

ON THE VALUE OF NEWSPAPERS AS A SOURCE OF EXAMPLES FOR A COURSE ENTITLED "VERTEBRATE PEST CONTROL".

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Abstract: While teaching a course entitled Vertebrate Pest Control, I scanned local newspapers for articles relevant to the course. A wide range of news items dealing with animals in nuisance and pest situations was found as were articles, photographs, and cartoons which were useful in demonstrating principles of vertebrate pest control and in providing discussions of means to deal with animals in pest situations.

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In teaching I try to keep my courses relevant to real world situations and look for practical examples to illustrate the principles discussed. One course I teach is entitled "Vertebrate Pest Control" and I have found that not only are there real world problems which provide excellent examples but that the problems themselves are frequently newsworthy. I usually find a wide range of examples during the quarter in which I teach the course and have saved outstanding examples over a number of years. I find also that students locate examples from newspapers that I do not have access to and frequently bring these to class. This report details several examples which became available during one quarter (Fall 1977) when I was teaching the course. The examples are drawn primarily from my local daily newspaper "The Roanoke Times". Other articles were recovered from local newspapers, newspapers searched by students in the course and from newspapers seen on out-of-town trips.

A few definitions are in order to clarify the scope of the course. "Vertebrate" for the purposes of the course includes all vertebrates (birds, mammals, fishes, and reptiles) other than man whether they are domesticated or not. All species are dealt with as pests in the course provided they contributed to pest or nuisance situations. The term "Pest" in the course referred to any animal species contributing to a situation where there was real or imagined damage to man, crops, animals, or structures and to species contributing to hazards to man's safety, health, well-being, or esthetic values. Because of the above definitions a wide range of situations involving vertebrates as pests was possible. The only situations not considered in the course were those which related to "game management" *per se* as such situations were adequately dealt with in other courses.

Hungry Deer Eating Garden Vegetables (Ranke Times [R.T.] 9/7/77)

This report provided an opportunity to discuss a major problem—deer damage to crops—and the approaches to its solution in Virginia. In particular the "damage stamp" system in Virginia Counties was discussed.

Deer Crashes Shop Window (R.T. 9/8/77)

This was a story of deer gaining entry through the window of a flower shop. The method of disposal of the deer mentioned in the article prompted a discussion of the most appropriate method and the ownership of wildlife.

Deer also gained access to a building through a window (*Deer No Joke: R.T. 12/5/77*). In this instance they were properly disposed of.

Hunters, Quarry Present Obstacle to Test Drivers (R.T. 11/10/77)

This was a report of problems caused by deer at an automobile proving ground in Michigan. This prompted a discussion of the problem of deer, and other large wildlife species, on roads and airports.

Wild Marauder Kills Livestock—Believed Coyote (R.T. 9/12/77)

This was a story of a mysterious predator which was killing livestock in Bath County (a rural area of Virginia). The speculation that the culprit might be a coyote prompted a discussion of the increased number of reports of coyotes east of the Mississippi River and of appropriate means to deal with coyotes in such a situation, particularly how recent problems of coyotes in Virginia were handled.

Slain Red Wolf May Be Killer of Livestock (R.T. 10/3/77)

Dealt with speculation that a predator killed by a farmer in Bath County might

have been a red wolf. Discussion of the range of the red wolf and of its status as an endangered species followed as did a discussion of the problems in managing members of rare and endangered species in past situations.

A later story (*Bath Marauder No Wolf, but Mix of Dog, Coyote—R.T. 10/4/77*) cleared up the speculation concerning involvement of a red wolf, and prompted a discussion of the problems of hybridized species, particularly coyote-dog hybrids.

Two similar stories were found in Massachusetts papers. Dogs were shot by a police officer around Northampton, Massachusetts, after they were found molesting domestic animals (*Dogs Shot in Retaliation for Poultry Killing—Species Uncertain. Daily Hampshire Gazette 10/20/77*). There was some speculation that the species involved might have been coyotes—a protected species in Massachusetts. The animals were later ruled to be dogs (*Animals Shot in Williamsburg are Identified as Dogs—Killed Legally. Daily Hampshire Gazette 10/21/77*). The incident prompted a discussion of differences between state wildlife laws.

Dogs featured in a wide range of problems during the quarter. An informative article on attacks on people by dogs reported that family dogs caused most attacks on people (*Family Dogs Blamed for Fatal Attacks—Nationwide Survey R.T. 10/19/77*). This prompted a discussion of problems caused by dogs, particularly of problems of personal injuries which have increased in severity with the trend towards maintenance of larger dogs.

Problems of enforcement of dog control laws were discussed in the context of an article. *Leash Law to End Stray Dog Problem (Blacksburg-Christiansburg News Messenger 10/4/77)* and *Dog Tags Available in Nov. (Blacksburg-Christiansburg News Messenger 10/4/77)*.

Problems of rabies control were discussed in the context of an article, *Rabies Clinics Set by Roanoke County (R.T. 9/15/77)*. The success of controlling the rabies threat from dogs was discussed as was the now relatively greater role of wild species as rabies vectors.

The wide range of dog related problems was evident from letters to the editor of the Roanoke Times (*Gone to the Dogs 11/13/77*) and to a problem solving column in the Roanoke Times (*Law Bans Running Dogs 10/19/77; City Bans Barking Dogs 10/27/77*). A major aspect of dog problems vis damage to zoo animals was discussed following the article—*Fence Rails to Buffalo Frantic Beast (R.T. 12/1/77)*.

Public attitudes to dogs and other animals were discussed, as were methods of humanely killing animals, following reports of a controversial method disposing of stray animals (*Pulaski Refuses to Stop Using Guns on Strays. R.T. 9/28/77; Pulaski Warden Changing Method R.T. 10/27/77*). An advertisement offering a \$100 reward for return of a lost dog (*R.T. 11/8/77*) as well as a story about a woman with 41 dogs (*Chicago Woman Assures Cleanup; Pets Returned R.T. 11/5/77*) emphasized the bond possible between people and their pets and the public relations problems involved in dealing with problem dogs.

Other dog problems such as the soiling of footpaths and parks in cities were discussed at the prompting of a story about the supplying of a street toilet for dogs in Tel Aviv (*Problem Relieved R.T. 11/26/77*). The problem of controlling breeding dogs and the potential for use of chemosterilization were discussed following a report—*Birth Control Pill for Pets in Works (R.T. 9/8/77)*.

Many aspects of animal control laws and potential laws were discussed following several stories (*Woman Convicted of Abandoning Kitten R.T. 12/1/77; Leg-Hold Traps Are at Issue in Ohio Voting, Richmond Times-Dispatch 11/7/77; Vagrant Skunk Lands Chicagoan in Dilemma, R.T. 12/7/77; Farm Bureau to Challenge Wildlife Law, R.T. 12/2/77; Plan Offered for Control of Animals, R.T. 10/6/77; Carroll Hunters Trap Supervisors, R.T. 11/16/77*). The complexity of wildlife and animal control laws was demonstrated by the predicament of the person in Chicago who trapped a skunk in his garage. He found he had violated trapping laws, could not keep the skunk, and he could not release the skunk. The ultimate disposition of the animal was not learned.

Methods of dealing with a wide array of animal problems in general were discussed following a story entitled *Wildlife 'Policeman' Combats Animal Damage (R.T. 10/20/77)*. A copyrighted story entitled "Nature can Control Mustangs" (*R.T. 9/7/77*) prompted a discussion of the problems of wild horses on public lands in the west and of the most appropriate means for their management. A photograph (*R.T. 11/1/77*) of burros

provided the stimulus for discussion of the problems caused by burros on public lands and the approach of having the public adopt individual burros as a means of reducing their populations.

A photograph of a moose in a town in Massachusetts (*Daily Hampshire Gazette 9/30/77*) stimulated a discussion of the requirements for immobilizing or otherwise capturing and relocating large animals in cities and of the public relations problem inherent in doing such work effectively.

Birds Force Jet Down (R.T. 12/1/77). This report stimulated discussion of the many problems birds caused at airports and in other bird-aircraft situations.

A number of articles on bears appeared during the quarter. A story on a woman attacked by a bear (*Woman loses 2 Arms to Bear; Says She's Lucky R.T. 9/8/77*) stimulated discussion on safety precautions in the presence of bears and the relative infrequency of bear attacks on people. A photo (*Unwelcome Resident R.T. 11/24/77*) of a bear which was a pet maintained in a town provided a discussion of the risks of keeping dangerous animals as pets. Such problems are real as demonstrated by the escape of a bear in Miami (*Bear's Two-day Fling Over. San Antonio Express 10/12/77*). The nuisance potential of bears was discussed following location of a photograph of a bear standing on a bird bath while robbing a bird feeder (*Super Squirrel. R.T. 11/6/77*).

Problems of rodents in dwellings were discussed in light of several reports of mice and rats in buildings (*White House Goes to War Against Mice R.T. 9/26/77*; Untitled story of the British Ambassador to Saudi Arabia being bitten by mice, R.T. 11/12/77; *Life is a Rat Race for Fla. Policeman R.T. 10/8/77*). Reports of bounties being paid on rats in Chicago (*Chicago Rat Patrol Needs Money. Wisconsin State Journal 9/28/77*; *Chicagoan Warring on Rats. R.T. 9/28/77*) prompted discussion of appropriate means of controlling rats in cities and of the impracticality of using bounties as a control method. Bounties were further discussed in light of a report (*Woodsmen Miss Hunting Rattlers R.T. 9/18/77*) describing bounty systems formerly used to control rattlesnakes.

The potential for predation by cats on wild animals was discussed following a report of a warning to cat owners to place bells on their cats (*Cat Lovers scared by 'Warning' R.T. 11/27/77*).

Pigeons Get Itchy Feet (R.T. 11/13/77) prompted a discussion of means of controlling pigeons in urban areas. Photographs of children (*R.T. 11/22/77*) and adults (*R.T. 11/2/77*) enjoying city pigeons presented an opportunity to remind students that animals are not necessarily pests in everybody's eyes.

A range of reports of domestic and zoo animals, and from foreign countries, helped to illustrate the range of problems animals can cause. These included *Enraged Bull Kills Farmer in Patrick (R.T. 10/18/77)*; *Elephant at Large (R.T. 12/1/77)*; *Escaped Elephant Likes Freedom in Florida Wilds (R.T. 12/2/77)*; *Berserk Camel (Richmond Times-Dispatch 11/7/77)*; *Monkeys Kill Children (R.T. 9/18/77)*; *Monkey Acquitted (R.T. 11/16/77)*; *Job Found for Alligator (Richmond Times-Dispatch 11/7/77)*; *Crocodile Destroyed (R.T. 9/5/77)*; *Man-Eater Slain but with Problems (Blacksburg Sun 9/11/77)*.

Two columns in the Roanoke Times (*Oft-Maligned Bat No Nightly Horror, John Pancake R.T. 11/6/77*; *Armed Men No Match for an Aggravated Bat, Mike Ives R.T. 10/19/77*) provided the stimulus for a discussion of the overall misunderstanding of bats by many people. However, there are many situations where bats do conflict with man's interests by occupying his buildings and by being rabies vectors.

A photograph (*R.T. 10/12/77*) of an owl eating a pigeon prompted a discussion of the place of biological control in the case of vertebrate pests. The report of *Poison Killed Snail Darters (R.T. 11/10/78)* was followed by discussion of the use of rotenone for removal of nuisance fish. It also provided the stimulus for a discussion of the complexity of safety precautions which ought to be employed in all aspects of vertebrate pest control.

In addition to the news stories and columns a variety of cartoons provided points of discussion.

The above illustrates that a wide variety of appropriate examples could be gleaned from newspapers for the course I taught. They served to demonstrate principles and provided examples all of which would not readily be available from other sources.