United States Department of Agriculture
Bureau of Biological Survey

Wildlife Research and Management Leaflet BS-60

Washington, D. C. * June 1936

FEEDING THE WEANED MINKS

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Mink ranchers and those who contemplate engaging in mink raising will be interested in the results of a recent experiment in feeding weaned minks, conducted at the United States Fur Animal Experiment Station, Saratoga Springs, N. Y. Because of the small number of animals available for this research, however, the results can not be considered final, but rather as an indication of a trend that may develop in the feeding of weaned minks.

Preliminary Management of Experimental Animals

The 16 mink kits used in this experiment, all whelped between May 3 and May 11, 1935, were divided into four lots, 2 males and 2 females in each. All were weaned at 8 weeks of age, and all received the same ration twice daily from birth until July 6. After weaning they were given only as much food as they would consume in a reasonable length of time. In equalizing the four lots, consideration was given to sex, age, breeding or ancestry, quality of fur, and weight at the beginning of the experiment. On July 6 the kits were separated into their respective lots, and one week of preliminary feeding was necessary to accustom them gradually to new experimental rations. The experiment proper started on July 12 at noon.

Rations Fed

The rations fed to each group are shown in table 1. The water added to the ration fed to lot I was sufficient to make it of satisfactory consistency, and the water in the rations for lots II, III, and IV was sufficient to make them approximately equal in water content to the ration fed to lot I.

The composition of the dry mixture ("No.6") included in the rations fed to lots I, II, and III is shown in table 2.

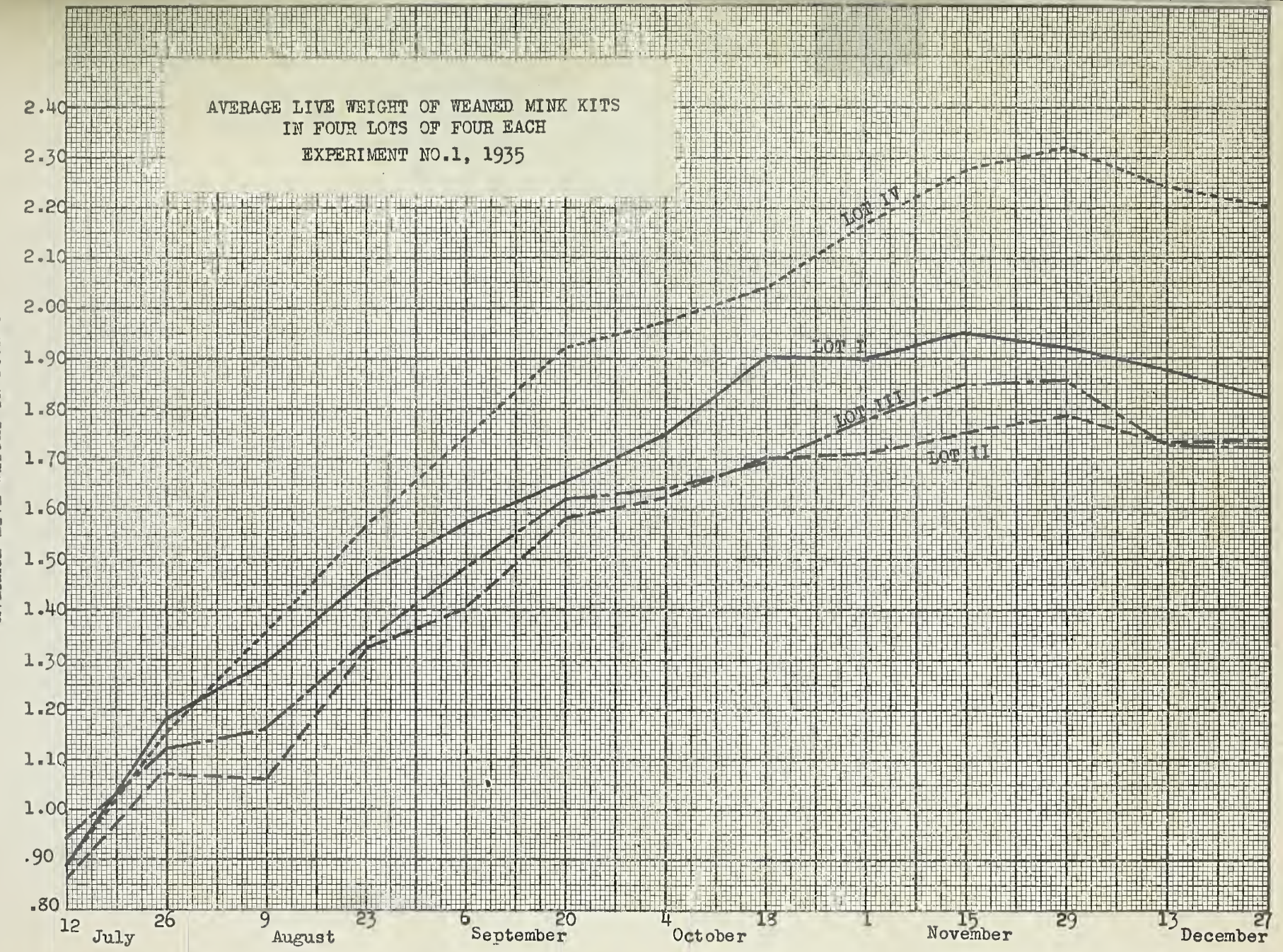
TABLE 1.--Rations given 16 minks, divided into four lots in a feeding experiment, percentages being by weight.

Food	Lot I 1/	Lot II	Lot III	Lot IV
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Raw meat	40.0	20.0	20.0	40.0
Livermeal, 1 part Tankage, 4 parts	----	6.6	----	----
Beef meal	----	----	6.0	----
Bonemeal	.5	----	----	.5
Vegetables	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
Ground green bone	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
Dry mixture 2/	25.0	25.0	25.0	-----
Breadmeal Corn meal 3/ Oatmeal } equal parts	----	----	----	25.0
Water	24.5	38.4	39.0	24.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

1/ Control lot.
2/ Dry mixture "No.6" used; formula in table 2.
3/ Finely ground and fed uncooked.

TABLE 2.--Composition of the dry mixture (No.6) used in rations for lots I, II, and III.

Components	Pounds
Breadmeal (whole wheat).....	100
Corn-flake waste.....	100
Corn germ	100
Kelpmeal	75
Wheat germ	50
Alfalfa-leaf meal.....	50
Fish meal (vacuum dried).....	50
Skim-milk powder.....	50
Total	575



Two minks in Lot II died on December 20 and December 23. Average final weight of this lot computed on the basis of average gain or loss of the remaining animals on the experiment.

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Feeding

The same quantity of feed per mink was supplied to each lot throughout the experiment. One-third of it was fed in the morning and two-thirds in the evening. Any feed remaining was picked up one hour after feeding in the morning, and any remaining from the evening feed was picked up the first thing in the morning.

Results

The general health of the animals in all four lots during the experiment was good, with the exception of two females in lot II, which died suddenly from unknown causes at the close of the experiment. Both had apparently been in excellent health. Since two males in this lot and six females in another experiment ate the same kind of feed with no harmful results it would not seem logical to attribute the primary cause of death to the feed.

Very little difference was noticed in the consumption of feed, for the quantities eaten by the different lots were respectively 90 percent, 93 percent, 94 percent, and 91 percent. The animals in lot IV consistently made larger gains and weighed more than those in the other lots (see graph). Those in lot IV at the close of the experiment weighed on the average 21 percent more than those in lot I (the control lot), while the animals in lots II and III averaged approximately 5 percent less than in lot I. The cost of feed alone per mink for the entire experiment was $1.57 for lot II, $1.62 for lot III, $1.86 for lot I, and $1.88 for lot IV. A slight charge should be added in all lots to cover the cost of refrigeration.

Too much emphasis should not be placed upon the difference in the cost of feeding the various lots, for the less expensive rations failed to produce as desirable results as in those lots fed the greater quantity of raw meat. Generally speaking, the fur of the minks in lots II, III, and IV was darkest in color on November 1, while that in lot I became dark gradually until the peak was reached on November 29.

Conclusions

Any conclusions drawn from the results of this feeding experiment with only 16 minks must be very general. Moreover, it is to be remembered that these fur animals have not been bred and fed in captivity long enough to develop strains of individuals that are readily comparable in standard requirements, as is the case with domestic livestock. Therefore, even though the animals were carefully equalized in various respects at the beginning of the experiment, the possible genetic differences in so small a group might materially influence the results. It would be highly desirable to check the present findings by repetition of the experiment with a larger number of animals, and this it is intended to do as soon as the facilities permit.