



Commencement of the Hunt



The Moment of Attack



Carrying Off the Quarry

(Courtesy of Niel Morrow Ladd.)

# Your Pet Cat May Have to Have a License Soon

## Otherwise It Will Be Killed as a Public Nuisance If Bill Now Before Legislature Passes—An Effort to Protect Birds and Crops

**I**T was about twenty years ago that the work of mosquito extermination was first seriously undertaken in this country as a matter of community or State activity. Of course, it was hailed with derision. The attention of the professional jokesmiths was transferred from the mosquito to the would-be mosquito exterminator. But the ridicule was short-lived. The public was educated to understand that the mosquito, even the Jersey mosquito, was not a joke but a most dangerous carrier of disease, and then the work of getting rid of the pest was taken seriously and put on a systematic basis.

Now it is the turn of the stray cat. Derision and levity once more, as a matter of course. But the work is under way. There is to be a committee hearing at Albany next Wednesday, on a pending bill providing for the licensing of pet cats and the destruction of all others in this state. The education of the public up to the point of taking this new crusade seriously ought to be a quicker and easier matter than it was in the case of the mosquito, for the charge against the cat, particularly at the present time, is a very tangible one, and directly linked up with no less a popular problem than that of the cost of living.

Here is the direct connection: The high cost of living is largely due to the fact that not enough foodstuff is produced by the farmers; the shortage of crop is, in turn, partly due to the ravages of insects, and the only effective check on the insects is the birds. But the birds are destroyed by the cats. Every link in this chain between the cat and the cost of food is backed up and proved by scientific demonstration and statistics and the totals all along the line are enormous.

For example, Frank M. Chapman of the American Museum of Natural History figures that there are at least 25,000,000 cats in the United States, and the country's annual loss in crops from the depredations of insects alone is estimated at \$1,200,000,000. In the single year of 1904 the destruction of the Hessian fly in the wheat-growing States of the country cost \$50,000,000. The crop loss in the Mississippi Valley in one year due to cinch bugs is placed at \$100,000,000. Estimates of the loss of bird life for the entire country have not been made, but the figures from several of the States are most significant and sufficiently indicate the seriousness of the cat pest. Dr. A. K. Fisher of the Biological Survey says that in New York State the cats destroy 3,500,000 birds annually, and the estimate of the number of birds needlessly lost to the farmers of Illinois every year is 2,500,000.

Now, as to what the birds can do for the welfare of the nation if they are unmolested. "In twenty-five years," said C. H. Wilson, in an address to the New York Forest, Fish, and Game League urging that body to support anti-cat legislation at Albany, "the stomachs of 50,000 birds have been examined by the Biological Survey, and it has been found

that 50 species feed upon different varieties of caterpillars, 38 upon those species that devastate plant life, and 50 upon the most destructive species of scale insects. Now, consider noxious weed seeds: The food of the mourning dove is 64 per cent. weed seed, 27 per cent. of the meadow lark's food is weed seed, and 40 species of sparrows in the United States are seed eaters, 97 per cent. of their food being seed. If in Iowa there were 10 sparrows to the square mile on a Winter range of 200 days, the total annual consumption of weed seed in that State would be 875 tons. There are 45 species and sub-species of woodpecker in the United States; two-thirds of their food is noxious insects, and they are the salvation of our forests."

Edward Howe Forbush, State Ornithologist of Massachusetts, has this to say on the same phase of the subject:

Experiments have demonstrated that many birds, particularly the young, consume more than their own weight of insect food daily, and that it is not unusual for a pair of birds and their young to dispose of from 300 to 1,000 insects a day. If they feed on minute or newly hatched insects, the number may be far greater. Dr. Brewer's calculation that a family of jays will consume 1,000,000 caterpillars in a season may be an exaggeration, but it shows what an impression the study of this bird's food habits left on his mind. I have given much attention to this subject and have written more fully on it elsewhere.

Various estimates regarding the number of insects killed by birds in different States have been made. Reed calculates that the birds of Massachusetts destroy 21,000 bushels of insects daily from May to September. A Nebraska naturalist has estimated that the birds of that State eat 170 carloads of insects per day, and it has been calculated that the birds of New York destroy more than 3,000,000 bushels of noxious insects each season. These figures may be wide of the actual numbers, but they are based on known facts.

I have noted many instances where birds have saved trees and crops from destruction by insects, and many where the destruction of birds has been followed by a great increase of insect pests. In 1894, a year of insect abundance, I succeeded in protecting an orchard in Medford, by attracting birds; thereby securing the only full apple crop in town that year, while my nearest neighbor got a partial crop as a result of my experiment. Baron Hans von Berlepsch kept his forest in fine condition by attracting and protecting birds on his large estate Seebach, in Angersalza, Thuringia, Germany, at a time when all the other trees of the countryside were stripped bare by caterpillars. The beneficial effect produced by the birds extended for a quarter of a mile beyond his boundaries. The Baron does not tolerate a cat outside the buildings.

Bobwhites have been more numerous on my place this Summer (1915) than for many years. They have frequented the potato patch, and for the first time in years it has not been necessary to spray for potato beetles. I have recently received the crop of one of these birds, sent me by Mr. Charles P. Curtis of Boston. The bird was killed by a mowing machine in the field, but the crop contained forty-eight potato beetles and 250 weed seed. James Henry Rice of Summerville, S. C., writes that by protecting bobwhites and encouraging them to breed in and about his potato fields, he has secured practical immunity from the potato beetle.

These examples are quite enough to show that birds in sufficient numbers may become important checks on injurious insects. It is difficult to compute the value of birds to agriculture, but William R. Oates, State Fish, Game, and Forestry Warden of Michigan, has placed the value of insectivorous and seed-eating birds of that State at \$10,000,000 per year, and doubts if an equivalent

could be secured in human labor for twice that amount.

If we assume that a bird, during its normal lifetime, eats but 50,000 insects, each cat that kills fifty birds in a year saves an enormous host of insects, the number varying in each case with the potential length of life of the bird had it not been killed by the cat. A cat that kills only ten birds annually protects a swarm of insects. It is fortunate that some few of the insects commonly eaten by birds feed on injurious insects, otherwise the destruction of birds by cats would be even more serious.

Needless to say, the figures showing what the insects can do to hurt the country when they are left alone are even more sensational.

A potato bug (remember that potatoes are now \$4 a bushel because of their scarcity) will produce fifty to sixty million more of its kind in a season; the green-leafed louse, destructive to hops, fruit, and vegetables, reproduces at the rate of ten sextillion to the pair in one season, while the natural increase of a pair of gypsy moth would defoliate the United States in eight years. One hundred and seventy-six species of insects attack the apple, peach, and cherry tree, 400 the oak, 100 the maple, and 300 the coniferous trees, while a larger number feed upon cereals, grain, and garden crops.

But in spite of all these unquestioned facts and figures about cats and birds and insects and damaged crops there is no State in the Union that has any law to protect itself against the stray cat. Bills for such laws are now pending in New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Massachusetts, and they have the support of the American Game Protective Association, the Campfire Club, the Audubon Societies, and many similar organizations, in addition to the intelligent farmers and the cat lovers themselves. The latter are willing to have the homeless, stray cats, the ones that do the most damage, painlessly removed, and their opposition to the proposed laws has been withdrawn because it is not intended to kill any household pets.

The bill now before the Joint Conservation Committees of the Senate and Assembly at Albany provides that no person shall keep a cat without a license, to be issued by the County, City, or Town Clerk. The license fee is 50 cents and the charge for issuing it 25 cents. Every licensed cat must be tagged and every cat without a tag is to be considered as a public nuisance and killed.

John B. Burnham, President of the American Game Association, and William B. Greeley, Chairman of the Conservation Committee of the Campfire Club, who are leaders in what is going to develop into a national crusade against the cat pest, will be in Albany at the Wednesday hearing to urge the passage of the New York bill, which, it is hoped, will start the thing for the whole country.

Although no State has taken action in the matter, there has been a community experiment in Montclair, N. J., which may be taken as an object lesson elsewhere. Frederick K. Vreeland, who lives in Montclair and is also a member of the Campfire Club's Conservation Com-

mittee, undertook to do some pioneer anti-cat work in his home town.

"We discovered at the outset," said Mr. Vreeland, "that we had no legal authority as a town to compel the licensing of cats, so we dug up an old law prohibiting the roaming of hogs, cattle, and other animals in the streets of a village or town. That served the purpose, after a fashion, because it was easy enough to consider stray cats as 'other animals,' and as such 700 have been impounded and killed within the little more than a year in which we have been at work."

"So far every attempt to have the matter covered by State legislation has been met with considerable levity at Trenton, but a bill is now pending in the New Jersey Legislature giving broader powers to the municipalities, and which, if passed, will obviate the necessity of the indirect methods of control we have had to adopt in Montclair. I hope that eventually similar laws will be passed in every State of the country."

The one argument most frequently heard in behalf of the cat is that it kills rats and mice. "But that is not a good argument," says Mr. Vreeland. "Rats and mice may be got rid of much more thoroughly by the use of traps or poison or the Pasteur virus made for that purpose, and the traps and the poison do not destroy birds or carry disease. That is another charge against the cat. Opinions differ, and the work of getting evidence on the subject has not been carried very far, but it is declared by many physicians that cats do transmit disease germs."

John Burroughs says that cats probably destroy more birds than all other animals combined. He believes that the preservation of birds involves the non-preservation of cats.

Dr. Frank M. Chapman, of the American Museum of Natural History, author of standard works on American ornithology and editor of "Bird-Lore," has this to say on the subject:

The most important problem confronting bird protectors today is the devising of a proper means for the disposition of the surplus cat population of this country. By surplus population we mean that very large proportion of cats which do not receive the care due a domesticated or pet animal, and which are, therefore, practically dependent on their own efforts for food.

Dr. William T. Hornaday, Director of the New York Zoological Park, and author of valuable works on the protection of wild life, says:

In such thickly settled communities as our Northern States, from the Atlantic Coast to the sandhills of Kansas and Nebraska, the domestic cat is probably the greatest four-footed scourge of bird life.

Mrs. Mabel Osgood Wright, President of the Connecticut Audubon Society, and author of many popular books on birds, writes:

The evidence of men and women whose words are incontestable would verify my most radical statement, but one fact is beyond dispute: if the people of the country insist upon keeping cats in the same numbers as at present, all the splendid work of Federal and State legislation, all the labors of game and song-bird protective associations, all the loving care of individuals in watching and feeding, will not be able to save our native birds in many localities.