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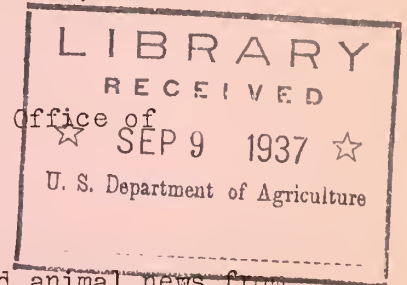
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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Saturday, August 28, 1937.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "NEWS NOTES FROM WASHINGTON." Information from the Office of Information, U. S. D. A.



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Our Washington correspondent writes this week some wild animal news from the Department of Agriculture. Among other news she tells about the two animals which Government biologists and engineers are finding helpful as conservation-ists--in saving soil and water especially.

"The beavers of the North and the pack rats of the Southwest," she writes, "are two of our small native wild animals that are helping the Government's conservation program by building dams in streams. When beavers build dams in the right place--that is, in mountain streams, they help save water. Of course, on some farms beavers are pests because they obstruct streams and irrigation ditches. So the biologists have worked out a way of moving beavers to locations where they will do some good. Moving day for beaver families is some time between July and October when their young have been weaned and when the water is low. And the moving-van approved by biologists is a trap which will catch beavers alive and not injure them. In such a trap they can be carried to mountain streams.

"You may not have heard that the pack rats of the Southwest have joined the Soil Conservation Service and are cooperating with Federal engineers in damming up gullies. This happens to be the case. When the engineers want a check-dam built in a gully, they choose the location and then throw in cholla (pronounced choy-ah) branches or other litter. They leave the rest of the building of the dam to the rats who almost always take advantage of this litter and use it as the making of a nest. They bring in stones, weeds, cactus, sticks--anything they can pack. During rains, soil and debris that wash down the gully lodge in this brush-pile. This forms a dam which the engineers say is about as good as any they can build themselves. Silt and debris continue to collect in the gully until the dam is as much as 3 or 4 feet deep. As the silt fills in above, the pack rats build the dam higher and higher until it halts further washing away in the gully.

"This economical and efficient cooperation between Soil Conservation engineers and pack rats is not just a hit-and-miss proposition. The engineers keep accurate accounts on their helpers and know just about how large a job the rats can handle successfully and about how long they will take to finish the job.

"In Arizona pack rats favor cactus plants for building their dams, Fortunately, the cactus plants generally take root and make the dam even stronger as time goes on. The engineers report finding a good many series of dams built this way in the same gully. A series of such dams means that the water will run down gradually in steps instead of washing down in a wasteful torrent.



"Speaking of wild animals reminds me of the study Biological Survey men have been making of the causes of death among our wild animals. A good many people have supposed that animals living in the wild state, away from the ills of civilization, have long healthy untroubled lives and die only from old age. But Department of Agriculture biologists who have examined a great number of sick and dead animals present quite a different picture. They say that very few wild animals die of old age. They rarely live to old age, in fact, the chief causes of death in the wild are shortage of food, accidental injuries that become fatal, diseases of many different kinds, and natural enemies.

"You may be surprised to hear that pneumonia or inflammation of the lungs is a common cause of death in the wild as well as in civilization. Starvation is a contributing cause since animals that are undernourished and run-down from lack of food have less resistance to disease and also are an easy prey to other animals.

By the way, the biologists say that a number of diseases of wild animals are dangerous to human beings as well. So the investigators who are studying deaths among wild animals must always be on their guard against infection. They use rubber gloves and antiseptics in their examinations and take great care against bites from ticks or fleas that have been on sick animals. Among the wildlife diseases that man must guard against are: rabies, anthrax, bubonic plague, glanders, tularemia and undulant fever."

That concludes this week's news letter from our correspondent at the Department in Washington, D. C. Next Saturday ---another one of these letters.

Oh, but wait a minute. I notice that our correspondent has attached a postscript at the bottom of the page here. She says:

"P.S. I almost forgot to tell you that a new leaflet on growing horseradish is just off the Government printing press. The author is our garden advisor, W.R. Beattie. The name of the leaflet is "Production and Preparation of Horse-radish" It is No. 129, and as long as the free supply lasts, you are welcome to a copy. Just send name and address to the Department of Agriculture at Washington, D. C.

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