

CORRESPONDENCE

Hawk Extermination

Editor of 'THE AUK':

On looking over the reports of bird observations throughout the United States for the season of August 15 to October 15, 1925 (Bird-Lore, Nov.-Dec., 1925, p. 402), I have been struck by the marked absence of Hawk records. This is certainly not attributable to lack of interest in these birds nor to any difficulty in observing them, since of all birds they most easily attract attention. Nor can it be fairly said that the southward migration was not, during part of this period, fairly underway.

Judging from this record there can be no question but that many of our Hawks are doomed very soon to join the Passenger Pigeon and Carolina Paroquet.

Both the shotgun and the trap are responsible. Since 1922, and probably earlier, a farmer in Delaware has been trapping Hawks wholesale. During the fall and winter of 1922-1923, up to January 20, he had captured thirty-five and as many as six in a single day. His methods were widely advertised in the press and his farm visited by many admirers who have doubtless used his methods. I visited him in September 28, 1923. Near the traps a Buteo Hawk was fastened to the ground by a fifteen foot chain and the bird half stood, half lay, in the grass. It appeared very weak and had had no food since its capture several days previous. It was slowly dying from starvation, a broken leg, and the "blowing" of the flies in its wounds.

But more Hawks are shot than are trapped. I know of four places in New Jersey where this so-called sport is regularly carried on during both migrations, and evidence is accumulating that the practice has been spreading. Unfortunately, one of the sportsmen's magazines has recently been giving this method of slaughter an even wider publicity.

The "sport" is already nearly finished, however, for, as numerous letters from New Jersey testify, the Hawks are becoming extremely scarce, even during the migrations. Only a few years ago, as many as a thousand Hawks could be seen at Cape May, N. J., in a single autumn day. But in the fall of 1925, on two separate days, Mr. Julian K. Potter reports respectively 236 and 30. On both days, the migration was at its crest. The 30 had been bagged by a *nature-waster!* "All were immature birds and all were sharp-shinned Hawks, except one Sparrow Hawk and one Broad-winged Hawk." The gunner had brought down no Red-tailed, Red-shouldered, or Duck Hawks during a day's shooting.

A former killer of Hawks in northern New Jersey has written me each year for the past two or three years that the "sport" is not what it used to be. The latest evidence on this point comes from still another user of the shotgun, in New Jersey. Under date of Jan. 17, 1926, he writes: "At

present there is nothing doing—we have no general visitation of Goshawks this season, nor have we had a flight for some 6 or 7 years, though I generally kill one or more during each fall or winter.—*Rightfully, this "sport" is resented by many naturalists and nature lovers* (italics are mine)—I feel convinced that this shooting has reduced the number of Hawks that come through noticeably, as I have not seen as big flights during the last few seasons as I did years ago." He adds that he regrets that an account of his methods has been published, since "so many have copied and are using the Owl for promiscuous killing."

Now, it seems obvious to me that if our American Hawks are to be saved there is not a moment to lose. The indiscriminate nature-wasters have two arguments which are peculiarly unsound.

(1) That the annual slaughter at Cape May, N. J., and elsewhere is merely equivalent to an open season, like the open season for deer. But it is difficult to see how anyone can talk of an *open* season on Hawks, when there is no *closed* season during which they are actually protected. In Pennsylvania, deer are protected the entire year, except for 10 days. Moreover, they have no migrations, and they can hide in the woods. It is ludicrous to compare with this the decimation and worse than decimation of the Hawks, protected at no time and no place, and without shelter during the migrations at their points of concentration.

(2) The second argument is the old, old song and dance—that there is no evidence that these birds are decreasing. One is reminded of the calm complacency with which members of Congress made a similar statement about the Buffalo, and of the friends of Noah who, as he built his ark, declared that there was "no evidence" of approaching precipitation.

The cure which I suggest is an immediate campaign for the passage of State laws, making it illegal to shoot or trap any species of Hawk by means of a live or mounted Owl, Hawk or other decoy of any description, or to shoot any species of Hawk, at any time, migrations or no migrations, except when it is caught in the act of attacking domestic fowl or game birds on private reservations.

I believe that the Owl and other decoys are the cause of most of the unreasonable killing. And I believe no law will have popular support, or be enforceable, which forbids the farmer or land owner to protect his own property from petty larceny. At least the first part of the law, moreover, would be easy to enforce, since Hawk shooting with an Owl is visible and audible a long way off.

Who will guarantee us against a plague of mice or insects if all the Hawks are to be wiped out?

It is time that Nature Lovers claimed their share of rights from the Nature Wasters. It is time for us to protect for our children their rightful heritage.

Yours sincerely,

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