

COMMUNICATIONS

To the Editor:

I have just received and read through the December issue of the WILSON BULLETIN, and was particularly interested in the article by Mr. P. T. English, describing the observations on Red-tailed Hawks in the Williamston project. The article is very illuminating but it is difficult to believe that the conclusions on page 235 are unbiased.

In the author's introductory paragraph he states that the Red-tailed Hawk is not numerous. In fact, he was able to find only one pair to work on; and this pair raised only one young. Yet he has compared the results of one investigation with the data of other investigators, notably Warren and Fisher, whose work was undertaken on a far larger scale.

Furthermore, considering the game birds taken on this area, the author admits that the Hungarian Partridges released in that vicinity were wing-clipped birds and, therefore, handicapped in their chances to escape the hawks. It is, therefore, not reasonable to expect that any Red-tailed Hawk, in any area, would have the same feeding habits as this particular pair.

Moreover, assuming that one pair of nesting Red-tailed Hawks would take three and two-tenths per cent of the game on a 5000-acre area, is this justification for destroying one of our rapidly disappearing and most interesting of American birds? Game breeding for slaughter, especially of imported birds, is being carried too far. If killing of Red-tailed Hawks is recommended on all game-management projects it becomes difficult, if not illogical, to stop their being killed on every other place.

Conclusion No. 7, indicating that weasels might be beneficial rather than harmful, is unjustified from his investigation as he has not shown that the mice are in any way injurious to the game birds, or that the weasels are harmful. Why should not the conclusion be drawn that the weasels had been killing game and by the killing of the weasel save many of the game birds?

Furthermore, while the article in general is quite fair in stating both sides of the question, it hardly seems to justify the elaborate and apparently scientific-seeming conclusions which are based on inadequate study and that only one pair of nesting birds was considered, and that was in a game area.

It is my contention that even though a nesting Red-tailed Hawk takes a number of game birds, and if it is as rare a bird as Mr. English's investigations would leave us to believe, in the area considered, it would be better to overlook, for esthetic reasons, if for no other, the comparatively small damage done by the depredations. On page 234 he quotes Stoddard to the effect that unless red-tails are numerous they may as well be tolerated in game preserves, etc.

In my mind the important fact to consider is to what extent we are to allow private gain to reduce or destroy some of our wildest, most interesting, and esthetically desirable forms of bird life, such as the Red-tailed Hawk, irrespective of its economic status in any particular situation? The facts, while they may appear damaging from a game management point of view, are certainly none other than would be expected of a pair of hawks nesting in almost barn-yard conditions.

Very truly yours,

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Societies' Hawk and Owl Campaign.*