



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Office of the Secretary  
Press Service



Release - Immediate

May 3, 1924.

KILLING PREDATORY ANIMALS  
AN ECONOMIC PROBLEM

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"The estimate that the average annual damage to livestock and game amounts to \$50 for each coyote and bobcat and \$1,000 for each wolf and mountain lion, has received very general acceptance," said Dr. W. B. Bell, Assistant Biologist of the United States Department of Agriculture, before the recent meeting of the American Society of Mammalogists, at Boston, Mass. In spite of the overwhelming evidence of damage done to the farmer and stockman and to the public in general through such depredations there are still some who contend that the fight to control these predatory animals by trap, gun, and poison should be discontinued or at least abated. It would be a difficult matter, however, to convince stockmen and farmers that an attempt to restore the old balance of nature would be beneficial, as it is not a practical undertaking in agricultural and livestock-raising districts.

That many of these destructive predatory animals are partly beneficial is not denied by the Department of Agriculture. The records maintained by the Biological Survey show that bobcats, lynxes, and coyotes destroy many undesirable rodents, but in settled countries these predatory animals, with wolves and mountain lions, have learned to take domestic stock to such an extent that the losses are not to be tolerated.

Government hunters and scientists have made investigations of the food habits of these principal predatory animals by examination of the content of their stomachs, and the results show a decided taste on their part for domestic

stock and for valuable game and birds. "In the case of the bobcat," says Dr. Bell, "it may be noted that of 3,990 items listed in a table showing a summary of the results of stomach examinations, 677 were meat of domesticated animals; 687 were of game animals, game birds, or other birds; 2,049 were of rodents; and 577 of various miscellaneous and relatively unessential materials, the largest number being bait employed in taking the animals. Sheep and goats were the favorites among the domestic animals on the menu of the bobcat, and poultry seemed to be second preference. Not a great deal of information was obtained on the Canada lynx, as only 20 examinations were made. In these cases evidence was found that 10 animals had been feeding on meat of domestic animals, mostly sheep, goats, and poultry. A number had eaten game animals and birds, and several had killed rabbits.

"More evidence has been obtained on the coyote than on any of the others. Of 36,989 items found in stomachs, 12,478 were parts of domestic animals, with sheep and goats strongly in the lead, beef second, and horses third, followed by poultry and pork. The coyote also destroys large numbers of grouse, as indicated by 1,268 items in the list. Evidence also was found that they have destroyed numbers of miscellaneous birds, deer, elk, and antelope. It must be said, however, that the coyote does destroy numbers of rodents, particularly rabbits, though the number of rodents found in the examinations was less than that of domesticated animals and poultry.

"The timber wolf depends almost entirely for his diet, according to the investigations, upon meat grown by the farmer and ranchman. Out of 549 instances cited, 457 showed that domestic animals, chiefly cattle, had been fed upon. In addition, it was found that the wolves destroyed deer, antelope, and elk. Very few rabbits or other rodents were found in their stomachs.

"A table compiled on the food preferences of the mountain lion shows that it has a good appetite for beef and venison, the numbers running cattle first, deer second, and horses third, although these animals have long been thought to care more for horse meat than any other. It seems that they kill some pigs and wild game but seldom pay attention to rodents.

"In carrying on its campaigns with various States for the control or eradication of predatory animals in livestock producing regions, the Department of Agriculture has recognized that modern economic conditions make it necessary that livestock be produced at the minimum cost and, therefore, that all losses be cut down as far as possible.

"Game birds and animals are now recognized as a real financial and food asset of the country, as well as having other values. It is known that one of the greatest checks upon the development of this wild life is the predatory animal. In many regions where campaigns have been conducted against bobcats, coyotes, wolves, and mountain lions, game has increases noticeably.

"Because of the modern methods used in controlling destructive rodents, it is no longer necessary to preserve the predatory animals in order to keep down these other pests. Predatory animals do not prevent the occurrence of rodents in seriously destructive numbers, and the cost of poisoning and trapping these <sup>small</sup> animals in much less than the loss occasioned by the predatory animals. As a result of these campaigns against rodents and predatory animals enormous areas of land are to-day being more profitably utilized in the production of crops and livestock."