

## THE MARYLAND HAWK BOUNTY

By A. BRAZIER HOWELL

Some day there will be written the complete history of the hawk and owl bounties that have been in operation in our various states, but at present one must content himself with informative glimpses here and there as the data, not always easy to secure, become available. In this connection the case of Maryland is of interest, and of particular application in that it is very recent. While Maryland is perhaps not at the exact geographical center of our ornithologist population, it is situated in a straight line between, and not distant from, New York and Washington, allegedly our two greatest foci of avian conservation.

By authorization of the state legislature, bounties on hawks were paid in Maryland from the years 1918 to 1930 inclusive, at the rate of 50 cents each. The numbers of hawks presented for bounty payment and the amounts so paid were kindly furnished me by Mr. E. Lee LeCompte, the efficient State Game Warden of Maryland. It should be noted that in this list there is a duplication of nine months and omission of five.

Date	Hawks	Price
June 1, 1918, to December 31, 1918.....	7	\$ 3.50
June 1, 1919, to December 31, 1919.....	67	33.50
October 1, 1919, to December 1, 1920.....	382	191.00
October 1, 1920, to September 30, 1921.....	373	186.50
October 1, 1921, to September 30, 1922.....	4,089	2,044.50
October 1, 1922, to September 30, 1923.....	8,000	4,000.00
October 1, 1923, to December 30, 1924.....	20,081	10,040.50
October 1, 1924, to September 30, 1925.....	19,374	9,687.00
October 1, 1925, to September 30, 1926.....	14,358	7,179.00
October 1, 1926, to September 30, 1927.....	13,029	6,514.50
October 1, 1927, to September 30, 1928.....	8,504	4,252.00
October 1, 1928, to September 30, 1929.....	14,539	7,269.50
October 1, 1929, to September 30, 1930.....	22,283	11,141.50
Totals.....	125,086	\$62,543.00

The law, as passed, was to apply to Sharp-shinned and Cooper hawks only, but until 1927 the bounties were paid by justices of the peace. Needless to say, it is likely that none of these gentlemen could properly distinguish one hawk from another, so it seems certain that bounties were paid not alone on every sort of hawk, but doubtless on some other birds as well. Under this system, however, abuses became so evident that it was decided that bounties should be paid only through the office of the State Game Warden, and this plan was adopted in 1927. It is significant that immediately great lamentation arose in certain quarters because Mr. LeCompte refused to pay bounties on heads of the highly beneficial Sparrow Hawk that were sent in.

There is more of interest in the above tabulation than meets the eye, however. In the five years from 1926 to 1930, inclusive, bounties totalling \$36,356.50 were paid by the state on 72,713 hawks. Of these, 40,003, or 55 per cent, were turned in by residents of Dorchester County. This is due to the fact that during the fall months migrating hawks by the thousands stop for the purpose of obtaining a brief rest in the lower sections of this county, which the majority of them doubtless leave within 24 hours. Many of the natives of this section have made a regular and profitable business of hawk hunting; and during 1930 one individual profited thereby to the astonishing extent of \$900.00.

The repeal of the provision for the payment of hawk bounties in Maryland was undoubtedly attributable to the efforts of Mr. LeCompte. But in accomplishing this

it would have been useless to advance the argument that destruction of hawks by offering a bounty is economically unsound. In fact there was strong opposition to repeal of the bounty provision offered by some of the state senators on the ground that this was one of the most valuable features of the game laws. Another argument advanced was that one of the chief sources of individual revenue of some persons, particularly in Dorchester County, would be taken away under the repeal of the hawk bounty.

The argument that won the day was that during 1929-30 the state paid the residents of Dorchester County \$6,817.00 for 13,634 hawks, while but \$5,742.75 for hunting licenses was paid by the residents of that county.

My attention was attracted, by brief notices in the press, to this measure during its passage through the state legislature. I thereupon wrote a number of letters in its behalf, including pleas to Drs. Pearson and Palmer, both of whom stated that they would also write similar letters to members of the legislature.

To me the outstanding point in the above statement is not that for thirteen years one of our oldest states, in a geographical position best fitted to profit by expert advice on wild life matters, has not only encouraged, but has been permitted to encourage, the destruction of thousands upon thousands of beneficial hawks breeding in every eastern state north of the Mason and Dixon line. The discouraging feature appears to be the fact that for the thirteen years that this has been occurring there has been no protest by any ornithologist or ornithological organization of sufficient loudness or decisiveness to have been heard. I regretfully admit that I have been as delinquent in this regard as anyone else.

Surely it is not unreasonable to expect that our ornithological organizations, presumably most concerned with the welfare of economically valuable birds, might, through committees, acquaint us in regard to such retrogressive steps as bounty laws, and this before they have been in force for thirteen years. How many of our ornithologists know what other states now have laws providing for the payment of bounties on hawks? How many care sufficiently to enquire?

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