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Office Restriction 4-20-

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release APRIL 26, 1950

HAWAII HAS UNIQUE GAME MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS, FWS OFFICIAL SAYS

Hawaii has the world's rarest game bird--the Hawaiian goose or "nene"--according to Robert M. Rutherford, Chief of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Branch of Federal Aid. The Hawaiian goose population is no more than 25 or 30 birds, Mr. Rutherford says, but the Territory is trying to increase their number and save them from extinction.

Mr. Rutherford recently returned from Hawaii, where he inspected the Territory's projects under the Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration Act. He also studied at first hand what he described as "some of the most unique game management problems in the world."

The nene, Rutherford explains, flourished in populations of 20 to 30 thousand birds during the 1800s, but changes in land-use, plus heavy hunting pressure from increasing numbers of people on the islands, and the ravages of imported animals on the eggs and young, reduced the numbers of geese to the vanishing point.

In their effort to save the nene, the Territorial wildlife authorities have captured a few pairs of birds and penned them in an isolated game management area to encourage natural reproduction. Since the paired birds will fight other goose couples, they must be kept in separate enclosures. Only one of the couples nested this year. Two goslings hatched from the four eggs laid, and they are thriving.

The uniqueness of Hawaii's wildlife consists partly in the fact that, except for a limited native song bird population and some species of waterfowl and shore birds, all of the islands' birds and animals have been imported by man, Mr. Rutherford points out. Importations are called "exotics", and Hawaii is therefore a laboratory for studying exotic management, he says. The Polynesians, first people to come to the islands, brought in one species of rat, and pigs and jungle fowl--which became wild. Later European and American ships and immigrants introduced pigeons, pheasants, grouse, quail, doves, partridges, turkeys, rats, mongooses, sheep, goats, and numerous other creatures.

Introduction of pigs and rats was enough in itself to endanger the endemic, or native, Hawaiian waterfowl, because of their depredations on nests and young, according to Mr. Rutherford. This depredation, however, was increased by releasing mongooses on some of the islands to kill rats. Although the mongooses killed some rats, they also preyed heavily on game birds. These game birds included the more recently introduced quail, pheasants, and other birds the Territory wished to manage for sport,

The numbers of feral sheep and goats grazing on the ranges of the various islands also created problems in the loss of habitat--the destruction of cover and subsequent erosion of the soil. Today the goats, sheep, and pigs are classed as game and are hunted as "mainlanders" hunt deer. Hunting, in some areas, has

reduced this "game" to such low numbers that seasons must be imposed to insure future sport. The Japanese, or "axis", deer--which were brought to Molakai Island during the last century as a gift to the King--also offer possibilities for transplanting to the other islands to add to hunting opportunities, Mr. Rutherford says. The Territory is now studying these acclimated deer to determine if such transplanting operations are advisable.

As in parts of the U. S., the principal game bird is the ring-necked pheasant. Large concentrations of these birds--up to 200 per square mile in some places--make for excellent hunting. Besides the ringnecks, the pheasants of Hawaii include the introduced green, blue or versicolor species, and the variety of hybrids that result. A big problem in the management of pheasants, at present, is the increased use of weed killers by agriculturists, according to Mr. Rutherford. These chemicals prevent the growth and production of weed seeds that pheasants need for food.

Populations of quail are being increased in the Hawaiian Islands under a Federal Aid project for the construction of rain-collecting devices, popularly called "gallinaceous guzzlers", Mr. Rutherford says. These concrete drinking fountains make it possible for arid lands to support more quail. Pheasants and other birds also use the guzzlers.

A flight of pintail ducks winters in the islands, according to Mr. Rutherford. Where they go to breed in the summer, no one knows for certain. To find out, 200 of the approximately 1,200 wintering pintails were banded last season--probably the highest proportion of waterfowl yet banded from one migration. The Territory's conservationists hope to find out through the return of bands whether the flight of ducks is using an established flyway, or whether the route is part of the Pacific flyway.

From Congressional appropriations for the Pittman-Robertson wildlife restoration work, $10,000 was apportioned to Hawaii for the current fiscal year for research and development projects.

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