

Small Worlds Around Us

By Lynn W. Watkins

Register & Tribune Syndicate, 1963

Chances Are Red Squirrel Has Been Wrongly Judged

Those who want to use the little guy for a target try to justify their act by claiming the red squirrel destroys the eggs of song birds. Some state conservation departments go along with this idea. Other and equally questionable justification for unrestricted killing of these vivacious little rodents comes from some hunters who claim the red squirrel is the traditional enemy of both the fox and the gray squirrel, and therefore should be eliminated from the woodland scene.

And, of course, there are those who make a profit from the sale of firearms and ammunition. They advocate the use of the red squirrel, as a target during closed hunting seasons.

So the red squirrel is caught in the middle, and nearly all the trigger-happy gunners shoot the little guy, thinking their act is furthering the conservation of larger squirrel species. Too, the "hunters" feel that they should keep in practice during off seasons, and what better target practice could be found than plinking red squirrels. This satisfies the desire to kill something, thereby displaying the shooter's power and mastery over lesser beings.

The fact that the red squirrel, as a species, is still present in limited numbers in some areas attests to the cunning and adaptability of the little rodent, not to any tolerance on the part of the gunner. Adaptability is a trademark of the red squirrel, especially in the animal's selection and rejection of certain kinds of foods.

How the little fellow accomplishes this is a little beyond our understanding. The red squirrel likes mushrooms, and will feed on them almost exclusively during the mushroom season.

In his home grounds many varieties of mushrooms may be growing, both the edible as well as the poisonous. But Reddy knows the difference. By some wild reasoning, he separates the good from the evil.

This, too, of course, brings up still another argument among woodmen and students of animal behavior. Some claim the little animal eats all kinds but is not adversely affected by those that would sicken or even kill a human connoisseur. They claim the squirrel's digestive system is immune to the poisonous properties of all species of fungi.

Expert Observed
To prove or disprove this doubtful point, a human expert in mushroom identification began a series of observations during a season when mushrooms were plentiful. Locating a woodland where several species of mushrooms were pushing up from the mould of the woodland floor, he watched the red squirrels eating the plants with evident relish.

When the little animals' appetites were satisfied and they scampered away, he examined the mushrooms. There were four kinds present in the immediate area; three of the edible kinds and one which was very poisonous.

The squirrels had carefully avoided eating any of the wrong kind. Further observations, in other areas with other red squirrels, bore out the original fact: the animals left the poisonous mushrooms strictly alone.

Our expert does not profess to know the answer. Just what instinctive reasoning the animals use is not obvious or evident, but somehow they seem to know good from bad.

Perhaps there are other traits, not understood by the wisest of us, that should cause us to give this little rodent the benefit of the doubt. Chances are he has been maligned and cruelly misjudged.

Blue Scout Rocket Reported Launched

Point Arguello, Calif. —AFSA satellite employing a Blue Scout combination was launched today from this Pacific missile range, the Air Force reported.

The terse announcement did not identify the type of satellite, its mission or whether the launch was successful. This was in keeping with Defense Department policy inaugurated a little more than a year ago.

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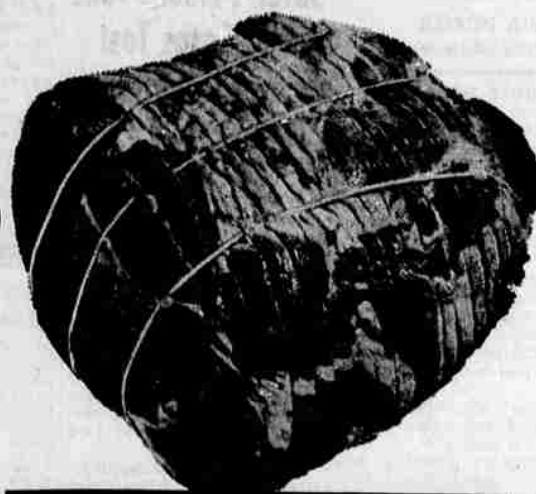
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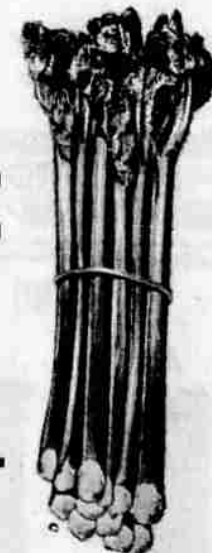
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