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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Saturday, May 22, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NEWS NOTES FROM WASHINGTON." Information from the Office of Information, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Listeners, our Department of Agriculture correspondent reports some animal news in her Washington letter this week -- news of one helpful animal and one very harmful animal.

She writes: "The beaver is an animal that is coming into some long-due appreciation these days, now that so many people are taking an interest in flood and erosion control and soil conservation. You see, the beaver's genius for building dams fits nicely into the Nation's conservation program. Long-time observations of Biological Survey men show that beavers are responsible for building up valuable bottom lands by building dams and thus constructing ponds which check rapidly flowing waters filled with soil.

"Of course you know that beavers are often very unpopular with farmers. They sometimes cause trouble on farms when the dams they build flood crops. Then, in some sections, their burrowing in ditch banks interferes with irrigation. But rather than kill these 'master engineers' for their pelts when they become farm problems, Biological Survey men suggest transferring them to mountain streams where their dams will help control floods and conserve water.

"A new farmers' bulletin -- No. 1768 called 'Trapping and Transplanting Live Beavers' -- tells how you can resettle these animals in locations where they will be most helpful. Moving day for beavers may be any time from July to October, suggests the bulletin, for during these months water is low and young beavers have been weaned and are old enough to shift for themselves. The bulletin describes traps that will not injure the beavers. Survey men do not recommend padded steel traps because they find that these are likely to cripple beavers.

"No doubt you know that in the early days of this country our forefathers almost killed off all the beavers. In their eagerness for beaver-pelts, they did such intensive trapping that the beaver was threatened with extinction. Rigid protective laws saved this helpful animal in just about the nick of time, from what I hear. Now, in more than half the States beavers are well-established. In fact, in some places they have prospered and increased so that they have had to migrate in large numbers -- move out to find food and homes. Very often their choice of location for a new home has not suited the farmer who owned the property. These surplus animals are the ones Survey men suggest transplanting to mountain streams. Many large areas of the country



are open to beavers -- areas that will profit by having beaver residents. Among these are National and State forests and parks, soil-conservation and reclamation projects, game refuges, city water-sheds and some sub-marginal farm lands.

"In States where conservation commissions are managing beaver production and regulating trapping, farmers and landowners benefit from the sale of pelts. For example, take the State of Pennsylvania, which had no beavers for about 70 years before 1917. In that year, State officials set free a pair of Wisconsin beavers. Then from 1917 to 1924, State officials brought in 94 beavers to settle in Pennsylvania streams. The immigrants increased so rapidly that it was necessary finally to transfer them to other sections. In 1931 when the State Board of Game Commissioners made a survey of the streams in Pennsylvania, they found 899 beaver-dams and estimated the beaver population to be 4 thousand 377. By 1934 they estimated that beavers had increased to 15 thousand. During the 1934 trapping season, over 6 thousand beavers were taken legally. At the average price of 15 dollars a pelt this regulated trapping brought Pennsylvania trappers nearly 97 thousand dollars.

"Now to report on a harmful animal -- probably the most harmful animal to mankind. This is the house rat. Both species, the brown and black, migrated from Europe to this country on ships. As the black rat is the common ship rat, it probably came to American shores with the first ships that moored here. Now it is most common at our seaports and in the Gulf States. The brown rat is reported to have made its first appearance in the United States about the beginning of the American Revolution -- in 1775. From various seaports it gradually spread inland driving out the smaller black rat until now it is common in every State.

"Today Biological Survey men estimate that there are 123 million rats in this country -- almost as many rats as persons. Twenty years ago the rat population in almost all the large cities was equal to the human population. But today the estimate is not more than 1 rat to each 2 persons in large cities. Improved sanitary conditions, modern rat-proof construction of buildings, fewer horses, improved food packages, and fewer waste food products have cut the number of rats in half.

"But in small towns, the rats still are equal to the human population, according to the best estimates. And on farms the ratio is much greater. Because of the abundant supply of food for rats on farms and because farms offer so many harbors for rats, few are free from them. In some of the control campaigns carried on by farmers under the direction of Biological Survey, hundreds and even thousands of rats have been taken from farms. Some years ago the contestants in a rat-killing campaign in one county in Texas turned in 153 thousand 720 rat tails in 6 weeks. The human population of the county was only 35 thousand.

"Rat control in the smaller agricultural towns is usually more difficult than in large cities because proportionately less concrete is used than in cities and these towns often lack good garbage and trash disposal.

"Poison bait prepared with red squill is the best way to poison rats. Red squill happens to be deadly to rats but relatively harmless to humans and domestic animals. But to have permanent protection against rats, rat shelters or harbors must be eliminated and buildings rat-proofed. Anyone who wants information on getting rid of rats is welcome to write the Department of Agriculture for it."

That concludes this week's animal news from Washington.

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