

Conservation:

Predatory Birds Prove Beneficial In Long Run

By JAMES L. O'DONAHUE
 Conservation is a many sided subject. To write on all its facets would require a long and varied essay or many short sketches. It is neither my purpose nor intent to write an over-all treatise but to take up one approach only and hope that it will fit into the general program.
 Long and rather close association with the so-called predatory birds and animals has led me to believe that, in the balance of nature unaffected by man, they hold the key to the survival of nonpredatory creatures such as deer, ducks, geese, quail and many others. All herbivorous birds and animals would destroy themselves by their own numbers through disease and starvation if left unchecked by the carnivora.
 Last summer saw the upheaval of the mouse population in our valley and at the same time the farmer saw the tremendous attack by ring-billed and California gulls on the destroying hordes. This inclination of the gulls is not new to the student of nature. It is merely an oft-repeated story. The Mormons of early day Utah were saved by the same birds

from a locust attack. Today, Utah claims the gull as its state bird. Often misaligned and misunderstood are the birds of prey: the hawks, owls and eagles. In the spring of 1957 the Oregon State Game Commission liberated a truckload of chukar partridge in an excellent game bird area, and unknown to the commission, under the nest of a great horned owl. This great owl is usually pointed to as being a destroyer. Hand raised chukar partridge should have been soft picking for him.
 The mouse population increase was already gaining momentum. Continuous observation of this nest for information on feeding habits of the owls disclosed that just before hatching of the fourth and last young owl, 82 dead field mice ringed the nest. The young owls left the nest at about seven weeks

of age. At that time we had estimated not less than 2,500 mice had been served up to the youngsters. In the last week one Chinese pheasant and one quail were taken by the birds to feed the young. No chukar ever appeared on the menu. The meadow mouse or vole is a cannibalistic creature. He will destroy eggs and newly hatched young of ground nesting birds. It is entirely possible that these owls saved a considerable number of such birds and eggs.
 A few short miles from Klamath Falls, in a rocky cliff several

hundred feet above a ranch house, is the nest of a Prairie falcon. The rancher tells me falcons have nested in the same spot for more than 30 years. "They never bother us so we never bother them," is his comment. To him, they have clearly demonstrated their

preference for ground squirrel. During our winters when mice and squirrel are no longer available, these birds must kill to eat. Birds of various types are then taken. Occasionally ducks or pheasant are included. Falcons are sportsmen of top rank. No crippled, maimed creatures are left behind. Their kills are clean, quick and merciful. Hunger alone is satisfied; no killing for blood lust.
 The short-eared owl, our only owl that nests on the surface of

the earth, is perhaps the most persecuted of all our beneficial birds by pheasant hunters. He raises from the grass or tules a short distance away and is an easy target for the only gun-toting predator — the world's prime destroyer — Man! An effort was made during the summer of 1957 on the ranch of Murel Long in Lower Klamath by members of the United States Soil Conservation Service to attract and hold this bird. Owl perches were placed at intervals along dikes and ditches to provide resting and lookout points. Owl castings or pellets consisting of fur and some bone of countless mice attest to use of the perches by the birds. It is hoped that this practice by farmers will increase and that such activity will lead to a better understanding of the little short-eared owl by hunters, and enemies shall be turned to friends and the true meaning of conservation will be realized.

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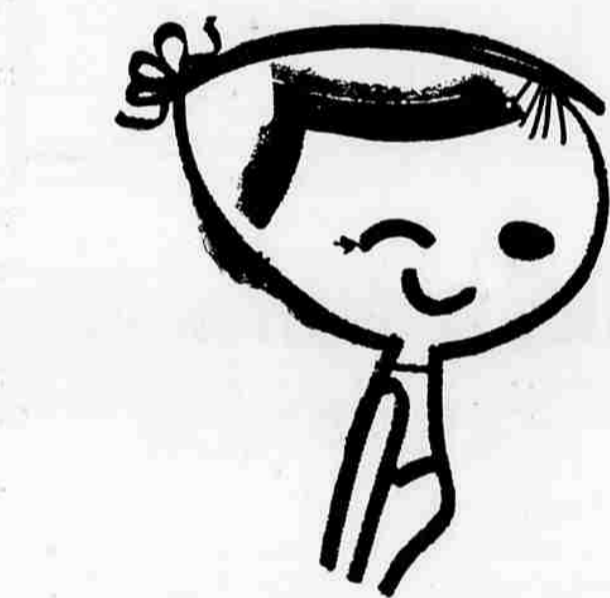
Western Washington and Oregon — Temperatures averaging slightly below normal and precipitation more than normal through Saturday. Showers probable about Tuesday and Friday or Saturday. Highs 58-65 in Western Washington and 60-72 in Oregon. Minimums 40-48.
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