

FEBRUARY 1978

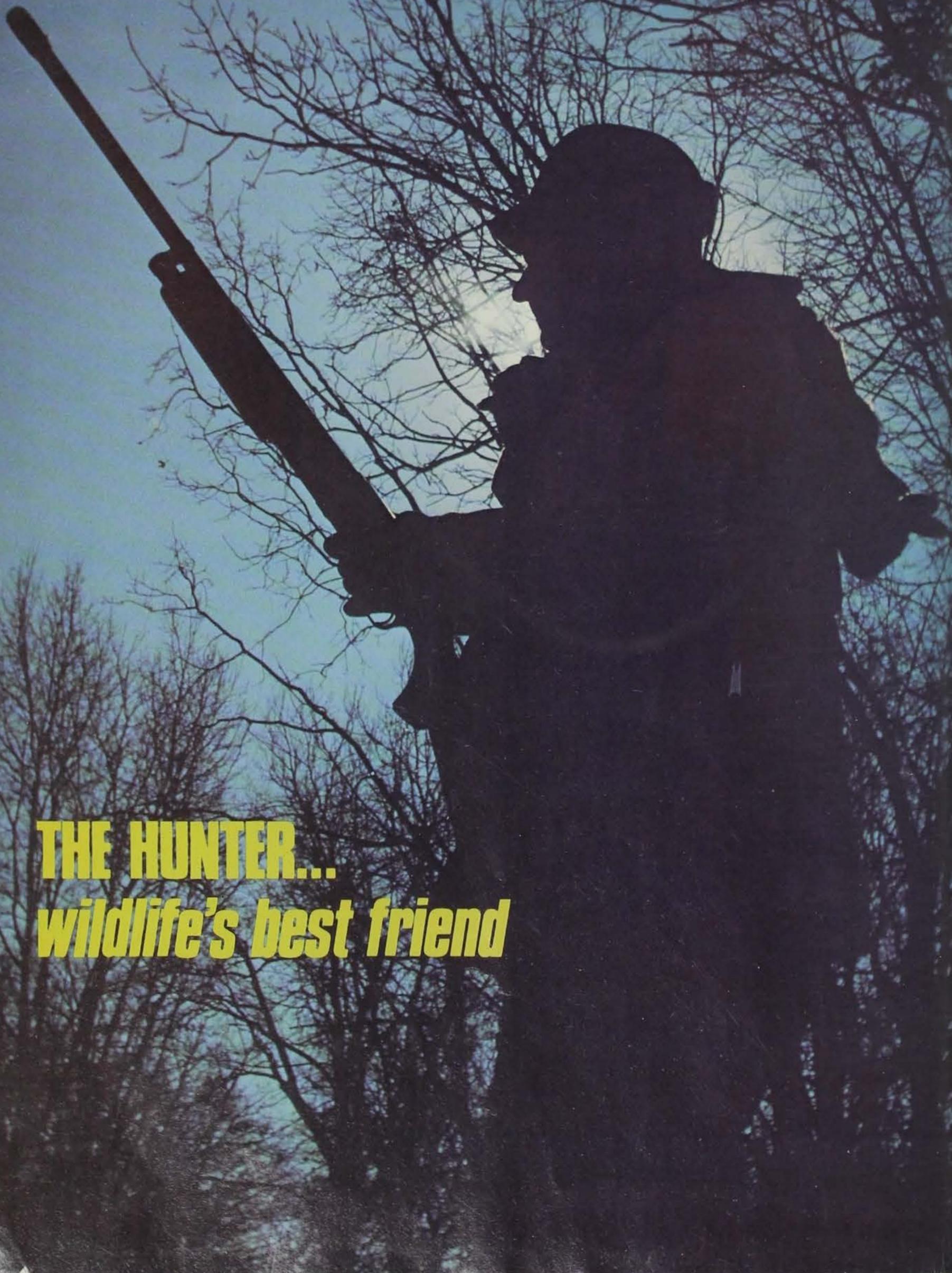


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**THE HUNTER...**  
*wildlife's best friend*

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## Guest Editorial

by Grits Gresham

Photo by Roger Sparks

I'M A HUNTER and make no apologies for being one! There are quite a few reasons why no apologies are necessary, but a very practical one is that I play an important role in the wildlife management programs that help to maintain all kinds of game animals at healthy and abundant levels.

Commune thee with nature if you will. With you, I'll tingle with pleasure at the sound of an elk bugling or a beagle barking, the aroma of high country spruce or trackish marsh, at the sight of golden aspens in the fall or a wedge of mallards flying high in the sky. I'll glow with smug satisfaction each time I share a wilderness campfire with fine companion.

But let it be known that one of my greatest pleasures is in the hunting act itself—the very moment the game is bagged . . . or missed.

That's one of your greatest pleasures, too, or I doubt that you would be reading this. Perhaps you don't think of it quite so realistically, but it's there all the same. If you have doubts about this, just think back to the last time you built a blind, rigged and set your decoys, tuned your call and were in place before daylight on a freezing morning—without a gun—just to watch ducks.

I don't know any hunters who do that!

I love to watch ducks, and calling ducks is one of my favorite sports, yet without the old comfort of a smooth-bore under my hand, I don't have the incentive to go through the considerable work and discomfort of duck "hunting." Without the prospect of shooting, even the probability of hooting, I would not be nearly as interested in whether there were any ducks or not. Or deer, or antelope or rabbits.

My interest certainly wouldn't be sufficient for me to end the season each year with hunting licenses from several states.

In all of those states, I killed a fair share of game and thoroughly enjoyed it all. Best of all, each species of game I hunted and killed is part of a regulated harvest that helps ensure that no species will overpopulate its range.

Hunting is not immoral! Hunting, per se, is not cruel! Hunting is conservation, is wise use of a natural resource; and it certainly provides a tremendous amount of wholesome outdoor recreation.

Now that we've said that, we'll leave it. You know it, and I know it, but—as is too often the case with people in the outdoor field—it's an exercise in futility for us, who are already converts, to swap this info back and forth.

But there are many in this country who think that hunting is both immoral and cruel and who would end it by law if they could. It is for these that we must have sound answers for their arguments. Here are some:

1. Most game cannot be stockpiled, and a majority of each high-turnover species (rabbits, squirrels, pheasants, doves, quail, etc.) will not live a year whether hunted or not.

2. Hunter harvest comes largely from game which would be harvested by nature anyway.

3. Game habitat has definite, limited carrying capacity, and not shooting the animals or birds on it won't make it carry more. To the contrary, allowing a habitat to exceed its carrying capacity of big game will invariably result in decreasing the carrying capacity through range destruction or deterioration.

4. Mortality from all causes—disease, predation, accidents and hunting—is greatest in a dense game population; and losses from all of these causes become progressively less as a portion of the population is removed by hunting.

5. Reproduction is more successful in a game population which is below the carrying capacity of the range.

Each year, hunters contribute hundreds of millions of dollars to ensure the well-being of game. They pay millions to state game departments for licenses, all of which is used for the benefit of wildlife; millions more to the states each year through the Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid to Wildlife programs, via an 11 percent excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition which the sportsmen themselves requested and which has resulted in the acquisition and development of several million acres of land for wildlife. They contributed more than a hundred million dollars for duck stamps, which has been used for waterfowl research, protection and habitat purchase; contributed millions of dollars to Ducks Unlimited for the same purposes; and sportsmen spend more than \$50 million each year on developing private lands for wildlife.

All forms of wildlife, not just the game species, benefit from the millions of dollars spent by hunters and from the millions of words of protest which they utter against the inroads of civilization upon wildlife habitat.

Hunters do their harvesting—their killing, if you please—for only a few months of each year. They do it at such time, in such manner and in such quantities as have been decreed by professional wildlife management personnel.

I don't try to convert people who think that hunting is not for them, but I do use the above facts to prevent them from forcing their views on me.

Provided as a Public Service by The National Shooting Sports Foundation.



**conservationist**

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### COVER

Red Fox by Carl Phelps, 1323 B Ave., N.E., Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52404

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# The Yellow-Crowned Night Heron

by **Ronnie R. George**

WILDLIFE RESEARCH BIOLOGIST

*Photo by the Author*

**H**AVE YOU EVER tried stalking Iowa's little-known avian fauna armed only with a field guide, note pad, and binocs? For many Iowans, the

thrill of adding a new bird to one's "life list" can be as great an accomplishment as landing a huge walleye or bagging a trophy buck.

Most of us recall seeing strange birds from time to time, but seeking out, observing, and identifying unusual species in their natural habitat can be a very rewarding experience. Anyone's first glimpse of a majestic osprey or eagle can leave a vivid impression, but avid bird watchers are equally thrilled by the sight of the inconspicuous snow bunting or

Lapland longspur. I can recall my own excitement at seeing a pair of northern phalaropes at an isolated pothole west of Barnum in Webster County in the spring of 1974. As recently as this September, I observed a lone cattle egret feeding on insects stirred up by cattle in a pasture north of Derby in Lucas County. However, one of the most interesting "rare" birds I have encountered in Iowa is the yellow-crowned night heron, a wading bird usually found in the mangrove and cypress swamps of semi-tropical and tropical regions.

If you are ever fortunate enough to observe a yellow-crowned night heron, the first thing you will notice is a heavy, almost sinister, thatch of pale yellow or whitish

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hair" that covers the top of its head like thick eyebrows. Except for this peculiar feature, I think adult yellow-crowns are quite handsome with their slate-gray bodies, strongly-marked facial patterns, and brilliant red eyes. In contrast, the awkward-looking juveniles are clad in rather drab brown and white plumage.

Unlike the black-crowned night heron (a closely-related and fairly common Iowa native that is almost entirely nocturnal in its activities), the yellow-crowned night heron can be observed at almost any time of the day casually feeding in shallow water. The yellow-crown's diet consists of a wide variety of aquatic and terrestrial animal life including: fish, crabs, crayfish, snails, lizards, mice and small birds.

While I imagine the yellow-crown's "fishy" diet would impart a rather strong flavor to its flesh, John James Audubon reported in 1840 that the Creoles of Louisiana eagerly sought yellow-crowns and considered them excellent table fare. Yellow-crowns and all other herons are now, of course, fully protected by both state and federal laws.

A few yellow-crowned night herons are reported every year by Iowa bird watchers, but records of breeding activity for this species in Iowa are very limited. Bob Garratt, the Iowa Conservation Commission's Superintendent of Wildlife, recalled a small number of yellow-crowned night heron nests associated with a black-crowned night heron rookery at Goose Lake in Jefferson County in the mid-1950's.

More recently, Mrs. Gay Crim reported in the June, 1976, issue of *Iowa Bird Life* that she and her husband Lloyd had observed one adult and one immature yellow-crowned night heron at Johnson's Bottom (part of the Rathbun Wildlife Management Area) south of Russell in Lucas County during the summer of 1975. While a nest was never located, she felt that these birds had nested in close proximity to Johnson's Bottom.

For the past three summers, I have been able to observe yellow-crowns and watch their number slowly increase on the Rathbun Wildlife Management Area. My highest count to date was seven adults and two juveniles at Johnson's Bottom on June 25, 1977. I believe the juveniles are continuing evidence of nesting activity in the vicinity.

Other yellow-crowns were reported this year at Coralville Reservoir, New Albin, and Shimek State Forest by members of the Iowa Ornithologist Union, but no evidence of nesting was indicated in these sightings. Additional sightings could occur anywhere in Iowa next year so remember if you encounter a strange, medium-sized wading bird with sinister eyebrows, you may be observing the yellow-crowned night heron, another interesting member of Iowa's avian fauna. □

# Whose Responsibility?

by B. Plum

A LARGE, shiny sedan whipped into the driveway and came to an abrupt halt. Joe Arborblight stepped out and sauntered up to his new split-level home swinging a six-pack he had purchased on his two block trip to a quick shop. A whiff of automobile exhaust lingered in the air as he opened the door and stepped in. Joe was preparing to watch a TV special that evening on his favorite subject—wildlife. He mused to himself about the stupidity of man in his relationship with wildlife as he twirled the thermostat up to 78° to take the chill out of the house that cool, spring evening.

About five miles away, a bulldozer set idle amid the debris of a newly completed timber clearing job. The next morning it would be picked up and delivered to another clearing site. In a field across the fence stood one lonely scraggly tree. From its upper branches peered a lone mother squirrel. As she surveyed the devastation, her gaze centered on a smoldering pile of embers in which the remains of a den tree lay. This had been her home. As it came crashing down she managed to escape but her luckless young were unable to follow their mother. With milk hardened breasts and a damp chill in the air, she stretched out on a limb to wait for morning.

On a hill crest just beyond, appeared a doe heavy with fawn. She had made her way to this spot to bear her offspring as generations of deer before had done. She stood there with astonishment in her eyes as she watched the flickering tongues of flame and the pungent smoke bellowing forth from piles of debris.

Neither Joe nor the wildlife could comprehend what was happening. Would Joe believe he was indirectly responsible for the destruction of a diminishing resource? It is easier for Joe to rationalize his place in the economic scene and blame the farmers, corporations or bureaucracy. His disregard for the wise use of petroleum has helped bring about the discomfort and eventual demise of his wildlife friends.

This seemingly insatiable demand for petroleum has brought about a change in the balance of payments between our country and the rest of the world. To bring this back into balance it is necessary to export. We can best compete in exports with agricultural products. The increased demand for commodities produces higher average prices for them. Generally higher prices encourage landowners to clear more land which is, in the long run, unsuitable for agriculture. As long as it is profitable in the short run to clear steep land for agricultural purposes it will be done. In essence we are trading our soil and woodland for oil.

Programs to encourage landowners to practice better conservation are bankrupt in principle as they become a raid on the public treasury with few long term benefits. One form of economic manipulation that should be examined, however, is the penalty taxation for abusing steep land. Steep land being used for other than woodland could be taxed to the point that it is economically unwise to continue the abuse. If a landowner had to pay a penalty tax which exceeded any possible profit from abuse of classes six and seven lands, he would consider keeping it in timber or returning it to timber to decrease his taxes.

The long range benefits to the landowner would be the sale of forest products. Society would not only gain from the availability of these products for their use but would have more wildlife, better watershed protection, and more available recreational area.

Iowa lost 1,000,000 acres of timber in the past 20 years. We have only 1,500,000 acres left. What will be left at the end of another 20 years? Until the majority of people demands a change, our woodland resource may be nearly exhausted within our lifetime. Let's not trade our woodlands for the privilege of wasting energy. □

# The Bays Branch Wildlife Area



by George Cox



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THE 800 ACRES known as the Bays Branch Wildlife Area was purchased in 1958 mostly through the efforts of Bob Barratt, then a game warden and now Wildlife Section Superintendent of the Conservation Commission. Much has happened in the 20 years since the state acquired Bays Branch. The most notable changes have been recorded in a history of the area. Each of the activities as they were completed were included in routine weekly and monthly reports. In reviewing the file it is easy to determine how many trees and shrubs have been planted on the area in the past 20 years, or how many pheasants have been counted.

The author is one of several Wildlife Biologists in that 20-year span given the responsibility for the management of Bays Branch. Each has had an impact on the area. Standing on a hill overlooking the lake, I often ponder its history—not just the last 20 years, but a hundred years ago. I also wonder how my influence will affect its appearance a hundred years from now.

The search for a history of Bays Branch was at best a difficult task. One seldom considers everyday events important enough to record them for history's sake. Most of what I found was recollections from long time residents of Guthrie County.

In 1849, two brothers, David and Russel Bay settled just east of what is now the town of Panora. They constructed a log cabin and staked their claim on a small creek that later became known as "Bays Branch." The brothers were only the second group of white settlers to homestead in what was to become Guthrie County. They paid the Federal Government \$1.25 per acre. By 1852, more than 200 white settlers had staked their claims in Guthrie County. The Gold Rush was in full bloom in those years and many of the gold seekers, tiring of the long journey, settled along the way. In 1850, Samuel Berry registered his deed for the parcel of land that was to become the headquarters of the Bays Branch Wildlife Unit. Mr. Berry bought the land for \$4.00 per acre. His deed was the first record of what is now the Bays Branch Wildlife Area.

Some 10,000 years ago, the last glaciers disappeared from Iowa. The leading edge of those glaciers crossed into the northeast corner of Guthrie County and gouged out shallow depressions, creating water impoundments. An 1875 Iowa plat book denotes a series of natural marshes stretching from north of Scranton to near Adel. Only a few of those marshes remain today and Bays Branch is among the survivors. As James Francis, an early pioneer of Guthrie County wrote in 1922, "The spring and summer of 1868 were very wet and our way out here, after leaving Story and Boone counties, seemed to be covered with ponds and sloughs. Some days we could not travel more than 10 or 12 miles. The rest of the time we were doubling up teams and pulling each other out of mud holes and across sloughs. The last time we had to double teams was while crossing Bays Branch."

When Francis arrived in Panora and claimed his property, he had to purchase corn for his stock and for planting but none could be found as the grasshoppers had destroyed most of the crop of the previous year. Within three days of this arrival in Guthrie County, Francis set out for "Swedes Point," now called Madrid, in search of corn. With two teams and empty wagons, the trip took less than a day. "We bought 50 bushels of corn and had to pay 80¢ per bushel because of the shortage. The journey back to Panora was one of the hardest trips we ever made for both man and beast. The distance of 35 miles took us three and a half days coming home. That trip put a stop to our trying to do hauling across the open prairie."

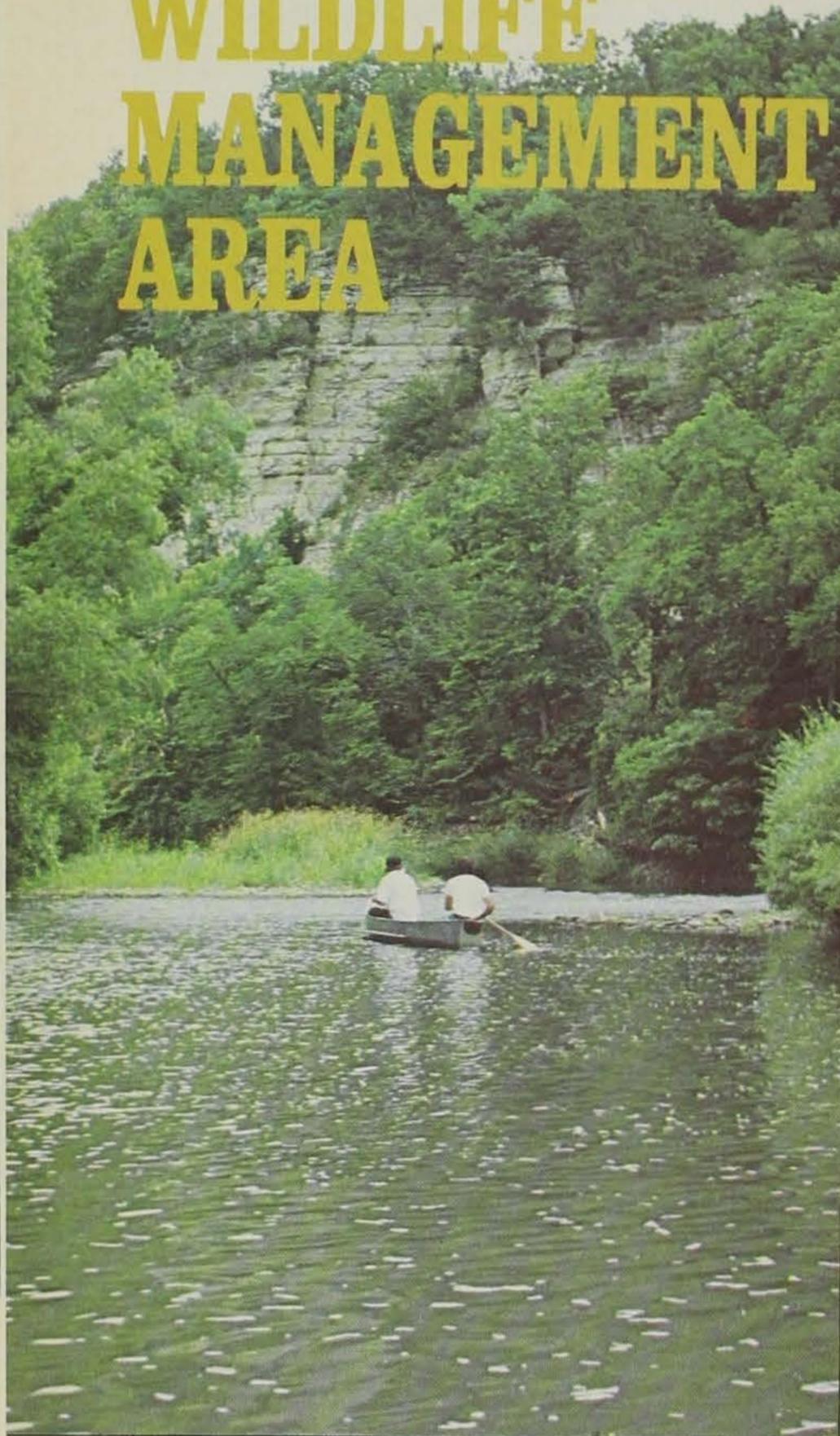
Mr. Francis continued his letter, "We finished our house with lumber purchased in Des Moines and hauled by way of stagecoach road through Adel to Panora just before the first blizzard of the season. The way those blizzards used to sweep down from the northwest was a terror. There was not a grove to break the force of the winds. Needless to say, the planting of large groves and osage hedge fence rows was one of the first necessities."

Mrs. M. T. Bascome of Panora wrote, "peppermint, pennyroyal, sheep-sorrel, wild strawberries, gooseberries, plums, and crabapples grew in Guthrie County when the white settlers arrived. The coyotes howled at night and left footprints on our doorstep. They would carry off a hen when they could get into the buildings. As soon as it was daylight, the prairie chickens began their 'woo-woo', the grasslands were alive with striped squirrels. There were many quail with their 'bob-white,' and meadowlarks, ground sparrows, bobolinks, and other birds." John King wrote of "the beauty of the wild prairie flowers, grass and timber and bountiful game consisting of quail, turkey, rabbit, deer, buffalo, elk, and a few bear as well as unnumbered prairie chickens, ducks, geese, and cranes."

Those were the "good old days." In a way it's sad that not more was written of those times; much has happened since the days of the pioneers. With public ownership, we at least will have a recorded history of the activities of the little piece of Guthrie County known as Bays Branch. Public ownership brought a dam and a 270-acre lake. In 20 short years the basin has silted in so much that Bays Branch is again a marsh. That marsh and the surrounding grasslands criss-crossed with small cropfields will be protected. That's what was there a hundred years ago and that's what I hope will be there a hundred years from now. □



# UPPER IOWA WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA



by Jim Ripple

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BIOLOGIST

*Photo by Ken Formanek*

**T**HE UPPER IOWA Wildlife Management Unit consists of 8,302 acres of Fish and Wildlife lands in Allamakee, Chickasaw, Clayton, Howard and Winneshiek counties. It is bounded on the east by the Mississippi River and contains

portions of the following watersheds: Upper Iowa River, Yellow River, Turkey River, Cedar River, Maquoketa River and Wapsipinicon River, each with its diversification of habitat types, from precipitous wooded hillsides to the gently rolling prairies. The Unit

contains no major urban centers, thus adding to the quality of the environment.

Wildlife abundance is dependent upon such environmental factors as Geology, Soils, Climate, Vegetation, Agriculture, and the individual wildlife species' needs. A brief appraisal of these environmental factors provides some insight into understanding why individual wildlife species are found in a particular type of habitat.

## Geology

The geology of northeast Iowa is primarily of sedimentary and glacial origin. Ancient seas covered the area during the Paleozoic period and resulted in deposits of shale, limestone, and sandstone that form today's bedrock. An era following the Paleozoic, resulted in the uplifting, folding, and faulting of the land and a long period of erosion.

Northeast Iowa was not appreciably affected during the Cretaceous period, but during the Pleistocene period, a portion of the area was subjected to the Nebraskan, Kansan and Iowan glaciers. Large quantities of material (glacial till) were deposited as the ice sheet melted, leveling the topography and resulting in the rolling prairies characteristic of Chickasaw, Howard and the west one-half of Winneshiek County. The remainder of the Upper Iowa Wildlife Management Unit is in an area known as the "Driftless Area" (non-glaciated). Erosional processes have continued unabated, resulting in a topography with greater relief than that of the surrounding areas where glacial deposition occurred. The area was covered with loess, a wind-deposited silt, during the most recent glacial period.

## Soils

The principle soils occurring are silt loams, silty clays and recent alluviums. These soils are moderately fertile. Steep rocky lands frequently separate the bottoms from the surrounding uplands.

## Climate

The climate of northeast Iowa is generally favorable for its wildlife species—summers

are warm and the winters cold. There are occasional periods of extreme temperatures. The average daily high is 86 degrees in July and 27 degrees in January. The average frostfree season is 138 days. Precipitation averages approximately 32 inches annually with an average snowfall of 40 inches. About 70 per cent of the annual precipitation occurs during the period from April 1 to September 30.

## Vegetation

The unglaciated portions of northeast Iowa were deeply dissected by flowing waters. The vegetative composition and succession has been greatly influenced by such factors as slope, exposure, moisture and soil conditions.

The terrain has varied vegetative cover. Bottomlands species such as elm, ash, silver maple, box elder, willow, black walnut, cottonwood and butternut grow on the stream terraces. Slopes and uplands support an oak-hickory association which in some places is being succeeded by a maple-bass-wood climax type of growth. Other woody species on the forested slopes include red cedar, white pine, balsam fir, white birch, aspen and Canadian yew. Rolling lands with poor internal drainage are covered with stands of native prairie species intermixed with introduced grasses.

The understory consists of gooseberry, raspberry, hazelnut, ironwood, dogwoods, prickly ash, smooth and stag-horn sumac, poison ivy and numerous ferns and grasses.

Allamakee County is 32 per cent forested, Chickasaw 5 per cent, Clayton 24 per cent, Howard 4 per cent and Winneshiek 13 per cent. When the first settlers reached Iowa approximately 19 per cent of the total land area was covered by forests. Since that time the forested lands have been reduced to approximately 7 per cent of the total land area and continued decline is occurring at the rate of 2 per cent per year.

## Agriculture

Farming is the dominant land use form. Farms and fields are of medium size and irregular pattern. The roads are topographically controlled. Livestock, dairy and cash grain are

the most common types of farming in this region. Approximately 40 per cent of the land in the driftless areas is in permanent pasture, with a marked increase in row crop production occurring from east to west. The tendency has been to consolidate the number of acres in a farming unit, thus increasing the average size of a farm, and decreasing the total number. As this trend continues, row crops are increased with a resultant loss in forest, pasture, hay and oats acreage.

Ken Formanek

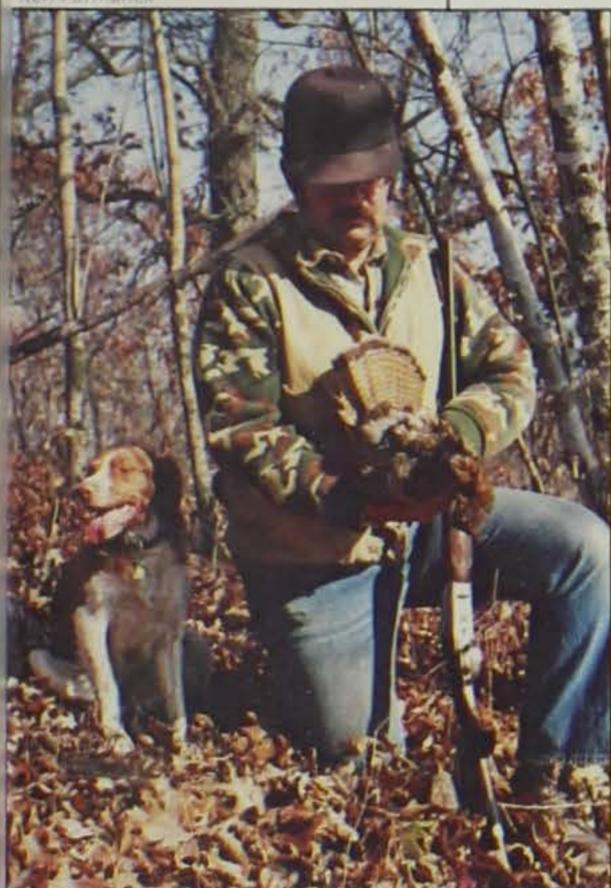
hunting is nearly confined to counties within this Unit. Good populations exist in suitable habitats. Wild turkey populations are mainly confined to portions of the Yellow River State Forest in Allamakee County and the more heavily timbered tracts adjacent to the Mississippi River. The present range is being expanded by the release of wild trapped stock in suitable habitats throughout the Unit.

Most furbearers, including raccoon, opossum, mink, muskrat, beaver, striped and

The wooded habitats adjacent to the many creeks and streams provide the wood duck and hooded merganser with many opportunities for nesting and rearing their young.

Habitat conditions for the mallard duck are found on the Mississippi River, Cardinal Marsh, and ponds and sloughs adjacent to the many watercourses, particularly where beaver create larger pools of semi-permanent water. The bluewinged teal is a common nester in the more western portions of the area

A few areas have unique features associated with them that provide a special attraction to the user. For example, Hayden Prairie in Howard county has the largest unplowed native prairie in Iowa. The Bluffton fir stand in Winneshiek county features the southern-most extension of the balsam fir range in Iowa. The Coldwater Springs area in Winneshiek County provides the only known underground entrance to an extensive cave system. The Turkey River Mounds in Clayton County and



*Deer and grouse hunting are quite enjoyable along the wild ridges of this unit.*

## Wildlife

The great diversity of wildlife habitats in northeast Iowa provides natural travel lanes as well as permanent homes for numerous wildlife species. Game birds and animals find the interspersed trees, brush, river bottoms and adjacent cropfields nearly ideal. There are good populations of white-tail deer, gray and fox squirrels. Hunting opportunities for these species is above average. Cottontail rabbits are common, though not abundant. Pheasants are plentiful on the more western portions of the Unit. Bobwhite quail are not plentiful but do occur throughout the more southern portions of the Unit. Ruffed grouse populations and ruffed grouse

spotted skunks are common to the Unit. The only known river Otter population resides on the Mississippi River in Allamakee and Clayton counties. Both red and gray fox are present, the reds preferring the more open country and the grays frequenting the timbered limestone areas.

The area is heavily used by songbirds, especially as a stopover during migrations. Numerous colonies of cliff swallows use the bluff areas along major streams. Owls, hawks, kingfishers, wood cock and pileated woodpeckers are common. The bald eagle and osprey are common migrants found along the major streams of the Unit. Rattlesnakes are found on the limestone bluffs and drier hillsides.

where suitable habitat exists.

Waterfowl hunting varies from jump shooting ducks along creeks and rivers to decoy shooting on the Mississippi River, Cardinal Marsh and impoundments on the larger streams. The bag is mostly made up of mallards and wood ducks.

Areas of the Upper Iowa Wildlife Management Unit are managed to provide the sportsman with an opportunity for a quality outdoor experience with the major emphasis on wildlife production and harvest. Many areas provide excellent trout and small-mouth bass fishing. Other recreational opportunities afforded consist of canoeing, hiking, photography, primitive camping and nature study.

the Fish Farm Mounds in Allamakee County, contain Effigy Mounds of the former woodland Indian cultures. These unique areas are managed as a cooperative venture between the State Conservation Commission and the State Preserves Board.

Upper Iowa Wildlife Management Unit personnel are available for providing technical knowledge and assistance concerning wildlife management and wildlife habitat development on both public and private lands.

The office is located in the US Governmental Offices Building, 911 South Mill Street., Decorah, Iowa 52101. The field headquarters is located on South Bear Creek, Highlandville, Iowa 52149 □

# CORN, OATS, BEANS AND WILDLIFE

## *What the farmer can do*

by **Jim Zohrer**

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BIOLOGIST

*Photo Courtesy Soil Conservation Service*

**H**OW MANY TIMES have you heard someone say "we sure don't have the pheasants around here that we used to"? Let's look at why we have less wildlife in some areas and what we can do about it.

First of all, we need to understand what the land must supply in order to produce an abundant wildlife crop. The three basics that wildlife require are food, water and cover. When all three of these are provided on a given area you will find wildlife. In Iowa wildlife

foods are normally not in short supply. Grain left in the fields after harvest, along with other natural foods, provide plenty for our wildlife to feed on. Very few animals starve to death in this state.

Water is, likewise, readily available. Even if surface water is not present, moisture can be obtained from the food that is eaten or from dew.

It is the cover requirement that is critical across the farmlands of Iowa. Nesting cover and winter cover are in short supply in many parts of the state. Our upland wildlife populations respond directly to changes in these cover types.

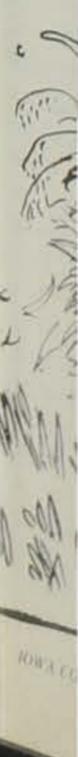
Since most of our wildlife is raised on private land, we need to look at how the farmer affects wildlife. In the last thirty years there has been a gradual change in farming practices. In the past, family farms were highly diversified. Livestock was produced on nearly every farm, and so a large proportion of each farm was in pasture, small grain or hay. Fewer chemicals and fertilizers were available and crop rotation was used for agricultural weed control and to prepare the land for the next crop. This necessitated that each farm be broken up into a number of smaller fields to accommodate this rotation plan. Each field was fenced so that the livestock could be turned loose. These fencerows were often grown up to brush and provided excellent winter cover for wildlife.

The fields of oats, hay and pasture provided safe areas for wildlife to nest and raise their young. The first hay cutting was later in the year than is the common practice today, and gamebirds had a better chance of hatching their eggs before hay cutting time.

A recent study on the changes in farming practices that have taken place in north-central Iowa since the 1930's has shown an increase in row crops from 33% of the land to 58% of the land.



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Small grains, hay and pasture declined from 56% of the land to only 12% of the land. Fencerows also declined by 71% during the same period. It is easy to see why "we sure don't have the pheasants around here that we used to." Today's continual row crop farming, bigger equipment, larger fields and the push for all-out production has drastically reduced available wildlife habitat.

What can the farmer do to help save our wildlife populations? There are a number of options open. Odd areas that cannot be farmed could be planted to trees and shrubs to provide winter cover for wildlife. Planting stock is available from our state nursery at minimal cost, and free technical assistance is offered by wildlife biologists located throughout the state.

Areas of the farm that are too steep to be worked or have poor soils can raise a good crop of trees. A Christmas tree planting can provide a good return for your investment, and will also provide excellent winter cover for wildlife.

A good windbreak around the farmstead adds beauty to the area and can reduce wind velocities and prevent drifting of snow on work areas. It can also cut fuel bills for house heating and can reduce wind erosion of soils in the area. Planting a new windbreak or improving an existing windbreak will be a benefit to you and it may make the difference between life and death for pheasants in your area. Windbreaks are often the only winter cover available in a section, and they will be heavily used by small game and songbirds.

Drainage of wet areas and sloughs is expensive and may never return the costs involved. Sloughs can provide a monetary return in the form of furbearing animals and will supply needed winter and escape cover for other forms of wildlife. If you enjoy seeing wildlife on your farm and would like to insure that your son has a place to hunt in the future, think twice before you drain that slough.

If you want to attract and hold wildlife on your farm in the winter, you might consider leaving a few rows of corn standing. Whatever the deer and pheasants don't eat you can harvest in the spring. Reduced fall plowing and new minimum tillage techniques will also leave waste grain available for wildlife through the winter. It will also benefit you by reducing wind erosion and holding snow in place. This will help replenish subsoil moisture which could be important in a dry year like last.

You can also do several things to improve nesting conditions on your farm. The later you cut your hay in the spring, the better it will be for wildlife. If you know there is a nest in front of the tractor, mow around it. Pheasants will often return to their nests, especially if they are near the hatching date.

Livestock producers should investigate the advantages of maintaining a cool and a warm season grass pasture for their livestock. This involves running stock on the cool season grass pasture in the spring and fall, and on the warm season grass pasture in the summer. There are definite benefits for the farmer and at the same time it will provide nesting cover for wildlife.

About 15% of our pheasants are produced in road ditches. Road ditches provide important nesting cover in some parts of the state. Burning or mowing your road ditches will eliminate nesting cover and may kill pheasants on the nest or destroy their eggs.

Just about everyone would like to have a farm pond on their place. Besides providing for erosion control, irrigation, livestock watering and recreation, a pond also provides a watering area for wildlife. The seeded areas around the pond may also provide valuable nesting cover for upland game and waterfowl.

If you have done your part to improve conditions for wildlife on your farm, maybe someday you will have the satisfaction of hearing your son say, "there sure are more pheasants around here than there used to be." □

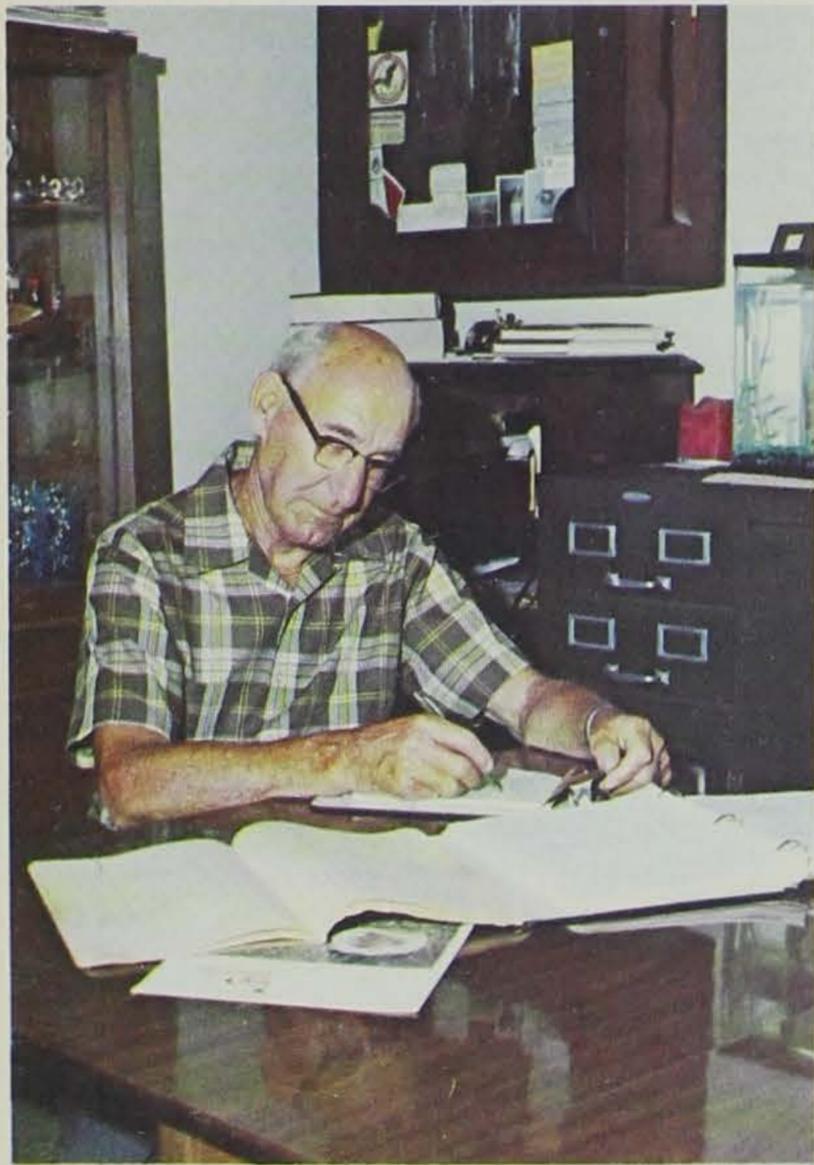


# The Old Man and his Field Diaries

by **Wendell Simonson**

CONSERVATION OFFICER

*Photos by the Author*



**T**HE OLD GENTLEMAN had the door open for me before I stepped onto his front porch. His name is Walter Dietsch, and he is a retired postmaster from the little village of Hills, south of Iowa City. I had heard of his fishing ability for several years, but our paths just never seemed to cross. He had sent me a photo a time or two of some nice fish he'd taken, but it wasn't until one day that I spoke at a service club in Hills that one of the members pointed out Mr. Dietsch's residence to me. His home, inside and out, was neat and well-ordered. He lives with his sister, and they soon had me in their parlor getting acquainted.

We had a comfortable and casual visit and he mentioned that he had kept accurate records on all of his hunting, fishing and trapping since around 1920. He told me he was crowding 75 years of age, and it only took a moment's mental arithmetic to see that he was talking about nearly 60 years of record keeping. I asked if I could see what kind of records he was talking about, and he started placing record books, notebooks, and note pads on the dining table. I didn't have to read but a few items to see that here was a veritable gold mine of information.

His records not only indicate the number and species of game taken, but also where, the weather, and in some cases, the firearm used. His fishing reports list the species of fish, where caught, what lure or bait, water conditions, etc. He used to do some trapping in his early days to supplement his income, and he lists the type of fur, grade, and where and for how much it was sold.

I noticed in checking his records back in the early 1920's that he would list wildlife such as "greater yellow-legs"—a species of shore bird legal at that time, but closed for many years now. Today's sportsmen know very little about them. Also mentioned were jack snipe, legal then; closed for quite a few years, and now again available to early fall hunters. In his summary for 1935, I noticed he had written: "New federal restriction on guns for waterfowl, must be plugged, 3 shells only. Shooting hours from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m."

To give an example of his records for a year of fishing, I picked one year—1972. The following fish were taken in a period running from January to November. At Iowa City: 113 white bass, 25 crappies, 3 large mouth bass, 2 walleye, 1 northern pike. Griffin pond: 1 large mouth bass. First river bed east of Hills: 60 white bass, 164 crappie, 13 bluegill, 13 bullheads, 9 large mouth bass, 4 flathead catfish, 2 walleye, 1 northern pike, 1 channel catfish. That totals up to be 415 game fish. He uses artificial lures most of the time.

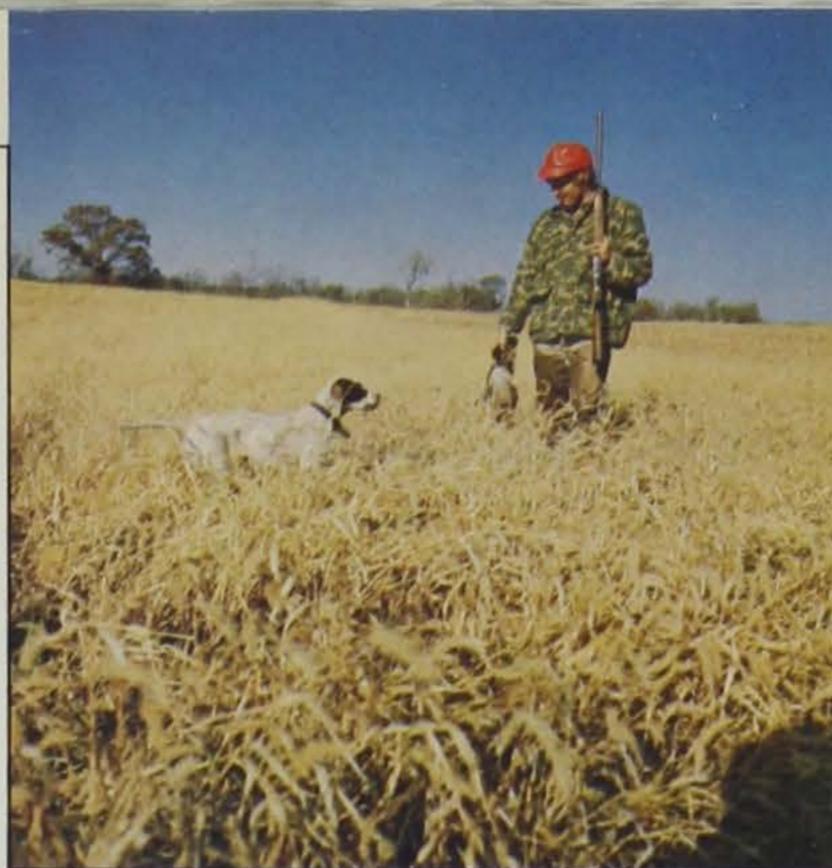
Mr. Dietsch has been able to observe some changes over the years in fishing and hunting. Fishing success is some better, probably due to several factors such as more areas, better management and enforcement, cleaning up pollution in several areas, and, to some degree, cleaner water below the Coralville dam. However, he considers chemical run-off from fields a serious problem. He can notice a decrease in hunting, especially in small upland game. He doesn't believe the causes are heavy hunting pressure, but rather environmental changes, destruction of trees and brushy areas, and intensive farming. He has fished trout in northeast Iowa on several occasions. He is flabbergasted by the beautiful water in the trout country, especially the Turkey river.

Some of his early records were kept on small notebooks given out by various firms for advertising purposes—some of these are antiques in themselves. While keeping these records was something he started for his own knowledge and pleasure, he hopes to be able to go through them during the next several months, and type them up for possible release to our fish and game department.

The old gentleman still pursues the outdoor life he loves so well—but if extremes of weather keep him in by the fire—out come the old field diaries and he leafs through 60 years of outdoor memories!

# Reflections on Autumn

by Peter Schodernek



It was hard to tell who was enjoying the day the most. The haste shown by the dog was not shared with my son Bill or myself. Indeed, hardly a milkpod within a 100 foot radius of our path escaped my son's careful handling before being blown to the winds. Mice and gopher holes provided far more fascination this splendid day than they would have merited on a brisk day.

No matter that only a great horned owl provided the closest resemblance to game that we would see in the next hour, since the pensive mood was being enjoyed. Indeed, it would have been embarrassing to be seen as we were simply sitting on the hillside of grazing grass talking about the land and our love of it. We talked of previous hunts in these same fields and relived both successful and unsuccessful ones and shared some humorous events that occur to everyone who enjoys the outdoors. We tried to believe that in bygone days some Indians, whose heritage is rich in this territory, shared the same peaceful view that we now enjoyed. The pure joy of such an uneventful day far exceeded the memories of Disneyland, the shore, and even the spectacular visits to many of our great National Parks. A closeness was felt that words cannot describe. In these few minutes I was removed from the world of business, energy shortages, inflation, pollution concerns, committee meetings and the well-practiced rituals of a suburban life.

As we walked the next hill, we could see the sun approaching the horizon providing a backdrop for an abandoned windmill creating a landscape worthy of an Andy Wyeth canvass. Each visit to this abandoned site presents the comfort of an old neighborhood visit. Although this site was well explored on previous occasions it again held forth the promise of rediscovery by my son. On this particular day the remains of an old wagon wheel provided the vehicle for an unfettered imagination of covered wagons, pet ponies, stray deer, and a host of equally improbable incidents.

All too soon we started back toward the farmhouse in silence although much communication was in evidence. It mattered little that a rooster pheasant defiantly cackled behind us letting us know that he too shared our environment.

In a fortnight the crimson leaves will have lost their splendor; the meticulous rows of corn will disappear as they tumble under giant machines.

Many hunters and nonhunters have experiences like this which they do not wish to forget. And although this particular outing and its pleasantries will undoubtedly become embellished with age, hopefully this description will at least prevent a diminution of the joys experienced in Iowa on an Indian summer day in late fall in the year 1976. □

IT WAS A TRUE INDIAN SUMMER for here it was late fall with each day a copy of the day before—clear sky and a panorama of colors. The leaves, having reached their peak earlier, were fading somewhat—a harbinger of the harsh winter that would eventually come to this central Iowa community. Wishing to take advantage of the few remaining autumn days, I decided to leave my office on Friday at 3:30, make a quick stop at the elementary school to pick up my 11 year old son who shared the love of the outdoors, and a young English Setter pup whose enthusiasm greatly surpassed her ability.

Although our trio shared many moments together in the ensuing months, most of which were more exciting than productive, this particular fall day has left an indelible mark on my memory, not because it was very significant, but rather because it provided the means to reflect upon things unrelated to the work-a-day world.

Wendy, our dog, always seemed to know when a trip to the country was in the offing and, before our hunting trip clothes were donned, she howled anxiously at the pickup truck that would take us to our favorite places. Pheasant season had already opened but since it was a Friday, few other hunters were able to enjoy the privilege of hunting.

Within 20 minutes we approached the road to the farmer's house from where we would depart, as we have done on numerous occasions in previous years. Our initial request to hunt his land a decade ago had developed into a lasting friendship. Each of us remarks today on the passing years and the passing boyhoods of both his sons and mine. Today, my youngest son has replaced his older brother who shares the outdoors with me only on weekends.

The farm, situated on a slight knoll, allows one to view many miles of rolling acres bursting with endless rows of corn. Some early cutting gives the appearance of many platoons of soldiers, each separated only by a narrow margin of space delicately calculated. As we started over one stripped field which only two days before was impenetrable, Wendy, our dog, bounded far beyond the tolerable limits of a good hunter. Although a whistle would bring her back in seconds, I decided it was simply too fine a day for disciplining. At 100 yards she instinctively stopped, turned toward us seeming to know that she exceeded her allowable limits, and voluntarily retreated (perhaps with a guilty conscience).

About 300 yards from the farm house the corn field imperceptibly blended into a thicket, one which provided fine pheasant cover for many years. On this occasion, before taking three steps into the thicket, a covey of quail exploded, equally startling all of us including the young dog, although she quickly recovered and gave a hasty pursuit. At nine months her playfulness was in full evidence, in spite of our concerted attempts to convince her to abandon her puberty in favor of maturity. Her pursuit was brief and it appears that she has learned on her own that which we have been unable to teach her with countless hours of training with "the wing"—you cannot catch the birdies!!

# Warden's diary

by Rex Emerson

LAW ENFORCEMENT SUPERVISOR

THE WINTER months have many times brought commercial fishing problems below the dam at Coralville on the Iowa River. Maybe it's because of the open water below the dam and maybe because of the concentration of fish in that area. Much of the time during the winter the water is unfrozen for a mile or so below the dam. It is not legal to take any kind of fish with nets on the Iowa River. Maybe that is the reason the commercial fishermen go there at night, hoping that no one will see them.

One night, after receiving a complaint, three of us converged on the area. One officer stayed with the vehicle at the entrance to the parking and camp area, just in case we needed a chase car. The other officer and I stayed in the shadows of the trees and worked our way down to the river, where we found a vehicle parked. We each had a walkie-talkie radio to keep in contact with the others and the officer in the car. Other law enforcement agencies are on the same frequency, so they knew what we were doing and where we were located, even though we hadn't contacted any of them. I was to find out later that in Johnson County every officer looks out for his fellow officers.

There was only one vehicle parked in the area and a check by radio of the license plate number convinced us we were on the right tack. We also knew this fellow could be tough. The other officer got located close to the boat landing while I was close enough to be able to see

the vehicle. The last radio communication to the officer in the car was that we were in place and would wait the man out.

There are several ways to catch these violators. Sometimes if you try to get in on them by boat they throw everything over the side and then probably head for shore to disappear into the woods. Each case is different and each case calls for a different strategy. One hour had passed. It had clouded over and was as dark as the inside of a cow. I crawled up within ten feet of the back of the vehicle. Then it started to snow and it snowed and it snowed; the largest flakes I ever did see. The little radio was tucked in under my coat to keep it dry. It is a very important piece of equipment at a time like this and one wants it ready to work when the button is pressed.

By the time two hours had passed I was completely covered with snow, as was everything else. It was 2:05 a.m. when I heard a very quiet motor coming up the river. It was evident he was being as quiet as possible so as to not attract the attention of cabin owners along the way.

Even though I wasn't where I could see the river, I could tell by the sound that the boat had come in to shore. I also knew the officer on the river bank would stay in his hiding place until he was sure they couldn't get back into the boat and get away. We didn't know how many of them there would be, but taking fish that way is hard work and there are usually two men to the boat. Any more

would take up room that could be used for fish and nets. When officers work together for several years they learn what the other will do and just when he will do it without any communication. So, not a word on the radios yet.

Sure enough, there were two men in the boat and it was stacked high with nets and fish. The first man came up the bank to get the vehicle and boat trailer while the second man stayed with the boat. That way, when they back the trailer into the water, the second man can run the boat up on it and they are soon gone. The operation only takes about thirty seconds. Given half a chance they will leave you standing there wondering where they went.

When the driver got to his vehicle he came around to the back to wipe the snow off the back glass. That was when I got up from under my blanket of snow. Very sternly, but quietly, he was told that I was a State Game Warden and he was under arrest. He was a bit shook up to see someone apparently rising up from under the ground. We stood there very quietly for a few minutes and then the other officer came over the bank with the second man.

The other officer had been able to grab the front end of their boat, so the second fisherman had a choice of coming in out of the boat or going for a swim in that icy water. He decided to get out on the bank.

A call on the radio told the officer in the car to come on in. Not only the Conservation Officer came driving in but also two deputy sheriff's cars and a State Trooper's car. They surrounded us like a wagon train that was ready to do battle. Their headlights were all focused toward the inside of the circle. Really quite an impressive sight!

You can bet there wasn't any trouble with those two fishermen. We didn't even know those other officers were close by, but they were watching out for our well-being, and we surely appreciated that. If I was going to be an outlaw I would sure stay clear of Johnson County, Iowa.

## LOOKIN' BACK

in the files of  
the CONSERVATIONIST

### Thirty Years Ago



the CONSERVATIONIST took a long look at multi-flora rose which was new to Iowa. The dense thorny shrub is native to Korea, Japan and China. It was imported to Iowa in hopes that it would be good cover for game birds and animals. Three decades later the shrub would be declared a noxious weed and game management personnel would be looking elsewhere for good game cover plantings.

### Twenty Years Ago



the official go-ahead was announced for engineering and game management plans aimed at bringing water back into Forney's Lake (Fremont County) and to re-establish a waterfowl refuge and hunting on the lake. Wintertime trout fishing was also featured in this issue.

### Ten Years Ago



the magazine urged Iowa farmers to leave winter and nesting cover for pheasants. The sad part is that there is even less cover today. Many farmers have left odd corners or terraces for pheasants but higher grain prices, the end of government set-aside programs, and larger machinery have encouraged most to plant from roadside to roadside. Game must have cover to survive. We need legislation in the near future to make sure farmers can afford to leave cover for pheasants.



Snails—especially land snails—are sometimes found during a class observation hike through the center's forest. Although easy to overlook, they are quite interesting. Many people have never observed a land snail; felt it move across their hand or watched its retractable antennae.

Members of the phylum Mollusca include some very showy invertebrate animals. Counted among this group are clams, oysters, squid, octopods, and snails. This is one group of invertebrates that has even obtained some popularity with amateur collectors. Various types of jewelry are made from their shells.

Turtella agate, a type of fossil formed when millions of snails became entrapped in mud, is sometimes called snail rock. When cut and polished it becomes an attractive piece of rock jewelry.

The Mollusks have had a long geological history. The possession of a mineral shell increases the chances of preservation and has resulted in a rich fossil record that dates to the Cambrian period—about 450,000,000 years ago.

The typical snail shell is a cone shaped spire composed of tube-like whorls and containing the visceral mass of the animal. Starting at the point are the smallest and oldest whorls, while successively larger whorls are coiled about a central axis and terminate at the opening from which the head and foot of the living animal protrudes. A shell may be spiralled clockwise or counterclockwise.

The principal power for movement is provided by a mucus-slime trail being laid down and waves of fine muscular contractions that sweep from one end to the other of the foot and pull the snail along.

Within the group of snails are found herbivores, carnivores, scavengers, suspension feeders, and parasites. One of the prime feeding organs that can be observed is called a radula. The teeth on the radula vary widely in number. This radula may act as a grater, rasp, brush, or comb. Feeding trails can usually be observed on the area where feeding occurs.

Probably the most unwelcome garden guest is the common slug. Slugs belong to the same family as snails, and are called Gastropoda, which refers to the single, broad, tapered foot on which they move. Slugs are merely land or fresh water snails without shells. Most feed on fungi and decaying leaves and animal bodies. Slugs and some snails were introduced to North America from Europe, possibly as a food source. In some areas, city waste water treatment plants are so pestered with snails that they become clogged. Additionally, some snails serve as hosts for parasites and are carriers of deadly diseases.

To collect slugs either for a class activity or to move them out of your garden simply lay some boards out in the area. Come back later and turn them over and you have your slugs.

Any time of year can be used to study snails. Winter time is suitable for observation of aquatic snails in an aquarium. The rest of the year can be used for both the land and water snail study.

Have you ever had a snail race? Looked at the world from the height of a snail? Thought about the changes in our environment in the time a snail travels two inches?



Photo by Wendy Meyer

## CLASSROOM CORNER

by Robert Rye

ADMINISTRATOR, CONSERVATION EDUCATION CENTER



*Black Capped Chickadee by John Bald*

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