



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 1940

TATTOO SNAKES TO STUDY DEPREDACTIONS ON DUCKS

Enterprising circus managers who feature unusual ladies and gentlemen in their sideshows may add a new attraction in the form of a tattooed snake charmer with tattooed snakes, if they follow the work food-habits investigators of the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior are doing on the Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Garden County, Nebraska. The biologists are tattooing bullsnakes that raid wild duck nests to eat eggs.

The reptiles are being marked so that the biologists can determine the bullsnake's range and institute effective methods to control its predations on nests. Last year bullsnakes destroyed more than 40 percent of the wild duck eggs on the 43,349-acre refuge, which is one of the important nesting sites for migratory waterfowl and other birds.

Before a snake can be tattooed, of course, it must be caught, and to meet that problem Ralph H. Imler and E. R. Kalmbach, biologists of the Division of Wildlife Research, in cooperation with refuge personnel, developed a snake trap. Two years ago 182 bullsnakes were captured in 25 traps. Last year, 38 more traps were constructed and 549 bullsnakes were captured.

Imler and Kalmbach worked for 3 years to perfect a practical trap. The traps are made of course-mesh screen and are oblong in shape. Getting the snakes to enter the traps was a difficult problem until the investigators discovered that the reptiles like to glide along the lake shores in search of food. Drift fences between 50 and 100 yards long are set at right angles to the shoreline and lead to the trap. A bullsnake looking for choice duck eggs and coming up against the 2-foot high wire tries to get around the obstacle by following, or drifting, along the fence. Shortly another bullsnake is captured.

To cope more effectively with this control problem, Imler devised the tattooing technique. Bullsnakes caught in the traps will be marked. After noting the marking and the date and place of release, the egg-stealer is liberated. When a tattooed bullsnake is recaptured the date and place of recovery is recorded. Within a few seasons, the biologists hope to know enough about the reptile's migration habits to institute better control methods.