



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
INFORMATION SERVICE

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files
9/5/56*

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release SEPTEMBER 6, 1956

FWS PROTECTS COTTON-WEEDING GEESE FROM PREDATORS

Protecting half a million "weeder" geese from coyote depredation is a new responsibility for the Fish and Wildlife Service, John L. Farley, Service Director said today.

Domesticated geese have been found to be a great aid in cotton culture in some parts of southern and south-central California, particularly where Johnson grass abounds to the detriment of cotton crops. Geese are grazing animals; they love the tender shoots of grass but have no taste for cotton foliage. Hence they can be turned loose in a cotton field where they can put poundage on themselves as they rid the field of the unwanted grasses--at little expense to anyone.

At little expense--except when the coyote gets into action. One Tulare County farmer had purchased 300 young geese and turned them loose in his cotton patch. In a short time the geese had disappeared, all except a few dead ones. Undaunted the farmer purchased another 100 geese and in just a few days all but 30 of these were gone. Then he called for help.

A Fish and Wildlife Service hunter and trapper came onto the scene and soon rounded up the culprits, a coyote family which had grown fat on the weeder geese. After that there was no more predation.

Not all the weeder flocks in California are subject to coyote attack but those which are suffer heavily. The weeders are usually young domestic birds because of initial cost and because of the possibility of marketing fat geese when weeds are no longer a problem in the cotton fields.

The California State Department of Agriculture, California Counties, and the Fish and Wildlife Service cooperate in a program to hold down losses from predators. This program consists of control of the number of coyotes on the open range and close watch of any coyote activity in other places such as those where weeder geese are used. These predators are kept at low numbers by trapping or den-digging or by other modern methods of control.

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