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FOXES PREFER RABBIT MEAT TO QUAIL, GAME STUDY SHOWS

Quail hunters and fox hunters long have argued as to whether foxes destroy so many quail that fox numbers should be reduced, thus sacrificing the sport of fox hunting in favor of that of bird gunning. First reports of an investigation of the question by the Bureau of Biological Survey do not bear out the contentions of the quail hunters, the U. S. Department of Agriculture has announced. Virginia foxes seem to prefer rabbit meat to the flesh of the game birds, it was revealed by an examination of the stomach contents of 50 foxes, nearly all killed in Virginia last winter. These included 38 gray foxes and 12 red foxes. Rabbit was the leading article of diet. Quail remains were found in only one stomach, and remains of small nongame birds in only six.

Eaten by 29 of the 50 foxes, the rabbits comprised about 44 per cent of all the food material analyzed. Mice and native rats, taken by 22 of the animals, made up 17 per cent of the whole diet. Other important items were: remains of poultry and sheep (the latter probably carrion), about 8 per cent each; beechnuts and corn, more than 6 per cent each; and persimmons, apples, and pears, more than 4 per cent for the three. Considering the time of year at which the animals were killed, the investigators considered the apples and pears as waste and thought that probably the corn was also.

The investigation, which is being continued, was undertaken by the bureau in cooperation with the Virginia Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries to clarify the issues in a controversy between fox hunters and quail hunters in the Southeastern States. Much more material, representing all seasons, must be studied to reach a final decision, says W. L. McAtee, in charge of the bureau's food habits research. "On the record of these 50 stomachs," he says, "foxes can not be condemned for their food habits in Virginia. The worst that can be said is that an occasional marauder may need to be eliminated."