

OREGON STATE
GAME COMMISSION
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FEBRUARY 1971

OREGON STATE GAME COMMISSION **BULLETIN**

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The Cover

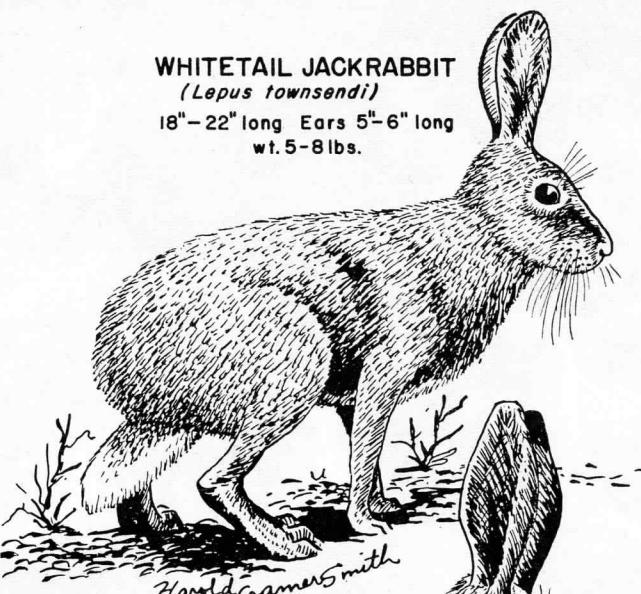
Oregon's most dangerous form of wildlife—the bees. See feature article.

—Photo by Al Miller

OREGON'S HARES

WHITETAIL JACKRABBIT (*Lepus townsendi*)

18"—22" long Ears 5"—6" long
wt. 5-8 lbs.



Harold Crampersmith

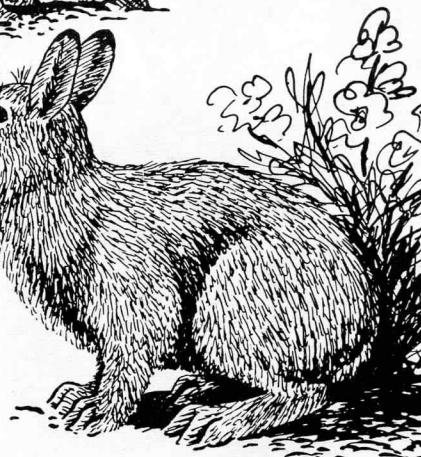
BLACKTAIL JACKRABBIT (*Lepus californicus*)

17"—21" long Ears 6"—7" long
wt. 3-7 lbs.



SNOWSHOE RABBIT OR VARYING HARE (*Lepus americanus*)

13"—18" long Ears 3 1/4"—4"
wt. 2-4 lbs.



HUNTER SAFETY TRAINING PROGRAM

Instructors Approved

Month of December.....	19
Total to Date.....	2,026

Students Trained

Month of December.....	580
Total to Date.....	164,146

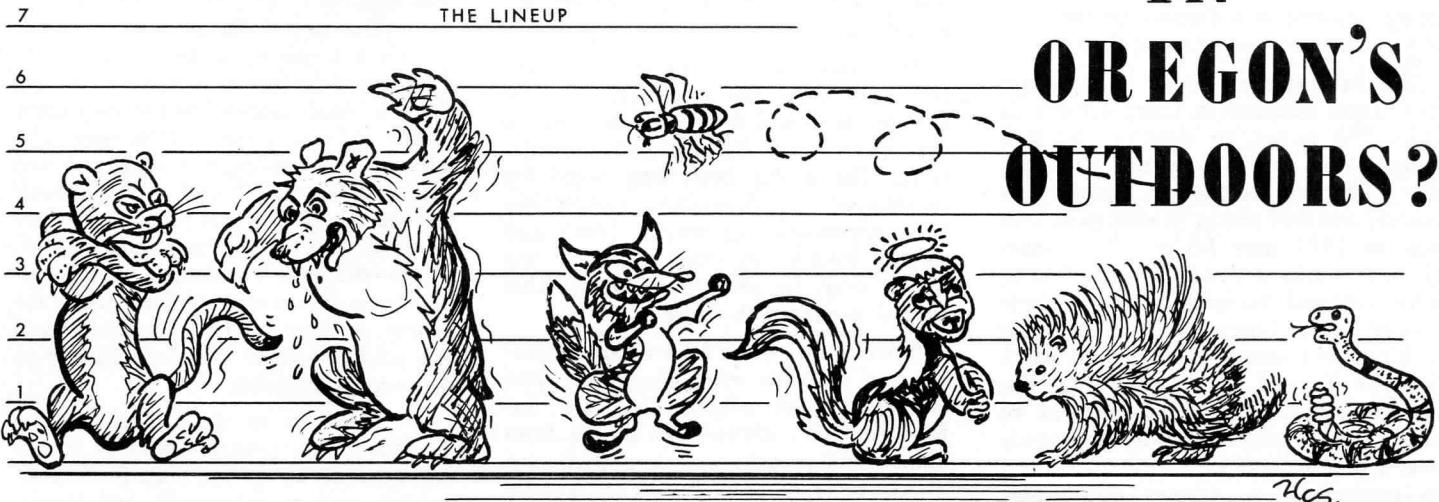
Total Firearms Casualties During 1970

Fatal	3
Nonfatal	50

In the November 1970 issue of the *Bulletin* we covered the rabbits of Oregon. Their close relatives, the hares, are commonly called rabbits also, but certain features have made taxonomists put them in two groups. The hares have longer ears and legs, some internal differences, and are born haired and with their eyes open. The rabbits are born hairless with closed eyes. Both groups belong to the order of rodents, but the hares are in the genus *Lepus* while the rabbits belong to the genus *Sylvilagus*.

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What's Dangerous IN OREGON'S OUTDOORS?



By CLIFF HAMILTON
Conservation Education Biologist

You are walking down a familiar path, headed for some relaxing fishing at a favorite spot. Suddenly, zing! A load of tiny arrows shoot past your ear, thrown by the stout monster that has appeared on the trail in front of you. You wheel and scramble for cover to escape the next deadly poisoned load. Fact or fancy? Do such episodes really occur in Oregon? Probably too many people believe so and are needlessly frightened or miss some fine opportunities to observe wildlife in its natural setting.

The "monster" of the above tale is, of course, the common porcupine, as incapable of "shooting" or throwing his quills as you are of making the hair jump from your head at will. The forest of quills that cover the upper parts and tail of the porcupine are really modified hairs and are attached as firmly to the animal as the real thing. True, they can inflict painful injury to both man and beast but only when direct contact is made with the porky's body.

The poison is a myth, too. Tiny barbs on the tip of each quill collect dirt and other matter during the animal's travels. This foreign material is carried into the flesh with the quill and may cause rapid infection, giving the false impression that the victim has been "poisoned."

Many other wild creatures in the

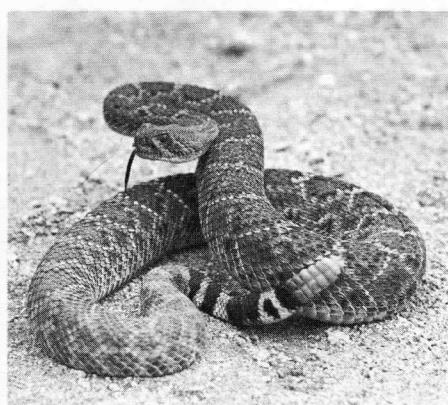
woods, fields, and waters around us have been falsely accused of having various mystical powers or affording certain "dangers" to man. Such yarns abound in folklore and Indian legends. The belief that birds could foretell the future was common among North American Indians. Most of these superstitions were connected with the call or place and manner of the bird's appearance. Medicinal powers were believed to be present in other animals or animal parts. Certain tribes dangled dried cougar paws over a sick person

to drive the evilness out. Others pricked their skin with a sharpened bone from the puma to ward off death. Snake skins, bear claws, eagle feathers, or the teeth of animals were also used to cure illness or promote health and bravery.

These remedies have generally died off with their ancient medicine man practitioners. Other wildlife-related beliefs brought over from Europe or developed by early settlers have lingered on to modern times. Some have a basis of truth but most are pure fiction. Unfortunately, such myths as toads causing warts and hoop snakes that roll downhill after their victims are still accepted as fact by a surprising number of people.

Among those unfamiliar with the ways of wildlife probably the fear of attack by a wild animal such as a bear or cougar tops the list of imagined dangers. This fear is not supported by facts. Records of unprovoked attacks are rare indeed. It can generally be said that only under unusual or extenuating circumstances are humans ever attacked. In most cases the animal proves to be either near starvation, rabid, wounded, defending its young, or cornered with no other means of escape. The latter three could hardly be called "unprovoked."

The cougar or mountain lion is very
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Careless placement of hands or feet while moving through dry, rocky areas is the most frequent cause of unpleasant encounters with the rattlesnake. Although seen regularly, they rarely bother anyone.

What's Dangerous . . .

(Continued from Page 3)

timid around man. This characteristic along with his remote habitat make contact with humans infrequent at best. The odds of seeing a cougar in the wild are small, chances of being injured by one infinitely less. Stories of hunters or hikers being followed at a distance by the curious cat are not uncommon, however.

The last reported attack by a cougar in Oregon occurred in Curry County in 1916. The victim, an eight-year-old girl, escaped with little or no injury. No fatalities have been recorded in Oregon this century and only one in Washington. This was in 1924 near Malott. Two unexplained attacks and one death, however, were reported recently from a remote area of British Columbia. Last November in Montana a cougar attempted an attack but was diverted by a family dog. The cat was later killed and proved to be an old, nearly toothless female, apparently near starvation.



Observing a cougar in the wild provides a greater thrill to the viewer than virtually any other form of wildlife. In Oregon its contact with man is infrequent and danger of attack almost nonexistent.

Injuries from bears are far more common. These animals are also less predictable than the cougar. The common black bear is usually cheerful and shy but can be dangerous in such places as parks where they lose much of their fear of man. Of all bears the partially tamed one is the second most treacherous. First is the female protecting her cubs. In the United States each year, several dozen people suffer permanent scars while feeding roadside bears in national parks. Besides being foolhardy, this act is also illegal, not as much for the bear's sake as for the visitor's own safety.

Cub bears do not have food carried to

them by the parents as do most other young carnivores. Once able to follow their mother, they soon learn that any mouse or bug not flattened by a fast swat will escape. Thus it seems the bear's only naturally learned method of securing food is a seizing or slashing action. Even the park bear cannot contain his reactions long enough to passively accept food and injuries to bear-feeding tourists are a sure bet.

Few people are hurt by bears in Oregon each year. The state has but one national park and few other areas where the bruins have become semi-domesticated. The grizzly bear, long noted for its temper and destructive nature, has been responsible for several deaths and serious injuries in other parts of the nation over the past several years. This animal is extinct in Oregon.

Notions that bears have a raging hunger and are thus more dangerous upon emerging from winter sleep are unfounded. Their stomach has shrunk from nonuse and they have little appetite for a week or more. Since bruins are actually sleeping in the true sense and not really hibernating as chipmunks and frogs do, they can be awakened by a spell of warm weather or a disturbance. Crawling into a sleeping bear's winter den is a bad way to gather information but a good way to get hurt.

Next on the list of potential physical damage are the horns, antlers, and hooves of big game animals. These timid creatures rarely attack man, with the possible exception of during the rut or mating season. With the fall rut, males lose much of their fear and reason to a more aggressive interest. An unwary intruder in such an animal's chosen territory might find himself seeking the protection of a convenient tree. A far more likely source of injury, however, is the downed game approached too hastily or without caution. Many a "dead" trophy has suddenly come to life and nailed the careless sport who left his rifle against a nearby tree and advanced, knife in hand, to administer the coup de grace. This possibility is not confined only to the buck deer or bull elk, for the hooves of female animals can also be potent weapons. Even when the quarry is dead, a final muscle spasm can send an antler or hoof slashing in the wrong direction.

Other entries to the log of possible dangers are the puncture wounds of catfish or bullhead spines, bites from small animals such as chipmunks, and similar types of minor injuries. These usually produce more knowledge than pain but should nevertheless be treated promptly to avoid any complications.

Besides the threat of physical injury,

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Like the hoop snake, stories of the porcupine's ability to throw his quills are pure myth.

What's Dangerous . . .

(Continued from Page 4)

fear of poison or disease causes many to keep their distance when it comes to certain animals. Past accounts of a horrible screaming death probably make rabies one of the most dreaded of animal-transmitted diseases. It is primarily a mammalian virus, found most often in certain species of carnivores such as skunks, bats, and foxes. It is transmitted to animals and humans by a bite or other inoculation of infected saliva in an open wound. Actual development of the disease after such exposure is under 50 percent and notions that untreated rabid animal bites are always fatal are false.

Dogs are responsible for 90 percent of the rabies cases with other domestic animals contributing another 8 percent. Only 2 percent of the bites come from wild animals and a good number of those involve critters brought in as pets. Any hint of rabies in an area usually brings on swift action by health and other governmental agencies. Animals, however, have their own method of control. Rabies in the wild is frequently associated with population highs of foxes, coyotes, skunks, bobcats, and others. The disease quickly decimates them. The survivors are often immune types that keep the area free of rabies for years.

There are few other diseases transmitted directly by wild animals although fleas, mites, and other external parasites may carry tularemia, spotted fever, or similar maladies. More dangerous than diseases, however, are the stings and bites of certain "bugs," especially to individuals that are particularly sensitive to the poison. A few small scorpions and some poisonous spiders such as the black widow are present in Oregon and may cause some concern but no deaths have been reported in this state in recent years. No doubt the **most dangerous of all wildlife in Oregon are the bees**. Since 1958, eight Oregonians have succumbed to bee stings—more than all other wildlife-related deaths combined.

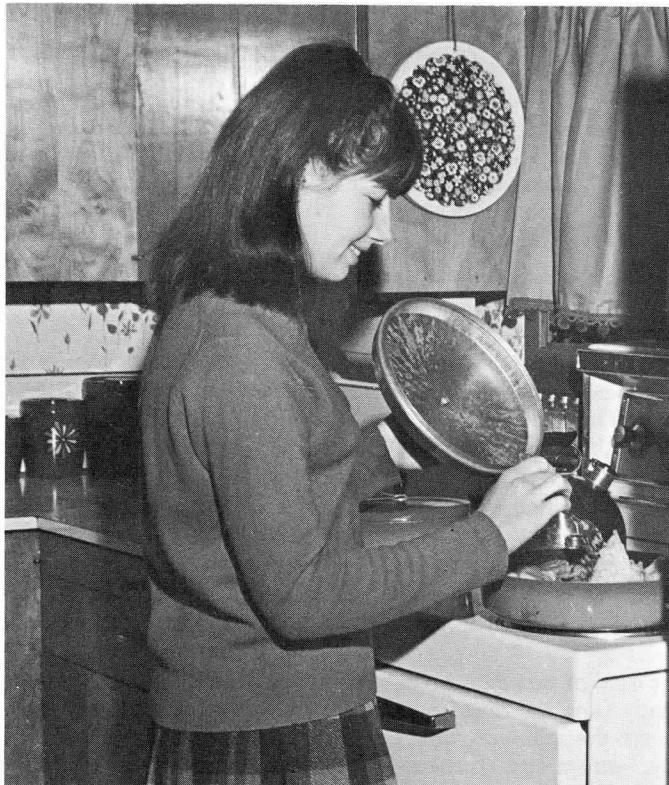
Of all animals, snakes are probably the most universally dreaded. Children are taught to fear them at an early age. Adults rarely get over their phobia of these interesting reptiles. Of the 15 species found in Oregon, only the rattlesnake offers any real danger to man. Although found statewide, rattlesnakes are probably more abundant east of the Cascades. Like all wildlife, they too would much rather quietly escape human contact than be forced to defend themselves. With reasonably fast treatment, bites are seldom fatal. There have been no deaths in the state for over 20 years, and very few bites.

All of the previously mentioned "dangers" require physical contact with the animal involved. Only one creature can "do his thing" from a distance: our chemical warfare expert, the skunk. More obnoxious than dangerous, the skunk's spray of yellowish musk is accurate up to ten feet. This defensive weapon has a temporary burning, blinding effect on the eyes and skin, a feature which probably provides the most immediate benefit to the animal. The evil odor may linger in the air for several days and never fails to clear everyone out of the area. The squirt guns seem to be functional from almost any angle and stories that skunks are helpless when the back feet are held off the ground are probably untrue, although few people risk getting close enough to verify it either way.

What's dangerous in Oregon's outdoors? The answer is—not much! Porcupines and skunks are the most likely encountered of the "dangerous" mammals, rattlesnakes are seen regularly but rarely bother anyone, and bees are the most deadly of all, but only for those sensitive to the poison.

If some fate awaits the venturer in Oregon's wonderful out-of-doors, the individual himself will most likely be the cause. Records consistently prove that the

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Proper preparation of fish and wildlife for the table not only makes a meal more appealing but greatly reduces any danger of picking up parasites or diseases. All wild meats should be thoroughly cooked before consumption.



When it comes to dangers in the outdoors, the sportsman is still his own worst enemy. Injuries caused by carelessness or accident outnumber all wildlife-related ones.

Game Commission Sets 1971 Season Opening Dates

At a public hearing in Portland Friday, January 15, the Oregon Game Commission set the opening dates for the 1971 hunting seasons for deer, elk, and upland game birds.

The buck deer season opening will be Saturday, October 2. The Rocky Mountain elk season was set to open October 30 while that for Roosevelt elk was set for November 13. Hunters will have an October 16th opening for ringneck pheasants and quail. The chukar and Hungarian partridge season will coincide with the deer season opening October 2.

The Commission's objective in setting the opening dates early in the year is to provide ample time for Oregon hunters to plan their vacation periods to coincide with the game seasons of their choice.

Length of seasons, bag limits, and other regulations for 1971 will be established at a public hearing scheduled in early June for big game animals and in early August for upland birds and waterfowl.

What's Dangerous . . .

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recreationist is his own worst enemy. Falls, exhaustion, hunting and boating accidents, cuts, drownings, and sprains are just a few of the self-inflicted "dangers" that outnumber the wildlife-related ones many times over. Even these outdoor accidents do not begin to keep pace with those occurring in the home or on the highways. Oregonians are truly safer in the woods with the animals than in most other places.



The docile skunk is Oregon's only animal that offers any "danger" without physical contact. His target may become a social outcast for some time.

OREGON'S HARES . . .

(Continued from Page 2)

VARYING HARE (*Snowshoe Rabbit*)

A native of the timbered areas throughout Oregon, this big brown hare with a white tail can hardly be distinguished from the shadows into which it seems to melt. If you return to the same spot in the dead of winter, the same animal might be there. It is still almost invisible, but instead of being brown it is as white as the snow that covers the landscape. Only dark eyes and black-tipped ears betray its presence. Because of its varying color with the season, it is called the varying hare.

Its "snowshoes" have also given it the name of snowshoe rabbit. Its long toes spread wide and the soles of the feet are covered with coarse hair that is longer in winter than in summer. These "snowshoes" prevent slipping on icy crusts and hold the animal up in soft snow.

Like all of its close relatives the varying hare is well concealed as long as it remains perfectly still, a defensive measure which is often more useful than speed. Where snow covers the ground, the varying hare changes its brown summer raiment for a winter white one. The shift is irregular and often occurs in patchwork fashion. The change generally requires about two months and is completed about the time the ground is covered with lasting snow. In the Coast Range the winter color may change only to a patchwork of brown and white or it may not change at all.

The snowshoe hare is a strict vegetarian. Succulent herbs and tender buds form the major portion of its summer diet. During winter it is dependent mostly on shrubs and trees and is fond of aspen, willow, alder and maple. It eats the bark, twigs and often the needles of conifers, including fir, cedar, hemlock, spruce and tamarack.

Mating generally begins in late March or early April and may extend throughout the summer. The young are born in about forty days. The size of the litter ranges from one to six. Three or four is most common.

The mother hare does not build a nest but merely stops where she happens to be. All of the young are usually born within a half hour. The youngsters are fully covered with fur and can walk and even hop within an hour after birth. At one week of age they are making short exploratory trips from their hiding place.

Contrary to popular belief that young hares can get along from birth without maternal care, they would die in a few days without milk. As a rule they nurse for about four weeks and would continue longer if permitted. At about two weeks they begin to nibble at tender grass and other herbs and could probably survive from that time if the mother were killed.

The snowshoe is a fairly large hare with summer fur more reddish than that of the jacks or cottontails. Its hind feet are always much larger, with longer toes. Average weight is around three pounds with a maximum of four.

BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT

Long ears that stand out like twin antennae characterize the black-tailed jackrabbit as he bobs off across the plains. The ears twist and turn with each jump as if to catch every sound of pursuit.

The long hind legs and feet propel the animal ahead at speeds up to 35 miles an hour. In times of stress the ears are flattened back along the neck as the animal leaps forward in a burst of speed. Only the greyhound can run down a fleet jackrabbit in fair chase. The coyote, fox and bobcat must use cunning to catch the fleet-running jack.

The black-tailed jack, like his cousin the white-tailed jackrabbit, inhabits the open treeless regions of Oregon. It is found in greatest numbers in the sagebrush country east of the Cascade Mountains. Jacks have invaded western Oregon, especially the Willamette Valley.

The jackrabbit feels safer at night and prefers to feed at that time. Although it may go out at any time during cloudy days, usually it waits until the shadows are long in late afternoon.

The black-tailed jack is fond of succulent green vegetation. He has a hearty appetite and nibbles almost constantly from the time he begins to forage in the afternoon until he returns to his hiding place the following morning. It is no wonder that in the west jackrabbits are disliked by farmers and ranchers. In years of peak abundance a land-owner may be forced to take harsh measures to protect his crops.

The jackrabbit is not always destructive and in reasonable numbers is an asset.

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OREGON'S HARES . . .

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He serves as food for valuable furbearing animals and acts as a buffer between livestock, poultry and game birds and their predatory enemies.

The mother jackrabbit builds a nest by digging out a bowl in the earth under an overhanging shrub. She lines the nest with fur which she pulls from her own coat. She may have up to six young but the average is two to three.

The young are fully clothed with brownish fur, and their eyes are open. They can stand up and take a few steps within five minutes after birth. They are able to hop around within a few hours and begin to nibble on greens within a few days. They attain adult stature within two months. Several litters of young are raised each year.

The black-tailed jack has a white tail with the upper surface blackish. Over-all color is grayish with a tinge of brown on the back. General weight is around four pounds with a maximum of seven pounds.

WHITE-TAILED JACKRABBIT

The first indication of the white-tailed jackrabbit's presence is often a flash of white as he explodes in full flight from under the very feet of a would-be enemy. Such tactics are likely to fluster even a nerveless hunter like the coyote. A second's uncertainty on the part of the hunter may be long enough for this big hare to get away.

The white-tailed jack is similar in color to the blacktail except the top of the tail is white or at best with only a few black or grayish hairs. It is larger than the blacktail, averaging about six pounds with a maximum of 13 pounds.

All animals of this species become much paler during the winter months, and those in the north and at high elevation are almost pure white. At that time of year the white-tailed jack is often mistaken for the snowshoe rabbit.

Food of the white-tailed jack is similar to that of other rabbits. At times, during peak populations, it may become destructive to agricultural crops. Its meat ranks on a higher plane than the blacktail and is used more widely for food. The white-tailed jack is also more prolific than the blacktail, often having as many as eight young to a litter.

The jackrabbit has a great many enemies besides man. He is among the most popular item in the diet of bobcats and foxes. Snakes seek out and eat the young. Predatory birds, such as the bald and golden eagles, great horned owl, and the red-tailed and rough-legged hawk swoop down from the air. In some areas rabbits form the major food item for the coyote. Many ranchers remark on the increase of rabbits that often follows a coyote eradication campaign.

Editor's Note:

This is one in a series of articles on the small animals of Oregon. These miscellaneous species are currently not protected by any laws and no agency has any jurisdiction over them. The Game Commission is hoping the Legislature will broaden the Commission's authority to allow appropriate management, protection, or regulation of certain of these creatures in limbo.

Steelhead Angling At Torrid Pace

Oregon steelhead anglers have reported some of the best steelhead fishing they've ever enjoyed in the coastal streams as well as several Columbia tributaries.

The success of the Game Commission's steelhead hatchery program is much in evidence by the impact it is having on angler success. If the high success continues through the remainder of the winter, marked steelhead from Game Commission releases will contribute well over 50 percent of the total catch, which is

expected to run from 180 to 200 thousand ironheads.

So far this winter, marked steelhead have contributed 76 percent of the catch from the Kilchis, 68 percent from the Wilson, about 50 percent from the Siletz, 60 percent from the Alsea, 50 percent from the Salmon River, 61 percent from the Siuslaw, and 50 percent from the Sandy. Marked fish records have not been tallied as yet from other streams on the Commission's stocking schedule.

THOUGHTS FROM ELSEWHERE . . .

In a recent issue of WILDLIFE NEWS, publication of the Canadian Wildlife Federation, the editor comments on the philosophy of hunting in an article entitled "Hunters' Moon."

Discussing the concept that recreational hunting is directly causing the threat of extermination of many species of wildlife, the article states, "The correlation simply doesn't stand up to critical scrutiny: of the 67 forms of endangered wildlife listed by the Canadian Wildlife Federation after consultation with scientists across the country, not one is threatened by modern recreational hunting, though the numbers of some were drastically reduced by commercial harvests in the past.

"His Royal Highness Prince Philip has expressed his views on these matters in his recently published book 'Wildlife Crisis' (Cowles Book Company Inc.) as:

"'Stalking roe deer and red deer and shooting game birds was so much a part of the life of many of my relations that it has never become a moral problem for me. The sight of blood had for me nothing of the mystical significance it seems to hold for those who grow up shielded from the facts of life. But I very soon learned the basic rules and traditions of those who for generations have gone after game animals and birds: the rigid observance of closed seasons, the need for special care in hard weather, the overriding concern to avoid any unnecessary suffering, and the need to understand the whole life cycle and habits of game animals and their predators.'

"I certainly learned the fundamental lesson of conservation: that if you want any game animals the following year you have to ensure a proper breeding stock and a suitable habitat. This was my real introduction to natural history, and it doesn't surprise me to find how many amateur naturalists came into it through shooting, stalking or fishing.

"I am always amazed that so many townspeople seem to be incapable of understanding that hunting and conservation are entirely compatible. They simply do not wish to recognize that in most parts of the world, leadership in conservation has come from experienced hunting sportsmen.'



WHO CARES FOR THE CRITTERS?

Oregon law gives the Game Commission jurisdiction over game animals, most of the wild birds, and the few small mammals classified as furbearers.

There is no law giving any agency the authority to manage or protect most wild mammals, amphibians or reptiles. It is hoped that the Legislature will enact HB 1123 to broaden the Commission's management responsibilities to include presently unprotected wildlife.



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