he reflects that all he does to protect nests from foxes is equally useful in saving them from ordinary keen-nosed vermin, and also from stray dogs. He should not forget that a nest which may escape a fox is likely to be interfered with by stoats or rats, and therefore each one must receive attention.

Although by persistent care partridges may be protected during the nesting period, the broods are still in danger from foxes. A brood trailing

through the grass after the parent birds not only leaves traces which a cunning old fox will recognise and follow out, but the scent left is also much stronger than it would be were the old partridges unaccompanied. However, as regards protecting the broods till they are able to fly the keeper is helpless, and he can only hope there will be tall, dense crops in which the little things may hide.

## CHAPTER III.

### USING ARTIFICIAL EGGS.

HE who understands how to use artificial eggs may prevent a lot of losses where foxes have to be reckoned with, for by their aid both partridges and pheasants may be induced to choose safer sites for their nests. The latter birds adopt a nest in which they find one or two artificial eggs with the greatest certainty, and quite seventy-five per cent. of partridges may be trusted to do likewise. However, to secure perfect success it is necessary to obtain artificial eggs, which are perfect imitations of real ones as regards colour, shape, size, and weight. The gamekeeper uses these eggs, to prevent his pheasants straying away to lay, by forming nests containing one or two in all fences which the birds are likely to run alongside when making off from the coverts; but it is not necessary to describe here the many uses to which they may be put in the game preserve.

Nests intended to attract pheasants should be

formed a few feet from the sides of rides, paths, &c., intersecting the coverts, from which they may easily be seen by the birds; also in fences surrounding a covert. Pheasants are fond of nesting close to a track, and, if nests are made in number according to the birds a covert contains, few will go outside to lay. These artificial nests save a lot of labour in searching, and as the keeper knows where each is it is easy for him to protect them from foxes. If several hens do happen to lay in one nest this only facilitates the collection of the eggs necessary for home hatching. Should no artificial nests be made to attract the pheasants to lay in certain spots they will nest where they like, and it will be a clever keeper who finds all; some nests are sure to escape even his keen sight, and the first evidence of the latter which greets his eye may be feathers and shells strewn all over the place, proving that a fox is the better searcher.

If a few pheasants be desired to produce broods at liberty the keeper should arrange artificial nests in places where a fox is unlikely to find them, and where they may at little trouble be protected against that contingency. However carefully he conceals such nests a pheasant hen is nearly certain to discover each one and adopt it;

and this goes to prove how keenly the bird searches for a nesting site.

Artificial eggs have long been used in connection with pheasants, but only during recent years has their value for partridges received partial recognition. The liking of a partridge for nesting on the fringe of a thick hedge, when she would be far safer in the centre, is peculiar but beyond dispute; and her discovery by a fox at such a spot is difficult to prevent, because he is so close.

When partridges mate each pair takes up a certain plot of ground on which the birds intend to nest, and when one pair is noticed to occupy continually a field, or part of a field, it is a certainty that they will remain there to breed if not driven away. Having located a pair the keeper should select the most dense portion of an adjacent fence, and right in the centre form a saucer-like depression with a shaped rammer; in it two artificial partridge eggs must be placed on a few dead leaves or a little dry grass. This should be done about the second week in April, or earlier or later according to the forwardness of the season and of the locality. Leave the eggs fully exposed and visit the spot every two or three days to see what has happened. When the

partridges discover the nest they promptly cover over the eggs it contains, although they may not lay to them for several days. But, once the eggs are noticed to be concealed, the nest is sure to be adopted unless the unforeseen occurs. A little dari seed or buckwheat scattered beside an artificial nest will help to attract a pair of partridges near enough to see it, especially if laid in short trails across the fields on each side of the fence. In this way partridges may be induced to nest in places of greater safety than those they too often select.

It is most important to remove artificial eggs from a nest as soon as the partridge has laid about six of her own to them, and under no circumstances should they be allowed to remain when the bird commences to sit, as they exercise a peculiar influence over the live eggs. Being made of glass or china they do not absorb much heat from the bird, and also quickly cool down to a very low temperature when the sitting partridge leaves her nest to feed; the eggs resting against them are affected, become cold also, and their fertility is impaired. And this is not the only danger. As stated elsewhere, when a brood of partridges hatches irregularly the first chicks to leave the shell are taken charge of by the cock

bird, who hovers them a little distance away while the hen stays to dry off belated chicks and hatch belated eggs. This excellent habit of hers explains the reason unhatched eggs are so seldom found in a nest after she has left it with her brood. A pheasant, on the other hand, is inclined to go off with the first strong chicks to appear, and leave belated eggs to their fate. Should artificial eggs be permitted to remain in a nest, the partridge stays longer than she should in an endeavour to hatch them, and not only will the brood suffer for this delay, but risk of their being snapped up by foxes increases with every hour.

It is unnecessary to say more to show that by skilful use artificial eggs may be rendered of great value in a hunting country, for game birds may be decoyed to nest where the keeper considers they will hatch with less risk of disturbance by foxes, and with a little practice and experience endless methods of utilising them will suggest themselves to him.

## CHAPTER IV.

### FOXES AND THE REARING FIELD.

EVERY gamekeeper would be happier were his pheasants at all stages of their existence protected from foxes as easily as they are while on the rearing field, but this is out of the question, for at a certain age the birds must be allowed their liberty in the coverts if they are to afford good sport. However, with the exercise of due care, the rearer who has his broods destroyed by foxes on the rearing field is, unless the circumstances be exceptional, very much to blame.

The most popular and effective method of excluding foxes from the rearing field is to erect wire netting, enclosing it to a height of from six to eight feet, and this requires to be put up in correct style, or it will be of little effect for the purpose intended. Six-foot netting is hardly high enough, and nothing less than eight feet is recommended, two feet of this being bent over outwards at a sharp angle, and held in that position by iron rods

attached to the posts to which the netting is fixed. A fox will not be able to clamber over this fence, the overhanging width proving an insurmountable barrier, even if he is able to climb up to it. Nothing but netting of strong gauge should be utilised, for a persevering fox has by aid of his teeth been known to tear his way through weaker material. The mesh must be four-inch, because this will admit of the pheasants passing in and out of the enclosure as long as they remain on the field, and save the trouble of lifting the netting at the bottom to re-admit any which have happened to fly over. Good stout posts, not more than twelve feet apart, should hold up the netting, and six inches of the latter must be let into the ground. This is best done by turning a furrow with a plough to that depth all round the circumference of the fence; the wire may then be put to the bottom, and the furrow turned back and trodden in place. It is very necessary to stretch the netting tightly between the posts, especially if the overhanging width at the top is dispensed with, because it is at places where the netting sags inwards that a fox makes a dash and scrambles over. Very few know how to stretch netting tightly, so it will be advisable to describe the process. Neatly staple it to the posts in the

ordinary way, and when a length of fifty yards or so is in place, go over it in the following manner. Place a stake through a bottom mesh and stand on it; then with another stake put in a mesh opposite, press your hardest, and if this is done at intervals between the posts the netting should be as tight as a drum, and perfectly rigid. All posts should be inside, because, if rough and outside, a fox may use them as aids to climbing over. A fox is occasionally keen enough to jump and jump at wire-netting till he gets it to sag sufficiently to allow him to work his way over, and if one is suspected of this trick it is an excellent plan to stretch a single strand of wire on sticks a foot from the ground, and six feet or so from the fence. Reynard will not detect the presence of this wire in the dark, and it will trip him up each time he essays a running jump. Two wires such as described, a yard or thereabouts apart, will be even more effective. Should the fence be low, a wire as suggested must always be provided, for it will prevent Reynard taking the running jump necessary to land him on the other side. It is much more difficult for a fox to clamber up wire netting of large mesh; his toenails catch in small meshes and afford him a firm grip, but his legs slip right through big

meshes, and he is fortunate to escape severe injury if attempting it. Where a fox does contrive to break into a rearing-field fenced in, the netting enables him to do far greater damage, particularly if the birds are beginning to use their wings. In their terror they run and fly against the netting, do not seek to go further, crouch at its bottom, and the fox simply snaps them up as he follows it round. For this reason alone a watchman must be present every night, as, however good the fence, there is always danger of a fox scratching beneath it, and in that way gaining entrance to the field. Too often the conviction that he has a fox-proof fence round his broods causes a rearer to consider watching at night an unnecessary trouble; but he who has once experienced the holocaust of which a fox that does force an entrance is capable will not be easy again in his bed under similar circumstances. Foxes are not frightened at wire netting as they were when it first appeared and its use was limited. At the present time it is to be seen in greater or lesser quantity on every farm, and Reynard no longer entertains dread of going near it; in fact, he regards it much as a schoolboy does a locked door between himself and a well-stocked pantry—as an obstacle to be surmounted if possible.

Should a rearer not be in a position to provide a wire-netting fence for his field, he must make use of such means of protection against foxes as are at his disposal, and every dog he possesses should be put on guard. Now, it is impossible to have dogs loose about the rearing-field, even at night, when the broods may be closed in their coops, for there are no means of insuring that they shall not wander off in the darkness on business of their own. Every keeper who takes the trouble to examine the ground in the vicinity of his kennels when snow covers it knows that chained dogs are no terror to foxes, for tracks of the latter may often be seen but a few feet distant from the farthest limit the chain permits a dog to reach. There is only one way of overcoming this difficulty, and it is to peg down a stout wire a few score yards in length. To this the dog must be fastened with a short piece of chain, at the end of which is a ring to run up and down the wire. Place the dog's kennel at one end of the wire and his drinking pan at the other, and this will cause him to patrol his beat more regularly. The value of this system rests in the fact that if a fox appears the dog is able to dash after him to the full limit allowed by the wire, and that is quite enough to make Reynard believe the dog free to

chase him. If sufficient dogs are available an entire ring may encircle the field, and they will serve to keep each other on the alert. Probably, a sharp fox terrier is as good a watch as any dog.

If alarm-guns are placed at intervals round a rearing field, the wires connected therewith extended so as to encompass it, and fixed at a height of about fifteen inches, no fox can enter without exploding one. Reynard is very unlikely to remain after the report, and should he be so bold, the watcher has been warned. Alarm-guns are little trouble to set, and they ought to be used for protecting the rearing-field to a far greater extent than they are.

Another method of excluding foxes from the rearing-field, although not absolutely reliable, is by free use of tainting fluids to which they have an antipathy. Foxes do not like strange, offensive odours, and generally make off from their neighbourhood. The best method of protecting a field after this fashion is to put sticks about three feet long in the ground, at eight feet intervals. Stretch two strings on these, one fifteen inches from the ground and the other on top of the sticks. Keep the strings dressed with the fluid, and few foxes will dare to venture near. The best and cheapest string is that used in harvesters and binders for

tying corn into sheaves, as it is of a rough nature and freely absorbs the fluid. After heavy rain the strings require re-dressing, as much of the fluid will have been washed off. Do not mind some dripping upon the ground as it is being applied.

Luminous paint may also be used with satisfactory results on the rearing-field, discs to which it has been applied being fixed at vulnerable points. Some keepers paint faces with it upon the shutters of every coop, and it must be confessed these are rather ghastly in appearance on a dark night. Lighted lanterns are also useful scares, but their position needs to be frequently changed, and if allowed to swing in the wind at the end of a string they are more effective.

Upon a rearing-field where foxes were feared I once saw a rather ingenious scare, and one which any rearer can easily provide. It consisted of a square lantern fitted on each side with a frame of coloured glass—red, blue, green, and white. This lantern was hung on a meat-jack, such as is used for roasting a joint in front of a kitchen fire. When the jack was wound up the lantern revolved and continually flashed coloured lights over the field. A powerful acetylene motor lamp is also a valuable accessory at night on a rearing-field, as

it may be used as a searchlight, to ascertain the cause of any disturbance detected by the watcher.

It is a question if a light and portable electric apparatus could not be devised to scare foxes from the rearing-field, as a very slight shock on touching a wire would be quite sufficient to drive one away. This ought to be easy of accomplishment, and the suggestion is commended to electricians, for such an apparatus would meet with a ready sale.

Whatever scares and means of protection against foxes are employed, it never does to place too great dependence in them, for Reynard has a bad habit of springing surprises on one, and, as before stated, a watcher should be within hearing in case of emergency. A man for watching during the hours of darkness requires careful selection, for if he cannot be relied upon to keep awake he will be worse than useless, and the rearer must get rid of the idea that a man can work by day and watch by night. The dual duty is impossible, and the rearer who expects it courts disaster. A man possessing perfect hearing powers, not given to drink, and who will rest by day, is the man for night-work, for there are men who will not retire to bed by day if they get the chance. The hours of darkness are not many

during the rearing season, and once day breaks half the danger from foxes has passed. The best watcher at night on a rearing-field the author ever knew was perfectly blind, and because of that his every other faculty was rendered more keen. This man would detect the rustling of a fox in the grass long before it became apparent to an ordinary individual, and not the slightest flutter of a bird escaped his ear. For many years he enjoyed regular summer employment as a watcher at night on the rearing-field, and not once when he was present did a fox get unnoticed amongst the birds. Where the services of such a watchman can be secured he may be employed with the greatest confidence.

A watcher intent on listening for tokens of a fox's presence should remain perfectly quiet; it is an ordinary practice for a man thus engaged to keep shouting or blowing a horn, but from constantly hearing these sounds a fox becomes accustomed to them and treats them with contempt. It is a far better plan to keep still, and shout or blow a horn only when it is thought or known that a fox is at hand. The sudden noise and alarm are sure to cause him to beat a hasty retreat. Foxes are at times very persistent, and the author has actually chased one from coop to

coop at night, unable to drive it away in the semi-darkness; but those which go this length are half-tame cubs turned down after having been hand-fed. Such are creative of more grievances on the part of shooting men than all the wild foxes in existence.

## CHAPTER V.

### HAND-REARED PHEASANTS IN COVERT.

THE real time of anxiety for the rearer is the period after the young pheasants have been removed to covert, and before they resort regularly to roost each night. For a time following upon removal the birds are certain to juk in the grass, and if a fox finds them while indulging in this lamentable practice he is in a position to thin their ranks seriously. As it is not an easy matter to detect his presence in, or drive him out of a piece of thick covert at night, no precaution must be neglected.

Upon an estate where foxes are to be feared the broods are best retained on the rearing-field as long as possible, so that they may become thoroughly strong, able to fly into the trees, and to some extent look after their own safety. Of course, they cannot be kept on the field longer than they can be confined in the coops, because of the necessity of shutting them in for removal, but,

for all this, they should not be taken to covert till the last moment. During the final weeks the pheasants are on the rearing-field it is a wise plan to cut tall bushes and implant them amongst the coops; the birds learn to fly into these during the day, and afterwards more readily resort to roost when removed to covert.

The rearer should endeavour to place his broods in a piece of young covert containing trees of not too large a size, the branches of which are easily accessible from the ground. Under such circumstances they will soon fly to roost, but to put them at first in a plot of tall covert is the way to make them inveterate jukkers, and once they become this it is only a matter of time before foxes secure the larger number. Do not allow rabbit burrows near to remain open, for these attract foxes to the vicinity; it is really wiser to taint every one, and drive the occupants away, as rabbits invite stoats and weasels in addition to foxes.

Neither is it advisable to transfer the broods from the rearing-field to a covert too big, as one of not more than a few acres with a clear space all round is much safer in every way and more easily guarded. The rides on which the young pheasants feed should be wide, and the undergrowth near must be well cut back so that it will

not afford concealment behind which a fox may creep up and seize feeding birds. The covert, too, is better devoid of thick grass and bushes, because the former invites the birds to juk instead of roost, and the latter to roost within reach of a fox which is cunning enough to stand on his hind legs or leap for a supper. Whatever is done, some of the birds cannot be prevented jukking for a night or two after removal, and a keeper has been heard to say that it is a good plan to sprinkle every one with some tainting fluid. This is done when each brood is released from its coop the morning after removal, a man being at hand with a sprayer to spray the birds as they emerge. Such a plan may be successful in so far that it would render the birds less easily scented by a fox.

When hand-reared pheasants are in covert the last feed of the day should be supplied early in the evening, that there may be plenty of time for them to try and get to roost. Too frequently, the final feed is delayed under an impression that if it is given early the birds may stray off; but they will not try to go to roost till they have been fed, and absolutely refuse to make their first attempts in either partial or entire darkness. Their safety from foxes at night entirely depends

upon roosting, and birds fed too late seldom fly to roost.

During the last hour of light a covert containing the birds must be kept perfectly free from intrusion, no one even venturing to pass along the rides, for it is most unwise to disturb the young pheasants while making their first essays to roost. Once one or two commence to fly into the trees others soon follow, and the whole batch will be at roost in a few evenings. It is also advisable to give some of the more active fowls their liberty from the coops, as they show no hesitation in flying to roost amongst the trees, and tempt the broods to follow their good example.

It has been noticed that if a fox does get amongst a batch of pheasants jukking in covert, kill some and thoroughly frighten the rest, that the birds fear to risk such another experience, and strive their utmost to get to roost the succeeding night. This knowledge has encouraged some keepers in hunting districts to muzzle a spaniel and well hunt a covert in which a large majority are suspected of jukking, and those rearers who have done this assert that the birds will not again juk, and it is seldom necessary to use the dog on a second occasion. As this is a proceeding of which the author has had no experience he

suggests its adoption only with extreme caution, because a disturbance at night amongst jukking birds has been known to cause them to leave a covert to spend the next night outside. On one occasion the young pheasants resorted wholesale to an adjacent field of corn, and the foxes followed them up and played severe havoc amongst them before their habit could be checked.

It is not advisable to feed growing pheasants too liberally on maize, as this cereal has a tendency to fatten unduly and render them heavy and clumsy ; in fact, so lazy do they become that they cease to fly to roost, and prefer to spend the night on the ground, where they are in danger from foxes. Maize has much to answer for with reference to pheasants, and it would be better for sport were it the most expensive instead of the cheapest of grain.

At times it happens that for some reason young pheasants cease for a short period to thrive after removal to covert, and as ill-health causes moping, a fox which discovers them in such condition is able to destroy a large number of the sickly birds. The latter, even when adult, will not fly to roost, and therefore everything possible should be done to keep them in the pink of condition. Healthy birds are always on the *qui*

*vive*, and much more able to look after their own safety than others in a sickly state. Losses from foxes are often primarily attributable to neglect of the birds' welfare, although it may be difficult to make the reader believe this fact.

Rough, windy, wet nights are those most dangerous to young pheasants in covert; nights when the noise of the storm and the clashing of branches overhead enable a fox to creep about unheard. Even on a still, but rainy night, Reynard has a great advantage over jukking birds, for every dead leaf and blade of grass are wet, and do not rustle in the least as he searches to and fro, hunting each inch of covert like a well-trained setter. On such nights as these it is doubly necessary for a keeper to be on the alert in a fox-preserving district. The plumage of the birds being rain-soaked, they make but a poor attempt at flying on being disturbed, are slow in getting on wing, and much more easily caught when found. Their bodies, too, being wet, steam is produced, and this being diffused around causes the scent of a jukking bird to be discernible over a larger area. When young pheasants have taken to flying to roost regularly, the rearer considers them safe at night so far as foxes are concerned, but if a violent wind arises

he should be on the alert. At first the birds are very insecure on their perches and easily blown down, and should the branch they are occupying sway to and fro they soon get giddy and fall to the ground. The wind is also capable of blowing them clean out of the trees; once this has happened the bird does not attempt to get up again, but remains on the ground, perhaps dazed by the fall. Hence the necessity of a watch being maintained during a rough night, even if the pheasants do fly to roost.

The fallacy that a fox is able to mesmerise a pheasant on a tree and bring it to the ground is a very foolish one, and yet it is widely believed. The author has in daylight watched a fox gazing at a pheasant which had seen him and flown amongst the branches, but the bird did not lose its head; on the other hand, its loud cries were a warning to every other within hearing, and finally the fox moved off with a grapes-are-sour kind of expression on his face. The statement alluded to is about as possible as that advanced in one of the comic papers, which caused some amusement at the time. It was that a fox found a pheasant on a tree, merely walked round in a circle, and the bird in an attempt to follow the enemy's movements with its gaze wrung its own neck.

The author would strongly warn readers to be careful concerning the nature of any non-straying mixture they may be recommended to use. The merits of some of these preparations are based on the attractive flavour they impart to the grain over which they are poured, but there are nostrums sold which intoxicate the pheasants. While under the influence of such a drug the bird certainly cannot stray, upon the principle that a thoroughly drunken and incapable man cannot move far; but no wide stretch of the imagination is needed to picture what would occur should a lively fox get amongst a batch of pheasants dazed beneath the influence of a mixture such as described. A dog even would do immense harm, and readers are again advised to resort to the use of such preparations only after due investigation.

Should young pheasants nearly matured be seen about minus their tails, it is plain proof that foxes are troubling them. A proportion of the birds a fox attempts to capture he loses owing to his grabbing their tails, which generally protrude from any cover in which the birds are trying to conceal themselves. A pheasant and its tail are easily parted, and no further sign of what is going forward is necessary to an observant keeper.

It may appear a peculiar argument to advance, but it is undoubtedly unwise for a rearer desirous of producing pheasants in a hunting country to resort for his eggs to an estate on which a fox is never seen. In the Eastern Counties, where foxes are not preserved, pheasants juk to a far greater extent than they do elsewhere, as may be seen if the ground is walked over by day or night, and the instinct to roost is decidedly less marked. It is only reasonable to suppose that what the parent birds do is transmitted to their offspring, and that chicks hatched from eggs procured from a non-hunting district will grow into pheasants very difficult to persuade to go to roost. Limited experiments in the direction indicated have proved this contention to have some foundation, so it is advanced in all good faith.

Wild-bred pheasants are far more wary of foxes than those hand-reared, and suffer far fewer losses; the latter have been protected by human agency all through their youth, and when thrown on their own resources after removal to covert are foolish and devoid of the protective instinct which the wild bird has imbibed from its parent. The wild bird all through its youth may have had experience of foxes, has run many risks, and arrives at maturity fortified by knowledge of

Reynard's cunning which the hand-reared bird has yet to attain by experience.

Care should be taken to feed pheasants in covert along a wide ride or on some open space, because while engaged in feeding they are naturally preoccupied, and it is a time when foxes take toll of their numbers. Reynard is keen enough to watch where the birds are fed, and continually lurks round the feeding-places. The ordinary style of feeding-stack cannot be too strongly condemned, for birds feeding on one side of it are perfectly at the mercy of a fox which creeps up on the other side with the stack between him and the birds; he has only to dash round quickly and seize one. All corn in the straw should be built on staddles, this being a framework raised at least two feet from the ground, so that birds feeding are able to see beneath it. A stack built on these, offers no means of concealment behind which a fox may creep near and spring upon the pheasants unawares.

Fowls brought to covert in coops with the broods require protecting from foxes. They are not likely to be attacked in the day-time, unless under exceptional circumstances, and at night it is an excellent plan to draw the fronts of two coops close together; then the hens cannot

poke their heads outside when a fox appears. Directly Reynard comes on the scene an old hen stretches her neck between the bars of her coop in a vain effort to escape, and is at once seized; had she kept at the back she would have been safe. Heavy coops, which a fox cannot move or overturn, also assist in saving the fowls. It is wiser to retain the hens in coops on the rides till all the birds go to roost, as they attract the notice of any fox venturing near, and give a warning which cannot be disregarded. Should a hen attacked fail to call out, the noise she makes dashing about in the coop is sure to be heard. Besides, the loss of a fowl or two will not be a serious matter, and if pheasants are saved thereby, the old biddies will have suffered martyrdom in a good cause.

## CHAPTER VI.

### PARTRIDGE COVERTS AND FOXES.

IN a work giving instructions how best to protect game from foxes, and especially nesting game, it would be folly to ignore the advantages of partridge coverts, which are found most useful on the large partridge estates in the Eastern Counties. There they are provided for the sake of the nesting accommodation they yield, and the cover they afford for holding the birds, foxes being a negligible quantity. Various are the ideas followed in planting these coverts, but with them the author has nothing to do, as the covert he wishes to see in a hunting country is designed to protect nesting pairs from foxes, and if it is successful in this regard the rest may be ignored.

It is not advisable to plant a partridge covert at any spot, and if possible a site should be selected to which the birds are partial at all times and under ordinary circumstances; choose some field they are fond of frequenting, which is high and

dry and of light soil, as dust for sitting birds is most necessary. If they are not able to take a dust-bath on leaving the nest vermin increase on them to a great extent, owing to the birds' long inaction while incubating. It is the dusting accommodation which largely influences a partridge in selecting a site for her nest, and this explains her partiality for a roadside fence.

A tall, thick fence or belt of trees should be on the north side, and along this the partridge covert should be planted in one big strip from forty to fifty feet wide. A square block may be preferable for yielding cover from which to shoot the coveys, but as partridges like to nest a few feet in from the edge, a narrow strip is best when nesting accommodation is the end for which the covert has been provided.

The ground intended for the covert should be in good condition, and must be ploughed and sown barley or wheat in the ordinary way. When the crop is up, and has been hoed, broom-seed may be drilled with it. Do not harvest the corn, but allow it to stand and be consumed by the game, as the straw will protect the broom during the first winter, when it often suffers a good deal from frost if devoid of shelter. Rabbits and hares must be strictly excluded, particularly the former,

10<sup>y</sup> - 20<sup>y</sup>  
wide

as they are fond of nibbling young broom, and, if numerous, will utterly destroy it.

When the covert is established, that is, when sowing is finished, it will be necessary to provide a fence, and this is not the least important matter. Posts should be erected at least six feet high, and wire-netting stretched on them in such a way that it extends to the top and is buried a foot or more in the ground. If dressed with tar the netting will be more enduring, and the best way of doing this is to dip it while rolled into a tank of tar, and stand it aside for a few days to drip and dry. To paint it when erected is tedious work—very expensive as regards labour and brushes. If the whole of the netting cannot be dressed, that portion intended to extend into the ground must be dipped in tar or it is sure to rot before the rest. For instructions how to erect the netting and stretch it tightly refer to the chapter on the rearing-field.

Wire-netting for fencing in a partridge covert should be of four-inch mesh and strongest gauge, similar to that used for folding sheep. No fox can break through this or clamber over it, and the partridges will be able to pass freely in and out. Such a fence is practically perfection for this purpose, and where a covert or two as described are established they will be a means of defying

foxes and insuring good shooting, for partridges soon find out where they are safe and resort there for nesting from over a wide area.

The covert will require attention for some time, and growths likely to swamp the broom during its first season must be kept down; all that is necessary in future years will be to keep the covert at an average height not exceeding two feet. Partridges do not care for a plot of tall broom, and prefer a short and not too dense growth amongst which they are able to get about easily. A scythe may be used to cut the broom if this work is regularly done each year, but if it is neglected for a season or two the task will be longer and a cutting-hook necessary. Clear narrow footpaths here and there, and do not be persuaded to substitute gorse for broom. Spruce firs topped form an excellent covert, and an open strip or two here and there to grow corn are advantageous.

## CHAPTER VII.

### WATERFOWL AND FOXES.

FROM their habits it might be imagined that waterfowl would be beyond the reach of foxes, but the curiosity which impels these birds to follow a little sandy dog up a decoy-pipe leads to their falling a prey to a fox. Reynard does not mind a cold bath in the least, if by risking it he may obtain a tasty duck for supper, as he dearly loves all waterfowl to eat. There is no surer find for hounds than a covert encircling a lake or pond frequented by waterfowl ; but a fox forced to leave this comfortable spot is generally too fat to run far. Reynard secures waterfowl in many ways, his favourite plan being to lie perfectly still, hidden in the undergrowth at the water's edge, and then when the birds come swimming near to leap for one and swim or wade out with it. To prevent this sort of trickery rushes and undergrowth must be cut back a good eight feet from the edge, so that a hiding place is not to be found within

jumping distance. With a clear space of this width between cover and water a fox can secure few duck, &c., although they are so fond of feeding and lingering near the banks. Never scatter feed, or allow any to exist, which will tempt wildfowl to leave the water, for if the birds are in the habit of doing this the fox will secure more than a fair share. Waterfowl are clumsier than most birds on land, and there they are less able to elude a fox than when on their favourite element.

It is a regular habit of waterfowl to leave their day resorts at evening and flight to the feeding places, these being cornfields, oak coverts, or other spots where favourite provender is abundant, and it is while feeding at such places that they are thinned by foxes. To prevent losses in this way see that there is no necessity for the duck to leave every evening in search of feed, and they will confine their flighting to a fly round for the sake of stretching their wings; after this the birds will settle down.

When nesting, duck suffer much from foxes, for they are seldom content to nest close to the water, or in rushes actually growing out of it, but must wander hundreds of yards up a covert or into adjacent fences. The nests in this case should be

looked up and protected as advised for partridges or pheasants. But the reader must remember that a duck yields a more powerful scent, and the risk of her detection by a fox is much greater. Around a pond intended for duck a double row of willows should be planted, and cut off at a height of nine or ten feet; if they are kept pollards the crowns in a few years will become wide enough for a duck to nest therein, and the nests, if the trees do not lean, will be perfectly safe from foxes. There is no better method than this of providing safe nesting accommodation for wild duck.

Another plan to be recommended is the formation of a small island for nesting, as a fox rarely cares to face a long swim even for a supper off duck. The island need not be very big, as duck are content to nest closely together, and it should be planted with laurels and privet right to the water's edge.

Hand-reared wild duck are much easier than pheasants to protect from foxes, and the reader obliged to have the latter on his shooting is advised to go in for the former birds. They are not difficult or expensive to rear, and if properly managed afford excellent sport, while a large expanse of water is by no means necessary to their

preservation. A very small puddle or two will suffice if the duck are fed judiciously.

It is a favourite device to pinion a few duck as a means of inducing those full-winged to stay, but such birds had not better be entirely deprived of their flying powers, or they will only provide a meal or two for the first fox which comes along. The first joint of one wing only should be removed, and a duck operated upon in this way will still be able to fly a little, and even to mount high in the air, but its course will be a circular one owing to one wing being less powerful than the other. Such a bird may join in the flights of the others as they fly round and round, but will never attempt to go straight off; consequently it must remain as a decoy to the full-winged duck. Ducks fully pinioned must be removed from water liable to be frozen over when hard frost prevails. A big company of waterfowl will manage to keep a space free from ice for a long time, but if the frost lasts ice gradually encroaches on this open water, and the fox gets his chance as it narrows. The full-winged duck may be able to escape at any time, and will probably desert a pond when this occurs, but those pinioned are doomed if not already caught and removed to a place of safety. The fox may not take them all, but, frightened at his

close presence on the edge of the ice, the pinioned duck dive beneath it and are drowned.

As a means of keeping duck at home during a hard frost it is a frequent practice for the keeper to break and remove some of the ice each evening at dark ; but this should be done near the centre of the pond and not at its edge. Should a space be cleared at the edge the duck are tempted to assemble there, and could be in no more dangerous place for attack by a fox. Break the ice all round the edges of a pond, if you like, as a means of preventing a fox getting upon the big body of ice in the centre, but clear a space in the middle for the duck to occupy.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MANGY FOXES AND GAME.

ONE mangy fox will do more towards making shooting men detest foxes than a dozen clean and healthy ones, for a fox afflicted in this way takes risks and goes lengths to obtain food which the others would not dare to venture. Besides, a mangy fox indulges freely in that sort of destruction which is peculiarly hateful to a game preserver, and the ruination of nests as long as they can be found appears to be the chief aim of its existence. Hunting men, in the interests of their own sport, and for the sake of their shooting friends, should do their best to kill every fox displaying the slightest sign of an attack of mange, for it will be only a matter of time before the animal develops into a perfect scourge. The greatest curse in connection with a mangy fox is that its affliction permits it little rest, and it is constantly on the hunt day and night. The destruction for which it is responsible can hardly be realised except by

those who have closely observed the actions of the wretched creature. For wanton damage it is far worse than a healthy fox.

A practical keeper will quickly recognise the work of a mangy fox, for his efforts to save nests are of no avail, and his scares and protective fluids appear perfectly useless. By a little watching he will soon ascertain if the fox responsible is mangy, and in such a case the keeper is warranted in at once taking measures to destroy the animal. When he succeeds he should allow some responsible person to see the carcass, as a proof that the fox was mangy and of no possible use for hunting. Should a keeper be known to destroy a fox, even if he did so under the provocation that it was mangy and destroying his nests, people who relate the occurrence are apt to forget that the animal was diseased, and he will soon discover himself alluded to as a habitual trapper of foxes of all degrees. Hence the advice that he should show the carcass to his master or other responsible individual.

It is not to be supposed that many foxes live to a good old age—their existence being far too precarious for this to occur often—but if a very old fox does manage to survive he becomes a fearful nuisance. Stiff of limb, and having lost

teeth, such a fox can no longer procure his living in the way Nature intended, and he, like a mangy fox, will venture risks which no healthy fox would dare. An aged fox cares for practically no scare the keeper can devise, and it is to be feared he finally gets so cunning as to regard them as tokens of the whereabouts of a meal. A fox, as described, is better destroyed in the interests of both hunting and shooting.

## CHAPTER IX.

### FOXES ON SHOOTING DAYS.

THERE was a time when the interference of a fox on shooting day was thought not worth considering, but now every effort is directed to securing a record bag, and as the keeper's place and reputation often depend upon a record bag being killed, the disturbance of well-planned beats by a fox is deemed no light matter. It is really vexing just as a fine batch of birds has been driven into a corner, ready to be sent over the guns in small lots, to discover that a fox is flushing them in one big bouquet. Under such circumstances the majority must escape, for there is no time for the guns to take more than a brace out of every lot, and perhaps the game lost as described cannot be shown again that day. Pinned in between guns and drivers, the fox rushes to and fro, and soon every bird has vanished.

This sort of thing cannot always be avoided if justice is done to the foxes, but there *are* ways of

preventing it. A remark is made elsewhere that the reader who desires to do his best by both game and foxes will endeavour to keep the latter at ground, and with this intent must allow them to form suitable earths. Where earths are available the foxes will prefer to be at ground in the day-time, and are not then likely to interfere with shooting; should any be above it, the first signs of beating and the first few shots will drive them into the earths.

Beating must be conducted slowly if the presence of a fox is anticipated, so that Reynard may have time to break out at the flanks or get to ground, and not be driven into a corner, and directly the beaters reach an earth down which he has disappeared the faggot for closing it must be firmly fixed in the entrance. All other earths should be closed as the beaters pass them by, that foxes already within may be kept there. Do not close earths earlier in the day, as foxes above ground are certain to be driven in by guns and beaters, and once in the earths will not give further trouble.

The wounded game picked up after a day's covert shooting often forms a creditable addition to the bag, but under ordinary circumstances hardly any is recovered in a hunting district. The

night after a shoot foxes have an orgie amongst wounded game, and much of what they do not consume is thoroughly spoiled, but if all earths are kept closed with the foxes inside for a single night every head of wounded game may be collected next day. Being kept at ground for one night will not harm foxes in the least, and is even beneficial, as a big glut of food does them no good whatever. If foxes are above ground notwithstanding every precaution, it must not be concluded that all game wounded will have disappeared the night after a shooting, for an energetic old dog-fox has been known to bury partly a dozen or so of pheasants on an adjacent fallow or other convenient place, and a retriever will find all these. Should much trouble of this kind with foxes be expected, every effort ought to be directed to collecting wounded game on the day of the shoot, and extra hands must be engaged for this work. Some keepers speak highly of Renardine for excluding foxes from coverts on shooting days, this fluid being liberally sprinkled on all gates, fences, and along rides; as its odour is most offensive to foxes they are said to desert the covert for the time being.

Although everything possible is done and every precaution observed, it is not a simple matter to

make record bags where foxes are preserved, even if sufficient game exists. The foxes worry the game, and however regularly pheasants are fed and driven in they are not to be concentrated and collected together so easily in certain favourable coverts. The birds spread out, and must be sought more widely if the usual proportion is to be bagged. It is a safer plan to permit this, for foxes more speedily make captures where the pheasants are thickly congregated.

Not many hares are in the country now, but they are the most troublesome of all game to keep and protect where foxes are preserved. As stated elsewhere, leverets are a frequent prey, and hares refuse to remain in a covert much hunted by foxes. Quietude is very essential to their preservation and retention. Hares, like other game, are forced to leave the fields and resort to the coverts during the turmoil of harvesting, but they soon creep out again when the crops are gathered in if foxes occupy the coverts also, and must afterwards be sought on the stubbles, fallows, and in the fences. In fact, every out-of-the-way corner should be searched for game in a hunting locality before an opinion is formed that there is none. The Ground Game Act, on the whole, has not been beneficial to hunting interests, but it has

reduced the hares, and sportsmen do not now trouble about them; were they as plentiful as in years gone past there would be more trouble over sport with the hares being spoiled by foxes.

To close coverts against hunting till they have been shot through is not always a wise plan, especially if the district around is being regularly hunted; foxes are quick to discover where they are allowed peace, and are certain to congregate in such a haven. If this occurs, more harm may be inflicted in the end than would be caused by drawing those coverts once or twice.

In the first part of this chapter earths were alluded to as a necessity, and it must be understood that natural earths are intended—not the artificial abominations in which foxes contract mange. Where the soil consists of heavy clay, foxes may not be able to tear out earths, and this is the only instance in which artificial earths are permissible. Such places *can* be constructed on sanitary principles, and the reader is advised to seek qualified advice before attempting to make one.

## CHAPTER X.

### HOW TO MANAGE A VIXEN AND HER CUBS.

IF a fox would be content to kill just as much as is required for its own nourishment no one would begrudge the food necessary to maintain sufficient for hunting purposes, but, unfortunately, he is a sporting character, and the quantity destroyed is only governed by the opportunity; should he gain ingress to a poultry-house it is his practice to slay the lot and feed off one fowl only. Very often it is a fox already satiated by a heavy meal which carries out this wholesale destruction, and not one fowl is eaten, although some may be buried or otherwise hidden for future use. Whatever damage may be ascribed to a vixen having a litter of cubs to feed, she is rarely guilty of this wholesale destruction, her natural inclination to kill wantonly being overruled by anxiety for her youngsters; consequently, directly she has secured something she forthwith starts to carry it to the earth. She may resort again and again to the same place for supplies,

such as a vulnerable hen-roost or a fence well furnished with game nests, but the birds are only taken one by one, and, if the earth containing her cubs is far distant, a great portion of her time is occupied in passing to and fro. Wanton damage to sitting game, such as the destruction of a dozen nests over a limited area in one night, is generally the work of a dog-fox, and not of a vixen. Probably, the birds stolen from their nests may all have disappeared, but if the ground near is carefully searched they may be found hidden in the vicinity; if the dog-fox has done this, a vixen may find the birds and transport them to her earth one by one, but she never destroys several, and buries them previous to taking them to her cubs. What she catches is carried to them while still possessing the warmth of life, for the vixen understands the necessity of hot blood to her family. Particular care has been taken to explain all this, because, on a number of nests being found destroyed, summary vengeance may be wreaked on the nearest vixen with cubs, when she is not in the least responsible.

He who wishes to preserve both game and foxes, with the least possible harm to the former, must have at least one covert containing plenty of rabbits, for, although a fox does not prefer

rabbits to feathered game, they are exceedingly useful, as an endeavour will be made to show. In the midst of these rabbits a litter of cubs should be located, and this may easily be managed even apparently against the will of the vixen.

A vixen should never be allowed to have her cubs where she prefers, or she may establish herself where her power for harm is doubled. A vixen with a family is not so shy a creature as when pregnant and looking for an earth; if she be much interfered with in the latter case she may leave an estate altogether and resort elsewhere for a suitable nursery free from interference. All that should be done during the early months of the year is to examine the earths frequently, and carefully watch for signs of a vixen occupying one. For this purpose it is not necessary to see her enter or emerge, as her small round foot-mark is not at all difficult to distinguish from that of the bigger dog-fox; the impression in the soil is more shallow, because she is not so heavy, and there are few keepers who cannot discern the difference. If the entrance to the earth is small, even her forwardness as regards pregnancy may be determined, for with increasing girth she rubs the sides of the entrance to a greater extent. In the search for vixens do not confine attention to

existing earths only, but examine all big rabbit burrows, dry drains, hollow stumps, and also earths which have been long stopped and disused, for a vixen is very energetic, and soon tears out a place in which to deposit her cubs.

When a vixen is found to be regularly occupying an earth, keep her as free from interference as possible, and if only one litter is desired on an estate, close all other earths so as to prevent more vixens taking up residence. Construct a neat faggot, just capable of fitting the entrance to her earth, and on the *morning* hounds are expected close it at the last moment, removing the faggot directly the pack has cleared away. Carry out this work with as little disturbance as possible, as it is only intended to prevent foxes entering when driven before hounds; the vixen will take care they do not enter at other times, and no fear need be entertained that any foxes besides the vixen will be shut in when the earth is closed on the morning of the hunt.

It does not matter where a vixen is located during the first few weeks following upon the birth of her cubs, because they are subsisting on her milk only, and she does not require to kill game for their sustenance; consequently, she will do no appreciable damage. Much of her own

time will be spent in nursing them, and contributing the warmth of her body for their benefit, so the vixen's hunting excursions will be few and short. Indeed, if she is fed at the earth during this period, she will not trouble to travel far in search of other food. Besides, there are no nests yet for her to destroy, but on an estate where hares can still be preserved, it is advisable to feed her, as in a mild spring they are breeding freely; if not fed she is certain to hunt persistently the fallows, wheat and seed fields in search of leverets. The increase of hares will be considerably greater if she is fed, but it is useless to provide cold carrion, as she will refuse to touch it unless under exceptional circumstances; everything must be freshly killed and still warm if possible, for although when hard pressed she will bring carrion to her cubs, she cannot be expected to rest content with such fare upon an estate where game is to be had for the catching. If plenty of rabbits are available there should be no difficulty in providing sufficient food for a vixen, and she dearly loves rats — water-rats in particular. Another reason a vixen should be allowed to choose her own earth for the litter to be born in is that when the cubs begin to come out to play she is inclined to shift them to new and

sweeter quarters. The cubs, while living entirely in the earth, foul it a good deal, and the remnants of their food do not add to its sanitary condition; hence the vixen may leave the first earth where she is desired to remain in favour of another where she is certainly not wanted.

When the entrance to an earth and the immediate surroundings show that the cubs emerge to play, preparations must be made to shift the whole family to another earth in the midst of a stock of rabbits, and this is more easily managed than readers may imagine. The keeper should procure a long-handled Norfolk rabbiting-spade, and with this tool scrape out the disused earth the vixen is intended to occupy to as great a depth as he can reach, depositing the excavated soil in a heap just outside, as if it had been torn out by a fox. This heap, if consisting of nice, fresh soil, will act as an advertisement of a house to let, of which the vixen when passing is sure to take notice. Having prepared the earth as suggested, every effort must be directed to attracting the vixen to it. If a fox's excrement is found, remove it near; also snare a few rabbits close by, and leave them alive in the snares, for a squeaking rabbit will draw a fox a mile on a quiet night. If the vixen fetches these away see that others replace them, so

that she becomes accustomed to resort to the new earth each night, and when it has been ascertained that she does this, measures to compel her to bring her cubs may be taken. A little paraffin should be poured at evening into the entrance of the earth containing the cubs (half-a-pint will be sufficient), and she will remove her nursery that night; and if the procedure described has been carefully carried out she will invariably take her cubs to the new earth prepared for them. A vixen has been made in this way to shift her cubs a mile, removing half the litter one night and the remainder that following. Should there be no old earth for the vixen to occupy, which can be opened up by aid of a spade, a hole should be dug, in a dry, sandy bank for preference, and the soil deposited outside as advised. If the vixen can be tempted near she will deepen and enlarge it for her cubs as soon as the old earth is tainted.

When the cubs have been located in the midst of the rabbits readers must not expect to see a rapid diminution of the latter in the vicinity of the earth, for a vixen has a habit of religiously leaving alone everything close by her earth. She is popularly supposed to do this for the purpose of currying favour with those owning game and poultry near, but has another and far deeper

reason. Wise mother that she is, she recognises that a day will arrive when, with all her energy and skill as a hunter, she will be unable to supply the wants of her cubs, and they will be compelled to forage for themselves ; she also knows they will not have her store of knowledge to draw upon to assist them in procuring food, and so, for their future benefit, she leaves alone the store close at hand. The rabbits near the earth become accustomed to seeing the old vixen ignore their presence as she passes to and fro, and they grow to regard her as more or less harmless ; but dearly will they pay for their misplaced confidence in foxes and present immunity from attack when her cubs begin to hunt on their own account. For all this, she will kill rabbits a few hundred yards away and bring them to the earth, the ease with which they may be procured often tempting her to spend time thus which might otherwise be employed in seeking more valuable game.

In these days farmers consider they possess an interest in rabbits on their holdings, and object to having a litter of cubs located near a flourishing colony which is regarded as a source of future revenue. Of course, a farmer cannot interfere with rabbits in a covert, but, if a vixen is known to be taking rabbits from burrows in the field-

fences, a farmer not possessing friendly inclinations towards hunting may do his best to drive her and the litter from the neighbourhood, even if he does not resort to worse measures. Before the passing of the Ground Game Act all rabbits belonged to the landlord, and, as they lived on the produce of the farm, the farmer did not mind how a vixen reduced their numbers; but now that he possesses a concurrent right to those rabbits, he regards the presence of a fox from a different point of view. Because a vixen is likely to be interfered with, that is, trapped or poisoned, a strict watch must be kept to protect the earth, and to discover at once if she is missing; if the latter occurs the cubs must be fed by hand, or they will die. Should fox-destroying neighbours be feared on any hand, evidence that the vixen is still alive and doing her duty by the cubs must be looked for at frequent intervals, for she forages widely, particularly in a district where food is scarce, and may be harshly dealt with at any moment.

When the nesting season arrives it is of undoubted advantage to feed cubs, but how seldom is this conducted properly and with due regard to the saving of the game! Most men deem it sufficient to throw down provender near

the earth they occupy, but where this is done the vixen goes on hunting all the same and inflicts just as much damage on the game. The aim of a keeper when feeding cubs should be to employ the vixen during the hours when under ordinary circumstances she would be engaged hunting. As a rule she forages during the night only, but, when food is scarce and enough cannot be procured on her excursions after dark, is forced to make daylight expeditions. With a little observation it should be a simple matter to discover the favourite direction of a vixen when starting out foraging, and the points for which she makes. It is at the furthest of these food should be placed for her, as a lot of her time will then be employed in carting it to the earth, and while thus engaged she cannot be doing harm. By judiciously placing such supplies, a vixen may be encouraged and tempted to resort farther and farther from her earth, and the journeys taken to and fro will employ and tire her. This is the way to feed a litter of cubs, for food placed near the earth has no effect on the vixen, and has no influence in staying her hunting.

Some attention must be paid to the kind of food provided. As before stated, where rabbits are abundant there will be little difficulty in

securing sufficient, but it will be well to provide variety if possible. On many estates young rooks will be available during May, and there is nothing both vixen and cubs appreciate more. There is no need to take rooks to the earth, for a vixen is fond of visiting a rookery, hoping that some of the nestlings may have fallen, and is clever enough to know there is a greater chance of this on a rough, windy night, when the slight boughs on which the nests are built rock to and fro. The young rooks intended for the cubs need only be shot and left lying. It is the wiser course to handle food placed out for the vixen as little as possible, and she will then take it all the more freely. Rabbits should be snared, trapped, or netted, and as far as possible pegged down alive for her. Readers are particularly warned against using the gun too much when procuring food for cubs, because the shots embedded in the rabbits, or whatever is killed, are swallowed, and in several instances cubs have been known to die of lead poisoning solely from continually eating food which had been shot. If fed daily on stuff thus procured, enough lead to cause this trouble is soon taken into their systems.

Few readers may know that a fox dearly loves a stoat or weasel, so if any are trapped they may serve a better purpose given to the cubs instead

of being hung on the vermin pole. Rats of all varieties, and mice, are much appreciated, and where stacks of corn are being thrashed a big supply of these may often be obtained. Waterhens are also accounted great delicacies, and so are pigeons. It will thus be seen that a good deal of food may be obtained without interfering with anything of much value for sport or the larder, but it would be useless for the author to seek to discount the trouble of keeping a litter of cubs supplied. A man will be employed for at least half his time during May and June; but the saving of the game effected will well repay all money and labour expended in that direction.

It is useless, too, to try and conceal the fact that a vixen is frequently killed as a means of saving the game, and the cubs entirely fed by hand from the moment they can eat flesh food, but in the interests of hunting this system cannot be too strongly condemned. In the interests of shooting such procedure is all right, but cubs brought up entirely by hand are seldom as strong and healthy as those reared by a vixen. Plenty will come forward to contend otherwise, but facts are against them. It is only by the most careful feeding that cubs lacking a vixen can be kept healthy, and to provide them with carrion and offal is sure finally

to cause an outbreak of mange. He who breeds mange amongst foxes makes a rod for his own back, but this subject is dealt with elsewhere. With reference to cubs which have never known a vixen's care since they first came out of the earth to play, it may unhesitatingly be asserted that they eventually do far greater damage to the estate which shelters them. Such foxes have *always* been fed at home, and they *continue* to feed at home, while others which have occasionally accompanied the vixen on foraging excursions carry on their feeding over a far wider area.

Finally, the author would like to remark that a frequent and regular examination of the earth will be a means of revealing what the vixen is doing and on what she is feeding her cubs; feathers, wings, feet, etc., are sure to be left lying about, and these will be a guide to the keeper as to whether she is paying undue attention to sitting-birds. Should she be engaged in this, find out the direction in which she is working, and strive to check her.

## CHAPTER XI.

### TRAPPING AND SNARING IN A HUNTING COUNTRY.

WHEN vermin-trapping is mentioned the majority of hunting men at once shake their heads, for the mere name of a steel-trap conjures up visions of foxes minus legs or feet ; some even forbid the use of such traps upon their estates, for fear a fox should be injured, but when doing this they are going too far, as no keeper can deal effectively with vermin without the assistance of steel-traps. Till something better is invented they must remain the best implements for the purpose.

Stringent trapping for vermin is more necessary in a hunting country than in any other, for foxes do quite enough damage to game without there being losses from other and preventable causes. If vermin are allowed to work unchecked, which it practically amounts to upon estates where the setting of a steel-trap is prohibited, some of the harm done is sure to be ascribed to foxes, and in

this way the latter get a worse name than they really deserve. In their own interests hunting men should encourage trapping, for stoats and weasels, if abundant, kill a lot of poultry, and a farmer is only too ready to assert that foxes have destroyed his fowls, because he is then assured of whole or partial compensation. The poultry fund is in lots of cases drawn upon to satisfy the claims of those who have lost fowls owing to stoats, and for this reason alone hunting-men should do their best to encourage careful and skilful trapping, for a steel-trap *can* be used without the slightest danger to foxes. Besides, there is another reason for suggesting this, for the more vermin existing the less there is for foxes to live upon and the greater the chances that the latter will attack poultry. Where vermin are numerous, foxes have a harder struggle for existence, and what damage they do becomes far more noticeable.

The utmost sympathy is felt by the writer for a keeper who is expected to preserve game in a hunting district and is yet denied the assistance of steel-traps for fear a fox should be injured. He has undertaken an almost impossible task, and, notwithstanding all the ingenuity with which he may dispose his box-traps and other clumsy

contrivances, he can never succeed to half the extent another keeper will who is able freely to use steel-traps. His estate is bound to be overrun with all kinds of vermin, to the curse of those adjacent, where the steel-trap will be employed to far greater extent, because he does not trap properly. If the latter occurs, what is the gain in the end?

A sportsman so obstinate (forgive the word?) as to prohibit the use of a steel-trap is advised to allow his keeper to set them, but with the proviso that they should not be concealed in any way. No fox, under any circumstances, will be so misguided as to venture near an exposed steel-trap, and yet a lot of vermin may be caught. A poaching cat has no reluctance to place her foot on a bare steel-trap, nor has stoat or weasel, and to clear these off by the best-known means is absolutely necessary to the preservation of game. However, the more cunning kinds of vermin, and they comprise most of the feathered varieties, are not to be easily tempted near a trap unless it is concealed. These must be dealt with by other means, but as poison is out of the question, and traps may not be set so that such vermin may be caught, it is difficult to say what can be done.

Vermin trapping, even as carried out by the

ordinary keeper, may be conducted without the least danger to foxes if very simple precautions are strictly observed, for it is only the careless and neglectful trapper who endangers the life and limb of a fox. So keen is the nose of a fox that it is able to detect evidence of a human being having handled a trap long after this has passed beyond the power of stoat and weasel; for that reason, the trapper who resets his traps each day will never harm a fox. He who sets a trap, and, because it captures nothing, leaves it untouched for several days, is carrying out his work in a very careless fashion, and is the man guilty of injuring foxes. After twenty-four hours all traces of human handling have vanished, and a trap left untouched for that length of time is a direct danger to a passing fox. The careful trapper will go over all his traps, and reset each one, whether it has been disturbed or not, preferably not earlier than 2 p.m.; no fox will venture near them the succeeding night, for the scent of man's presence will be far too palpable about the spot. The most risky trap of all is one set so that a fox jumps over some obstacle right on to it, so be cautious of placing steel-traps on one side of a fence, wall, or ditch, which foxes habitually leap over.

The safety of a fox also rests in the proper placing of a bait, to quite as great an extent as it does in any other precaution a trapper can observe. It is a sovereign rule, when trapping for any particular kind of vermin, for the trapper to judge accurately the exact distance between the forefeet of the creature it is desired to trap and its nose; this having been determined, the bait and trap must be arranged that far apart, care being taken that the former cannot be approached except over the latter. If a trap is placed so that it will take the forefeet of a stoat engaged in smelling the bait, it stands to reason that a fox may lift that same bait without coming within the compass of the jaws. Predaceous creatures are exceedingly cautious when approaching anything having the semblance of a bait, usually stretch their bodies to the fullest extent while endeavouring to obtain possession of or reach it, and the fox observes this rule perhaps more strictly than any other animal. All readers may rest assured that trapping conducted as advised will not endanger a fox. A fox which has once been in a trap and escaped may be trusted never to get into such a difficulty again, as those whose duty it is to trap foxes on grouse moors know to their cost.

On an estate, which shall be nameless, where foxes are strictly preserved, and around which it is to be feared every effort is made to trap them, full advantage is taken of the foregoing fact. Traps with weak springs are especially made, and designedly set to catch foxes at intervals of a month or so; the result is to give the foot a smart rap, and it is then withdrawn with little difficulty and no material injury. The fox which has met with this experience is most cautious for the future, and, since the system has been adopted upon the estate to which allusion has been made, those over the boundaries seeking to trap foxes have met with but limited success.

Snares are far more dangerous to foxes than steel-traps, and far more generally used, especially since the passing of the Ground Game Act. Where hares and rabbits exist on a farm snares are to be found in every fence at certain seasons of the year, and a fox is fortunate to avoid them. Indeed, Reynard is attracted to the spot where they are set by the cries of rabbits already caught, and if any snares are still standing they get on his legs. A snare made to hold a hare or rabbit is not sufficiently strong to detain a fox, but the wire of which it is composed draws tight and often becomes deeply buried in the flesh before a fox can break

away. Snares are always made of brass or copper wire, because these materials are ductile, and both have bad effect on the flesh, causing a gangrenous sore which either kills Reynard or renders him too lame for hunting purposes. Snares used in the game-preserve should not be made too strong, and, while weak enough to give at once to the pull of so large an animal as a fox, they would still be able to detain either hare or rabbit. A fox would then break away before the wire became deeply embedded in his flesh. A fox does not get rabbit-snares round his neck, but his legs become entangled as he moves about where they are set. If every person using snares in a hunting country could be persuaded to tie a knot in each about four or five inches from the eye, that snare would still run up sufficiently to hold a rabbit, but Reynard might withdraw his leg. The eye could not pass over the knot, and in this way the snare would never tighten on a fox's leg.

A fox and hare have been seen caught in one snare, and it must have been made unnecessarily strong. In this instance, while endeavouring to escape the fox, the hare had run in a circle at the extreme length of its tether, firmly twisted the wire round the hind-leg of the fox, and there both were found by the keeper.

One of the greatest grievances against a fox is that he interferes so much with snaring and trapping operations carried on with a view to the capture of rabbits, and the farmer, hoping to profit by the provisions of the Ground Game Act, is inclined to resent the losses occasioned thereby. A rabbit in a snare is so easy a prey that a fox will resort night after night where he has discovered that snaring is going on, and play havoc amongst the rabbits caught. The best way of preventing this is to move the snares as often as possible to a fresh site, never snaring in one spot more than a single night ; this will prevent losses of rabbits and injury to foxes.

A trapper working the burrows never need lose rabbits to foxes if he exercises due care ; there are two spots at which to set a trap at a burrow, one being just at the entrance and the other well down the hole ; a rabbit leaves by leaping out, and a trap set between the taking-off and landing-place will not be effective. Foxes are fond of smelling down burrows, and to trap outside or just in the entrance would be manifestly to their injury, so trapping well inside only is admissible. And it is to the trapper's advantage to follow these instructions, because a rabbit when caught creeps as far as possible into its burrow, and the trap

being between it and a fox seeking a supper, Reynard is beaten. If he can seize the rabbit without the necessity of touching the trap, which he will be able to do if it is set at the entrance, he has no compunction whatever in stealing that rabbit; this is why so many are lost, and the fox instead of the trapper condemned.

It has been the writer's endeavour to give the fox his due throughout, so it is only fair to state that he performs some good work as regards vermin, for a game-preserve in a hunting district where foxes abound is seldom infested with rats as estates are where not a fox exists. Rats are the most harmful of all vermin to winged game, and the most difficult to get rid of, so the fox is to be commended for killing them. Many stoats and weasels are also destroyed by foxes.

## CHAPTER XII.

### GENERAL REMARKS.

WHERE foxes and game are both required—that is, a sufficiency of the former and an abundance of the latter—suitable coverts are a necessity, and if coverts can be provided for each the work of production will be much simplified. Foxes dearly love a cosy, well-kept gorse covert, big enough to afford privacy and concealment, and dense enough to yield shelter from piercing winds. If such a gorse is planted, and kept quiet, foxes will not lie much in the game-coverts, and this is a great gain.

The fox-covert ought to be as far distant as possible from those intended for game, and yet not quite on the boundaries of an estate, for to form a fox-preserve on the boundary cannot be considered a neighbourly action, and it is hardly fair to seek credit for maintaining foxes when they live to a large extent on ground other than your own. Besides, this is a certain way to encourage

vulpecide, or, if things do not go so far as this, all sorts of ill-feeling which is bad indeed for the welfare of hunting. Plant your fox-covert well within your own boundary, and yet as distant as possible from the principal game coverts.

It is hardly necessary to dilate here upon the proper way to form a gorse, because directions for this have been given in so many books and journals; but a smaller area than five acres will not prove satisfactory, and a bigger expanse is to be recommended. However, success will largely depend upon the privacy of the site and the density of the covert. The best shape for it is that of a triangle, because it is more easily watched when a fox is expected to break, and it has been found that Reynard more freely leaves a covert of that form. In a square covert he may contrive to circle and thus elude hounds, but in one of triangular shape is certain to get cornered very quickly and then must take to the open. If possible locate the fox-covert amid cultivated fields, as these are more free from disturbance than grazing land during the hunting season. Do not have rides or footpaths through it, as they only invite intrusion, and without them few trespassers will seek to penetrate far into a dense thicket of prickly gorse.

Hunting men, who do not shoot, strongly condemn the presence of rabbits in a fox-covert, and are able to advance strong arguments in support of their exclusion. Rabbits cannot be prevented burrowing, and, however careful the keeper may be when earth-stopping, hunting men assert that he is certain to leave open burrows large enough to provide refuges for foxes hard pressed by hounds. This is reasonable, but if a covert has proper supervision there should be little risk of sport being spoiled in the way described. Rabbits are also, hunting men say, an invitation for every wandering terrier to hunt through the covert; but what wandering terrier can refrain from hunting through any covert met with, whether rabbits be present or not? Rabbits are a means of absorbing the attention of any dogs which do intrude, and the foxes are left in peace. The shooting man is strongly advised to encourage rabbits in his fox-covert, as they will be the means of saving a lot of game from destruction. Old foxes may ignore rabbits as a staple food, but cubs feed thereon for many weeks after the vixen has ceased to provide for them. Without rabbits they wander far and wide, and under such circumstances are certain to discover the whereabouts of the hand-reared pheasants at a very inopportune period.

On cold, rough nights, even the old foxes on leaving their earths in search of provender will be tempted to console themselves with an easily-caught rabbit, as they may afterwards quickly get back to shelter and comfort. A vixen's favourite food for her cubs is young rabbits, particularly when her youngsters are first taking to a flesh diet; the numerous nests of rabbits she scratches out and carries to the earth prove this, and in the covert containing her litter rabbits may be relied upon not to increase at a very speedy rate during the first few weeks of the cubs' existence. Hunting men may agree in condemning the presence of rabbits in a fox-covert, but if a friend of both hunting and shooting wishes to do all he is able for the two sports, he should be permitted to follow the plan he considers the wiser and better without being subject to criticism more or less hostile.

It is doubtful if a fox ever scratches out an earth in solid soil, for the burrow of some other creature is in nearly every case adopted as a basis. The deserted retreat of a badger is at once fit for occupation, but a rabbit's burrow may be enlarged at the expenditure of little labour, and the latter is without doubt the origin of the majority of natural earths. For this reason alone

rabbits should be allowed in a fox-covert, as a change of earths is necessary to the health of a litter of cubs, particularly when much food is being brought to them and remnants left from their meals begin to render foul the one they for the time occupy. While a litter remains small, and unable to roam about in the earth, rabbits have no objection to occupying it jointly with them, using the small side holes up which the vixen cannot penetrate because of her size; but when the cubs begin to crawl about, rabbits are compelled to leave, for each tiny side-hole is explored before the cubs dare venture outside. These side-holes which rabbits make in connection with an earth are frequently the means of preventing the destruction of the litter, as, when a hunting terrier enters, each cub promptly rushes up them and the dog cannot follow. If those who raise objection to the presence of rabbits in a fox-covert will ponder on the foregoing remarks, it is possible they will afterwards entertain a contrary opinion.

For the sake of the game, foxes are far better kept at ground, and, indeed, it is better for hunting that they should lie in their earths all day if so disposed. While there, they are not likely to be disturbed and driven away from the covert, but

when lying above ground are constantly being put on foot. If this occurs, a fox will start hunting, and it does not make for quietude in the preserves if foxes are continually wandering about and disturbing the coverts. Where a fox can be kept at ground a find is more to be relied upon, for Reynard may easily be shut out when hounds are expected. The great advantage of allowing foxes to remain at ground is that they stay there in peace the major portion of the twenty-four hours, perfectly free from interference, if wandering curs can be kept from entering the earths. It is their nature to sleep through the day if permitted to do so, and roam only at night. Foxes not allowed to have and occupy earths are forced to secure what rest they can above ground, and are constantly being put on foot by dogs, intruders of the human kind, and even by loud voices at a distance. They may not leave a covert, but are compelled to move about it in search of quiet; and when at this do not lose opportunities of seizing game, should such present themselves. The mere fact of a fox wandering about in the daytime creates a disturbance amongst game in a covert, and has the effect of scaring a portion of it to other quarters. Where foxes are kept at ground they do not emerge, except under special

circumstances, till nightfall, and then every pheasant which is adult should be at roost.

Hunting men ought at once to recognise the importance of keeping foxes at ground, for a fox which rests all day is in a fit condition for a long ramble during the hours of darkness; and it is at such a time the country and the way about it is learned. A fox wandering by day seldom learns anything in the way suggested, for it is scared at every turn. Neither is a fox which has its rest disturbed by day able to roam far, for it generally secures a meal, and is then glad to lie down and sleep in peace.

In a clay country foxes are not much accustomed to being at ground unless artificial earths are provided, for nearly every litter of cubs is reared in a hollow stump or similar shelter. Under these circumstances the game suffers greatly, as the foxes feed to a large extent by day and sleep at night, when they are more free from interference. If a fox gets a hare it is always by jumping on puss while she is in her form, and this can hardly occur unless Reynard is on the prowl by day. Rabbits, like foxes, find great difficulty in burrowing in a clay soil, and a large number live and are bred above ground; consequently they suffer more than would be the

case on a light soil. Having no burrows to which to retreat, the rabbits are easily coursed down by a fox, and, being obliged to sit above ground, are seized in their seats by foxes hunting by daylight. Litters of young rabbits are also laid up in hollow stumps, where they remain an easy prey to the first passing fox; or in shallow stops, which Reynard quickly tears out if so disposed.

Artificial earths may not be an unmixed blessing, but should certainly be provided in a clay country if game is required, for foxes which remain at ground by day do far less damage in the end. If a passage can be made in some steep bank, through the clay to a vein of sand, the foxes will do the rest; and a cosier abiding place for them could not be imagined. Should an earth have to be made, it must be located at a spot just inside a gorse, so that it may be closed at night without the necessity of the keeper passing through a large portion of the covert. If he is compelled to do this, a fox which has just emerged from its earth, and not yet left the covert, may be driven back and shut in. A keeper for his own sake should be most careful to shut foxes from their earths when required, and to close the entrances properly when hounds are expected to run his way. He is generally credited

with a desire to get rid of foxes, and he can gratify it in no more legitimate way than by careful attention to the details specified.

The officials of a Hunt do not always extend due consideration to the interests of their shooting friends when drawing coverts, being more intent on getting a fox to head for a good country than on preventing the escape of game over the boundary of an estate. Running hounds intent on the line of their fox do little damage in passing through a covert, but it is a different matter when they are drawing; in the last case every corner is searched and little in the way of game left undisturbed. This is particularly likely to occur if a fox fails to break directly, and the draw is lengthened. Hounds ought to be thrown into covert so that any game driven out will make for home and not away, and the Field should be placed in a position to assist in this desirable object. There is room for a great deal more consideration of this kind, as every shooting man who likes to provide a fox will agree.

There is one thing the Hunt authorities often do which cannot be too strongly condemned, and that is the turning down of semi-tame foxes in a covert stocked with young game. This is done because such litters are on hand and the Hunt

does not know what to do with them. Before now a litter has been released at night in a covert containing hand-reared pheasants just removed from the rearing-field, and great destruction wrought before measures could be taken to prevent it. From courtesy alone the owner of a shoot should be consulted before such foxes are turned down on his place, or a breach of friendship will surely result. If he consents to receive a litter and it is released at a spot indicated by him, the cubs comprising it are sure to be fed and properly looked after. Instances are on record of information being sent to hunting headquarters of there being too many litters on an estate, accompanied by a request that some should be taken elsewhere; and these cubs have been removed by day, and turned down on the same place the succeeding night.

Cubs which have been kept in confinement a few weeks and fed by hand become partially tame; their dread of man is not so pronounced as it is in the case of purely wild foxes, and being unaccustomed to get their own food such cubs venture lengths which an ordinary fox would not dare. In this case all the keeper's efforts and carefully-devised scares are of little avail. Many good friends of hunting have been alienated by

the unwise turning down of half-tame cubs on their estates, and, as far as the sport they afford is concerned, the foxes they develop into are not worth the loss of the most humble supporter of the Hunt.

Another precaution which Hunt authorities might observe on behalf of their shooting allies is to keep cubbing fixtures quite secret. These take place while game, especially hand-reared pheasants, is young and inexperienced, and the roughs who make the coming of hounds an excuse for assembling are able to secure a lot of birds with little trouble. Besides, when cubs are the quarry, hounds linger in covert a long time, and roughs of poaching inclinations have an excuse for lingering on the scene also. Regular hunting fixtures may be made public, for game in November is mature, better able to look after its own safety, the pack is soon away on the line of a fox, and the keeper in a position to order off the roughs. A portion of the Field and some of the Hunt servants might do worse than act as keepers on these occasions, and they should at once check any attempt of roughs to penetrate into the more sacred parts of a preserve. The drawing of coverts, too, might be conducted less noisily, with an absence of horn-blowing and loud

cries ; such a tumult may get foxes on foot, but also puts birds on wing.

The cry of the hunting man is for old foxes in preference to youngsters bred the season before, the former being supposed to possess a knowledge of the country-side which enables them to run better, but young foxes appeal more to the shooting man. When a fox has managed to survive a couple of seasons he has acquired a store of knowledge certainly, but this enables him to outwit hounds by cunning rather than by pace. On the other hand, foxes of less experience have no accumulation of cunning to draw upon, they know considerably less of the country, and as their only idea of escaping is by outpacing hounds they generally afford a good run and blood to the pack at its termination. The old fox in many instances gets to ground safely, and hounds are discouraged thereby. As explained elsewhere, it is the old fox which does the greatest damage amongst game, and a leash of them are capable of far more harm than double the number of youngsters.

Hunting men look askance on any project for preserving foxes which interferes in the least degree with the animals' liberty, saying that once they sanction such procedure there is no telling where it will end. Without recommending the

following ideas to be put into practice, the author feels that they are worthy of discussion in a work of this description, and he only regrets that he is not permitted to name the estates upon which they have been carried out. On one estate the head-keeper made a practice of confining every fox for a few weeks during the breeding season of the game, and he contrived to do this without handling one. Two litters of cubs were reared annually, and each was fenced in with wire-netting, together with the vixen belonging to it. No dead carrion was thrown down for the litter to feed upon, but each evening a few live rabbits were released in the enclosure, and these were sufficient to maintain the family of foxes in health and vigour. The fence was not erected till the end of March, when game commences to nest, was taken down at the end of June, and the results accruing from this system were wonderful, as the game was free from molestation during the nesting season. This keeper's method of catching up the dog and other odd foxes about the estate is curious and yet simple and effective. He merely wires in a big enclosure in the centre of his principal covert, erecting a fence impassable to a fox, and in it places one fox to serve as a decoy to the rest. This enclosure is got into working order as soon

as possible after hunting ceases. On the outside of the fence he throws up one or two banks of earth at equal distances apart, up these the foxes at liberty run, and from the top they leap into the enclosure to join the one already there. This they do freely till hardly one remains outside. Like the rest, they are liberally fed on live rabbits, and duly released when they can do little harm, in perfect health and condition. This is a plan which might be more widely practised, if carried out as carefully, with every benefit to sporting interests.

Another keeper, a well-known man in his profession, vouched that he secured the safety of his nesting game by performing on every cub a slight operation which utterly destroyed its scenting faculties. How he contrived to do this he could never be persuaded to divulge, but observation of the habits of his foxes certainly went to prove that something of the kind had been done. They could not smell a red-herring, were compelled to hunt for food by aid of eyes alone, and a bird on its nest was rarely destroyed. Food not being easy to procure under such conditions, these foxes had to work hard for it and range far, and consequently grew to be very active and vigorous. The keeper who practises this is fond of asserting it to be the only solution of the problem of producing

winged game in a hunting country, but he feared to speak of it generally from dread of losing his berth.

Many hunting-men look with a kindly eye on badgers, but, however welcome their presence in a covert where foxes are given the preference over game, they should not be permitted to remain on a shooting estate. Badgers are responsible for a lot of destruction which is attributed by the ignorant to foxes, the work of the two animals being very similar to all but the experienced keeper. The badger often bores a way into a hen-roost of which the fox takes advantage later in the night. Probably, a badger is as destructive to nests of game and stops of young rabbits as a fox, and has been known to clear every nest out of a fence in a single night. Of eggs of all descriptions he is extremely fond, and is guilty of searching consistently and perseveringly for such delicacies.

When complaints are heard of great havoc among game nests, it is advisable for those concerned to make careful inquiry and examination. In one instance the author heard that a farmer, who had the shooting rights over his own holding, had lost a great many partridge nests from foxes, and was vowing vengeance against the

entire vulpine race. A very casual inspection was sufficient to show that no one but himself was responsible for the damage, as it had all been done by the pigs he had allowed to roam over certain fields that year. Pigs have noses far keener than a setter's, and soon learn to hunt for eggs with the greatest success, as many a farmer's wife has found to her own cost when resorting to her hen-roost in quest of eggs. No doubt many a game nest they have destroyed has been scored against foxes.

One good work the fox does is the snapping-up of diseased game as soon as it becomes at all feeble, and thereby preventing the spread of the complaint. In the Eastern Counties, and elsewhere, coveys of partridges are frequently seen afflicted with gapes, and, when flushed, individual birds drop exhausted at intervals along the whole line of flight. These birds linger on from day to day, spreading the disease, but if foxes existed there all but the most vigorous would be promptly destroyed, and their capacity for harm at once brought to an end, with ultimate benefit to the rest of the stock. In a hunting district a covey may be noted to grow smaller day by day, but it is possible that the birds have become infected with disease, and have fallen a prey to Reynard

before they grew so weak as to be noticeable. There is no doubt that an appreciable portion of the game a fox secures would die in any case from disease or wounds, and perhaps do immense harm before succumbing in a natural way. So it is really no loss.

In a hunting country, where foxes are to be feared, a game-preserved will do well to maintain his stock of game in the fullest health and vigour. A healthy bird possessed of good stamina is sure to be more on the alert than another lower in condition, which is inclined to mope; it is the latter bird which becomes an easy prey to foxes. Interbreeding is a sure and certain means of producing birds lacking in vigour, and should be avoided at all costs. Where the proprietor of a shooting is careful to infuse fresh blood amongst his stock at frequent intervals, his losses from foxes are sure to be decreased, for his birds are better able to look after their own safety. We all recognise in the human specimen the alertness and vim which arises from perfect health and a vigorous constitution, and, as this enables a man to battle with the difficulties of his life, so does it assist even a pheasant or partridge to escape dangers which are fatal to less vigorous birds of their kind. Game out of condition is just as much

a victim to lassitude as a human subject, and it is one of the laws of nature that the unfit should succumb and give place to the fit. Foxes are acting as the agents of nature when destroying game of weak stamina.

It is a frequent remark of experienced sportsmen that game of all descriptions found in a hunting country affords the best of sport. This is because the ever-present danger of foxes has caused it to be wild and constantly on the alert, and also because each weakly bird is certain to be destroyed and only the healthiest are left to breed.

It is not quite clear why sportsmen should be so anxious to secure the old birds from a covey of partridges as early in the shooting season as possible, although this is widely done under a rightful impression that they are best out of the way before another breeding season comes round. Young birds are the more prolific without a doubt, and nothing is to be said against killing the parent birds of a covey directly the season opens in a non-hunting locality; but it is not a wise action where foxes have to be reckoned with, because when the old birds have disappeared the covey is deprived of its natural protectors. Young partridges are innocent of many risks from which the parent birds are able to defend

them, and a fox finds it extremely easy to do as he likes with a covey lacking their guidance. In a hunting country it is advisable to allow old partridges to escape at the opening of the season, and to kill them later on. At night it is the old cock which keeps awake and on the alert to give warning of a fox creeping near, and partridge netters one and all assert that he is the means of saving many a covey just as the net is about to fall and enfold the lot. Old partridges, of experience, are more likely to rear a brood in a hunting country than young pairs of the previous season, for the writer has proved this over and over again.

Partridge driving late in the day is greatly to be condemned, and should not be indulged in if foxes are numerous. If darkness comes on before the broken and intermixed coveys are able to sort themselves, and assemble together, foxes have a rare frolic amongst the birds on the stubbles and fallows. Thoroughly dazed, the partridges sit about in all sorts of places, many of them having crept into fences and ditches, where they fall easy victims to foxes. French partridges suffer a great deal in this way, for they run till tired and then tuck themselves into a hedge.

There is just one matter which should be

pointed out to those readers who turn down foreign partridges in a hunting district. Wherever possible a majority of hen birds should be released, for cocks are sure to be in preponderance at the pairing season. When a nest is destroyed by a fox it is generally the hen bird which is taken and the cock which escapes, and this accounts for birds of the male sex predominating where foxes are preserved. An excess of cock partridges is well known to be productive of much harm, for these disappointed old bachelors interfere with other pairs and at times go so far as to upset both nest and eggs. If a nest is found deserted, and the eggs broken or displaced, a fox is nearly certain to be blamed, especially if a fight between the two cock birds has occurred, and a few feathers are scattered around as the result of the scrimmage. Even if unpaired cock partridges do not go so far as to disturb a sitting bird they linger round the nest attempting to fight the cock belonging to it, and such a scent is diffused around that a passing fox can hardly fail to detect it.

Like sporting dogs, foxes vary as regards keenness of scenting faculties, some having better noses than others. A particular fox also will be found to have a nose for a particular thing; for

instance, taking pheasant nests and leaving those of partridges alone. Others are keen at finding leverets, while some are riverside hunters, which subsist largely on water-hens, water-rats, and like delicacies. Foxes certainly entertain different ideas of what is good.

French, or red-legged, partridges are more reliable breeders than the native variety in a hunting country, which fact is principally attributable to their habit of nesting on pollard trees, ricks, and in other positions not easy of access to Reynard. There the broods are hatched safe from his interference. However, there is a time when the fox plays havoc with the red-legs; on a heavy soil the surface is often sticky during winter, and the French partridges, having a preference for using their legs, become encumbered with soil attached thereto, and can neither run nor fly. Then Reynard takes heavy toll of their numbers.

Few readers may know that foxes are exceedingly fond of ripe wild fruits (as any one may see who takes the trouble to examine their excreta during the autumn), such as raspberries, blackberries, &c. It is not suggested that the provision of this will save the game, but it goes to prove that a fox is not as strictly carnivorous as is

generally supposed, and when consuming one thing he is not eating another. Perhaps, Reynard's favourite fruit is gooseberries dead-ripe, for cubs kept as pets have been known to clear a bush completely of its crop.

A covert in which foxes are carefully preserved, and left undisturbed, is occasionally drawn blank, to the consternation and bewilderment of the owner, and it will not be out of place to relate several peculiar influences which have caused the needful to be lacking. In one case a boy was employed to scare rooks from a field newly sown with wheat near a fox-covert, and the morning hounds were expected managed to get possession of a tin horn, which he blew with what under other circumstances would have been commendable skill and perseverance. When hounds came every fox had left that covert some hours before, and it was drawn blank the first time for many seasons. In another case rabbits had been tainted out for shooting, and the gas-tar used had proved too much for the foxes. In yet another instance a well-known covert was enclosed with iron fencing, and the proprietor took it into his head to dress this with tar just before the opening of the hunting season. The smell was, of course, outrageous. and as it lasted for weeks not a fox remained in

the covert. Even after the smell vanished the tar was sticky on the rails, and foxes refused to pass through till it had dried and no longer adhered to their coats. These are a few striking reasons for coverts being drawn blank, and before giving way to suspicion it would be well for Hunt authorities on similar occasions to search deeply into the real cause.

If foxes happen to be scarce, very unkind remarks are at times made concerning local shooting men and their keepers, for which there may not be the slightest justification; it is decidedly wrong to indulge in these maledictions, for others are more likely to be deserving of blame, although the shooting man and the keeper are supposed to be the only persons having an interest in destroying foxes. It is a most unwise thing for a Hunt to give any man a reputation for dealing harshly with foxes, for there is always plenty of people ready to take advantage of such an individual's reputed guilt and indulge freely in vulpecide, with the certainty that suspicion will never fall their way, and that all the blame will be ascribed to the party already bearing so bad a name. When foxes have been found poisoned, and the culprit responsible detected, the author has known neighbours to continue poisoning

because they foresaw that the death of every fox subsequently found would be attributed to the man proved guilty and the baits he had already placed down.

A shooting man who does his best to provide foxes is a far greater friend to the Hunt than a follower of hounds who does no more, and should be treated fairly in every way. The author knew an estate in the centre of a big shooting district on which foxes were always treated fairly, while over a wide surrounding area it was doubtful if they ever received fair play. The consequence was the coverts on this estate were not drawn as frequently as they should have been, while those around were regularly visited by hounds. Because the owner was an acknowledged friend of foxes his estate was regarded as a reservoir to feed the neighbourhood, and he was expected to breed and keep foxes to stock the whole country-side. This was taking an unfair advantage of his goodwill, and there could have been practised no better way of alienating him.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### FOXES AND LAMBS.

THE heading of this chapter may strike readers as not strictly within the scope of a work of this character, but, in the interests of the preservation of foxes, it will not be out of place to describe how Reynard is tempted to interfere with lambs, and the best method of preventing such interference.

First of all, if a fox does steal a lamb it is from dire necessity, and because of a lack of other food ; in a game-preserving country he will never be driven to such straits, and it is rare indeed that he there succumbs to the attractions of young mutton. Farmers should remember this when inclined to grumble at slight damage inflicted by game on their crops, for the presence of the game of which they complain may be the means of saving them from more serious losses—just as it induces men to poach who might otherwise steal fowls.

When speaking of foxes never stealing lambs except under dire necessity the author is alluding to English-bred foxes only, being thoroughly convinced of their innocence in that respect, but he is not so certain that foxes imported from the far North are altogether so guiltless. Such foxes are very different in habit to those bred in the South. Food is scarce, they have had the run of a large extent of moorland on which sheep abound, and are well known to be guilty of stealing lambs. If a visit is paid to the rocks in which litters of cubs are bred in the far North, plenty of evidence is to be seen that the youngsters have had a good deal of young mutton. Should cubs fed in this way be captured and turned down in the South, it is only natural that for a time they should seek to feed on similar fare. However, the plenitude of other food, if they have been released in a preserved district, soon causes them to take to other modes of living, and these imported foxes rarely steal lambs after the first season in their new home.

If here and there a fox does kill lambs the owner or his shepherd is often much to blame. A farmer generally establishes a lambing pen in the fields, and all the pregnant ewes are collected therein. As soon as lambs begin to appear foxes

are attracted to the spot—and how? Why, simply by the cleanings or afterbirths of the ewes being merely thrown outside the pen instead of buried deeply out of the way. Either fox or dog will go miles for such fare as this, and the odour, which savours strongly of newborn lamb, attracts them from over a long distance. If a fox is encouraged in this way, is it to be wondered at that a lamb is stolen when afterbirths are no longer to be had? Were these disposed of properly, a fox would not consider it worth his while to visit the lambing fold.

The same remarks apply to the dead lambs of tender age, which the shepherd is too lazy to bury, for these, too, are generally thrown into some convenient ditch, or covert, where a fox can feed on them. In this way a liking for such food is engendered, and when dead lamb is no longer available, that alive has to pay the penalty. A farmer who permits his shepherd to leave dead lambs lying about is deserving of little sympathy should foxes attack his young flock.

Foxes are frequently blamed for killing almost mature mutton, when dogs are the real culprits; the latter feed on their victim and leave it, and a fox passing near is attracted to the spot and also enjoys a meal. The tracks of one or several foxes

soon obliterate those of the dogs, and, as the foot-marks of the former only are to be seen in the morning, foxes are at once condemned without further inquiry. A vixen, too, is sometimes considered guilty because a dead lamb is found near her earth, but it may be one she has found which a shepherd had neglected to bury.

Foxes may be kept away from a sheepfold if a string, thoroughly dressed with Renardine, is run all round it at a height of about fifteen inches from the ground, and when ewes and very young lambs are turned out each of the latter should be dressed with Renardine twice a week on the root of the tail. No fox will venture to touch them where this precaution is observed, for the odour of the fluid renders the flesh utterly distasteful to him.

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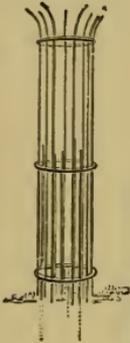
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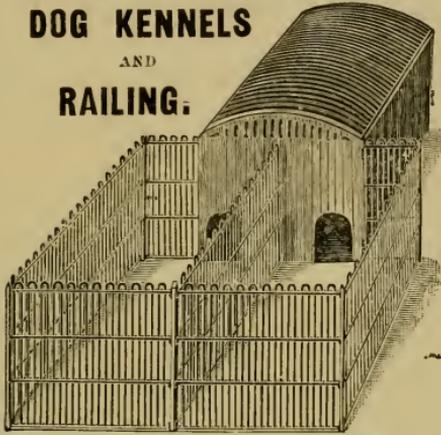
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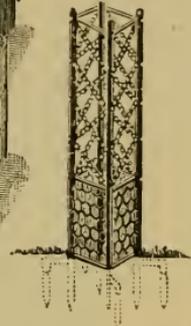
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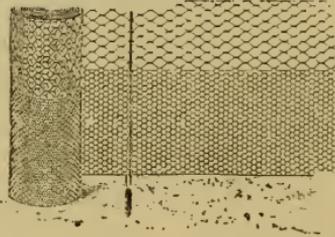
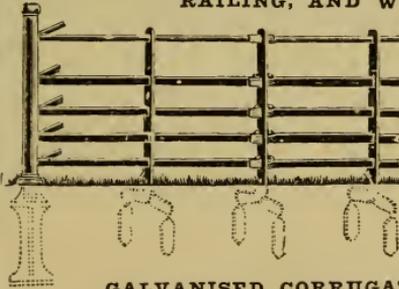
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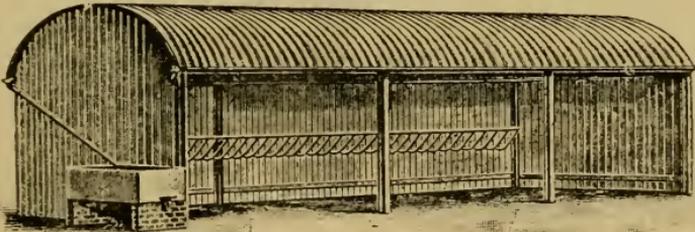
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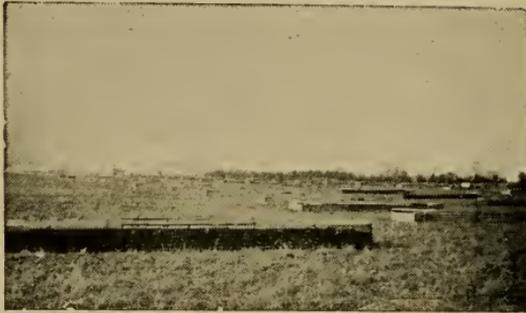


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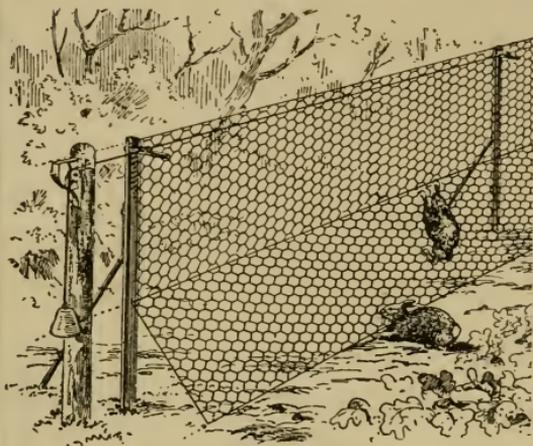
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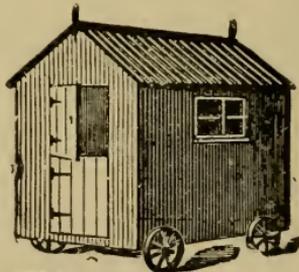
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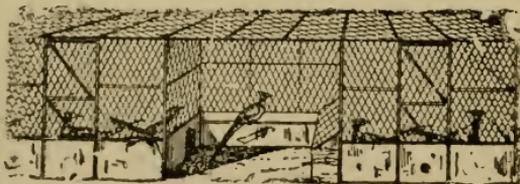
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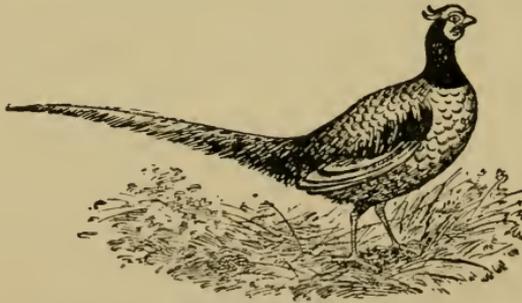
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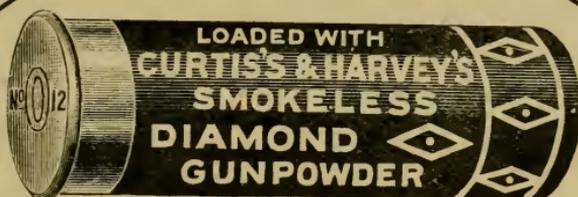
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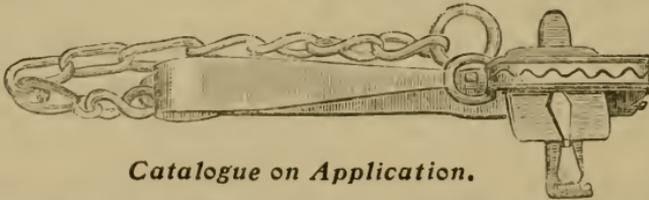
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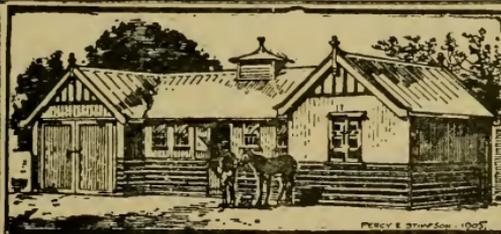
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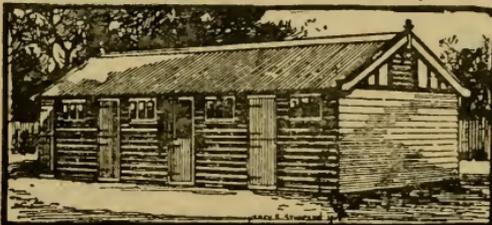
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