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Around The Campfire

With John E. Mills



Since it has been rumored that a screening device for the Big Sandy flume has been devised, let's not assume that such a screen will be actually installed this summer. Let's not celebrate the screening of that flume until the screen is actually in place and in the meantime keep the iron hot.

About three weeks ago we started a discussion of the upland game bird situation in this neck of the woods and named several factors that figure in depleting the pheasants, grouse, quail and part-ridges. I really started something when I named the common house cat as the worst of all predators of our game birds.

Now, before the dead cats are hurled at me, let me clarify those remarks. I want to remove "certain cats" from the ranks of the enemy.

Many cats stay strictly to home, are well fed and cared for by their owners and fill an important place in the home or farm as a mouser or pet. The house cat I mean is the kind you see lurking along fence rows in the back pastures and fields.

Those are the ones that no one owns, they are the ones who follow the young broods of pheasants and quail from the time they are hatched until they catch every one of the chicks or the survivors are able to wing their way to safety.

I know there are folks who will doubt the seriousness of the wild house cat threat to our game birds but to them I say: Take a short hike some morning when a new fall of snow is on the ground. Go out around the back pasture and fields and along the creeks and make a note of the number of house cat tracks you see.

Your cats never made those tracks, neither did your neighbor's. Your cats and those of your neighbor (if they are worth keeping) were in your house or barn policing up on the rats and mice.

Where They Come From
Many of these wild house cats are scattered through the country by inhuman persons who suddenly find themselves blessed with an over abundant crop of kittens or even adult cats. To relieve the situation they just haul them out and dump them "someplace in the country." Some of these strays are picked up by kind-hearted folks and become good pets or mousers but a lot of them just go wild and are worth no more than the low-lived individual who abandoned them.

I recall several occasions many years ago while making ski or snowshoe inspections for possible snow damage to homes in the Mt. Hood summer home area. These trips were made several times each winter and always during the snow season when tracks were easy to see. Few of the summer homes would have anyone in them after Labor Day and scarcely any of them after the heavy snows fell.

I was surprised at the number

of house cats left to shift for themselves when their owners returned to town in the fall. Also, I was surprised at the apparent high rate of survival of these cats. But the cost in small wildlife is tragically high. Even if last summer's pet didn't survive it is a 10-1 bet that the same vacationer brought another kitten with him the next spring and left it that fall after petting it all summer. Kittens are so easy to get you know, and they do make such lovely pets. Don't you think so?

Blueberry Crop Advocated Here

Blueberries could be grown successfully in the Sandy-Gresham area says Richard P. Juhnichen secretary of the Gresham Berry Growers.

He said blueberries require acid soil and top irrigation with good drainage. There are isolated experimental patches in Milwaukie, Tigard and the west hills of Portland. The type being raised in this area is the Eastern Blue, grown largely in New England.

"We are not requesting raising of the berries, but we are willing to advise any prospective growers," Juhnichen said.

Blueberry plants require more pruning than cane berries and take from eight to ten years to develop to full production.

There is little demand for blueberries in this area. Juhnichen said the public will have to be educated in uses of the crop.

Blueberries are easy to pick and can be shipped great distances without spoiling.

This area is free from diseases peculiar to blueberries, Juhnichen reported. He mentioned blueberries as an excellent crop for anyone wishing greater diversification.

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