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TAKE STEPS TO AVOID POISONING OF WATERFOWL NEAR RIFLE RANGES

Phosphorus poisoning of ducks feeding near the rifle range at Fort Humphreys, Va., has led officials of the Biological Survey, U. S. Department of Agriculture, to act in protecting waterfowl from this peril, says a bureau statement issued to-day. The action followed the discovery of phosphorus in wild ducks found dead on the tidewater area of Pohick Creek near Fort Humphreys, where grenades containing phosphorus had been fired at target practice.

The Biological Survey learned March 18 that wild ducks were dying in great numbers on the tidewater area of Pohick Creek, a tributary of the Potomac River below Alexandria, Va. Autopsies showed that the birds were in good flesh and apparently had been in normal health. No disease condition was observed, and parasites were especially scarce. In the digestive organs, however, the investigators discovered phosphorus, the cause of death. The phosphorus odor was distinct, lesions typical of phosphorus poisoning were found, and small, pale amber masses of the substance were identified.

Further investigation disclosed that in recent months rifle grenades containing phosphorus had been fired from the Fort Humphreys rifle range over the shallow waters of Pohick Creek. On this area wild rice grows abundantly. A

large raft of wild ducks fed there the day before the serious losses were discovered, and an exceptionally high tide flooding the marsh area led the birds to feed farther up the creek than usual. Their food consisted largely of last year's submerged crop of wild rice. The birds evidently had picked up with the grain small quantities of unburned phosphorus which had fallen to the bottom. Phosphorus, unfortunately in this case, keeps well under water, and deposits such as those on the Pohick Creek area may remain for several years a menace to any wildfowl that may feed there.

Somewhat similar circumstances occurred on marshes at the Spesutie Narrows adjacent to the Aberdeen (Md.) proving grounds in 1923. In this instance the War Department cooperated in preventing further losses by patrolling the area and frightening the ducks with a flash gun and other mechanical devices. These measures may not be required on the Pohick Creek area, but the Army officers have expressed their willingness to cooperate in preventing further losses. These two instances of phosphorus poisoning have led the Department of Agriculture to suggest to the War Department cooperative measures for the prevention of future occurrences at other ranges. General advice on how to protect the waterfowl in feeding areas near ranges is being formulated.

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