



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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MEETING GANGSTERS, PUPILS, HUNTERS
ALL IN DAY'S WORK FOR GAME AGENTS

NOTE TO EDITORS: This is the fifth in a series of feature stories explaining the work of the Fish and Wildlife Service, which will be issued from time to time. Still available are a few copies of the previous stories on food-habits investigators, refuge managers, Service surveyors, and predatory animal and rodent-control workers.

Chicago's duck bootleggers laughed at the Federal game agents who were on their trail. For a year the smugglers had been buying and selling wild-fowl and still the game agents couldn't track down the ring of violators.

The smugglers had a stooge, an old waterfront derelict who didn't know what was in the packages he carried from one illegal dealer to the other. One night, four bootleggers met in a dark alley. A large package and green bills changed hands.

"Thanks, Dopey," one of the men whispered. "You know where to get the next one tomorrow night. Here's a buck for your trouble."

And Dopey shuffled off with his dollar bill--a marked bill.

Two minutes later Federal agents swooped down on the cluster of duck bootleggers, and the next day the leaders and members of the Chicago ring were in Federal Court, where the principal witness was Dopey, the waterfront

bum. But Dopey was sober and well-dressed, for the erstwhile down-trodden bum was John Perry, United States Game Management Agent of the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior.

Throughout the 48 States, the Fish and Wildlife Service maintains a corps of alert game management agents whose duty it is to apprehend individuals who violate the Federal game laws. In addition, the Federal agents cooperate with State Game Wardens in catching violators of State laws, and, in turn, the States help the Federal agents nab their man. With the cooperation between Federal and State game agents the country has, in effect, a small army of men protecting the Nation's wildlife resources.

Rounding up smuggling rings and wild duck bootleggers is only part of a Federal game agent's work. During the hunting season he must check sportsmen's guns and daily takes to see that all hunters abide by regulations.

"Most of the sportsmen are cooperative," declared W. E. Crouch, chief of the Division of Game Management, "because they realize we are helping to keep up the bird populations by checking the comparatively few violators who exceed the bag limits."

That sportsmen realize the necessity of having alert game agents and appreciate the value of this work, Crouch explained, is indicated by the fact that sportsmen's organizations are constantly asking Federal game agents to speak at their meetings.

"Which, by the way, is another reason we are so stiff in our requirements for game agents," Crouch said. "An agent not only must know a great deal about the outdoors, how to apprehend violators, and how to present his cases in court, but he must be able to speak before sportsmen's groups, conservation clubs, school assemblies, and in other meetings."

Pointing with pride to the achievements of his men, Crouch stated that in his organization are aviators, engineers, pharmacists, newspapermen, salesmen, professional auto racers, lawyers, expert mechanics, and musicians.

"They were all successful in those fields, too," he adds, "but the lure of the outdoors and their interest in conservation attracted them to this organization."

Despite their varied qualifications, all Federal agents have these abilities in common: They must be competent mechanics, understand the use of firearms, be diplomatic, know the law, and know how and when to make arrests.

Agents who make arrests merely to add to their "record" soon find themselves released from the organization. "We want our agents to make legitimate arrests, to take the real violators," Crouch emphasized. He said that in 1940-41 Federal game agents either singly or in cooperation with State agents obtained evidence in 3,033 cases of game-law violations. Convictions were obtained in 2,861 cases, or almost 95 percent of the cases.

"That shows," commented Crouch, "that our agents do not make needless arrests."

He pointed out that one of the best agents in the Service makes the fewest arrests. "He cleaned up his district some time ago and the sportsmen are cooperating with him," the Chief Agent said, "so there is little need for arrests in his area."

Getting back to the qualifications for an agent, Crouch stated that former experience is often helpful. Especially when professional fur smugglers or bootleggers of wild ducks and other game birds are involved.

A few years ago, a ring of bootleggers were apprehended by a game agent who before entering the Service had played in swing bands appearing in large theatres in the west and midwest. He had become interested in game management work and finally was accepted as a full-time agent.

His former profession came in handy when a ring of bootleggers operated through a popular nightclub. "The bootleggers knew our regular agent and hid their illegal ducks in a secret ice box whenever he was seen in the vicinity of the club," Crouch explained.

One night the club's orchestra had a new "hot" drummer. A few days later the regular Federal agent for the district walked into the night club and went directly to the secret ice box where he found the wild ducks that were used as evidence in Federal Court a few days later.

The "hot" drummer was the Federal game agent working on undercover assignment.

Undercover work is probably the most difficult task that can be given a Federal agent. This type of activity is usually directed against rings of operators violating game laws on a large scale. The agent or agents assigned to this work appear in the vicinity of the area posing as any of a number of persons. During their stay in the vicinity, the undercover agents are expected to gather evidence that will break up the illicit activities.

Within recent years, three large rings were smashed by undercover operators. A few years ago a Service man worked in the Chesapeake Bay area for some six months obtaining evidence that finally convicted 52 wild duck buyers and sellers. The Eastern Shore bootleggers had been selling wildfowl to night clubs and restaurants in Norfolk, Washington, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston.

Last year, a ring of small restaurants and night clubs in the San Francisco Bay area were selling wild ducks to special customers. Finally a Federal agent became a special customer, and shortly heavy fines and jail sentences were imposed on the game sellers.

It isn't an easy job. Agents must work all hours of the day and night and in all kinds of weather. "Once they are on a case, they can't quit until it is closed," Crouch said.

One agent trailed a group of men who were "jacklighting" birds at night and taking dozens of birds by clubbing the creatures paralyzed by the sudden flashes of light. Suddenly the group doubled back on its tracks, and the agent dived under a car.

"He laid on the cold, wet ground in the middle of November for about two hours before he called his assistants in and arrested the men as each came back to the car with a bagful of birds."

Working at night in isolated spots is particularly dangerous. It is not uncommon for game agents apprehending violators to be threatened, but this is considered part of the work. Sometimes the violators shoot first and ask questions later. Some years ago, a U. S. Game agent was killed by a man whom the agent tried to arrest for a game-law violation. K. F. Roahen, the Federal game agent in Montana, has been shot at several times, once from ambush.

"It isn't as bad as it used to be years ago," Crouch said. "Now the majority of hunters, the general public, and the Courts are sympathetic with our work. They know that only by conserving our wildlife resources can we maintain adequate populations that will permit us to enjoy our wildlife in the future as well as now. We are after the selfish few who want their share of game and the other fellow's, too. Unfortunately, there always seem to be enough of that type to keep us busy."

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