

GET RID OF

GAMEKEEPERS and SOCIETIES

and the pigeons and rabbits will go too,

says JOHN CHERRINGTON

WHEN the Government, fearful of pressure from the animal lovers, made it an illegal act to spread myxomatosis, it automatically made the extinction of rabbits an impossibility and at the same time turned into criminals a good many otherwise law-abiding farmers. As compensation for having removed the one sure method of control there is a subsidy for rabbit-clearance societies.

But these are themselves hamstrung in various ways. They cannot legally make use of myxomatosis as a method of control, they cannot use gin traps, and they are not compulsory on all farmers and landowners.

There is some pressure to make the sale of rabbits illegal, as was done in New Zealand. This would be an unenforceable provision in any case, and would provide no answer. Very few people today can possibly make a living out of the sale of rabbits. And it's most doubtful in this age of full employment if many young people would take on trapping for a living. Especially as the two most effective methods of destruction, still used in New Zealand, poison and gin traps, are denied them here.

Plenty of Noise

So far our Rabbit Clearance Societies are making a fair bit of noise and are not, I submit, killing a great many rabbits. As they are not compulsory the non-co-operators refuse to join, and to make matters worse many shooting owners refuse to allow their woods to be invaded by the Society's operators. Instead, they are allowed to do their own destruction with their own keepers.

This is a fundamental mistake. Keepers, in my experience, are possibly the worst pest destroyers in the world.

Of course, they fill their pantries with stoats, weasels, crows and the like, but who ever saw a rabbit hung up even in these days? All they kill are the enemies of the rabbits.

I could confidently guarantee the abolition of our two major pests, rabbits and pigeons, if, as a preliminary, I was allowed to abolish all gamekeepers. Pigeons only nest in our woods and hedges with such abundance because the "vermin" have been ruthlessly destroyed.

The question of the gin trap is one of some delicacy. If it had been illegal for domestic dogs and cats to trespass on other people's land no one would have said a word if their pet had come home with a damaged foot. After all, dozens of cats are killed and maimed on the roads every day, but no one has suggested making cars illegal.

Gin traps

I must say I don't like gin traps. When we used to use them I insisted that they were frequently inspected, but I don't believe they are in themselves any more cruel than any other method of destroying vermin.

Shooting leaves many rabbits to creep off and die. Gassing is acceptable only because we don't watch the death agonies in the depth of a burrow. A snare is not the quick despatch that people seem to imagine. At best it's strangulation, at worst it can be a long drawn-out agony, worse in a way than the gin, because the rabbit is caught by the body and not by a foot.

I think the way to look at the problem is that the rabbit, like the rat, the mouse, and other pests is an enemy of farming and hence of all people who eat food. Our enemies have to be destroyed in order that we all can live.

No one sheds a tear for the rat which is allowed to be poisoned with impunity. It's only the rabbit that seems to arouse the anger of the animal lovers.

Hypocritical

Yet their anger is so hypocritical. At the height of the myxomatosis row, which, if you remember, coincided with the final abolition of the gin trap, one prominent animal lover, in all other respects a most sensible man, threatened in conversation with me that if farmers persisted in destroying their rabbits in this way, then the enraged British public would boycott British food.

I believe they would, too. And go on making use of the products of countries like Australia and New Zealand where, of course, every possible variation of humane and inhumane methods of destruction are not only tolerated but encouraged by the authorities.

But to return to our Societies. They are incapable of containing the rabbit plague without the recurring onset of myxomatosis. The only system of destruction that seems available to them is gassing. This at best is only moderately successful as there is some doubt as to whether the gas penetrates into the burrows sufficiently far to kill all the rabbits. But the most serious drawback to gassing, even if 100 per cent effective is that it only affects rabbits that are to ground.

I just don't believe these stories of rabbits that have turned to living on top of ground because of the gassing of burrows or myxomatosis. Large numbers of rabbits always lived on top of the ground.

At Our Expense

The only time these are to ground is when they are breeding, and then as their stops are usually in the corn or under other dense growth they are fairly invulnerable. In the old days the way to deal with these was by open gin trapping in the Spring. Now they just breed away happily to do more damage, and to provide the operators of the Rabbit Clearance Societies further employment at ours and the Government's expense.

All in all then the Societies don't seem to make much impression on rabbit

numbers. In fact, I would say that they do as much harm in preventing the spread of myxomatosis by making burrows uninhabitable as they do good. My experience is that rabbits always return, that their numbers increase gradually to a certain point and then there is a recurrence of myxomatosis and practical extinction.

Contrary to popular belief there is no evidence that the disease is in any way less severe, simply that as there are fewer rabbits about the spread is less effective.

Try Nature

In France, where myxomatosis first appeared in Europe nine years ago there has been practically no widespread reappearance of the rabbit in any number, and the disease reappears almost when required as numbers rise, without human aid.

I suggest that the best policy here would be to let the Societies lapse and see if nature can keep them in check.

With grateful acknowledgments to the author and the "Farmer and Stock-breeder".



GOLF COURSE EQUIPMENT

Hole Tins	Tee Boxes
Cutters	Tee Plates
Staffs	Ball Cleaners
Mats	Tablets
Mowers	Rollers
Hose	Sprinklers
Mole Ploughs	Rotary Sifters
Aerating Machines	
and all	
Greenkeeping Tools	

H. PATTISSON & CO. LTD.
STANMORE · MIDDLESEX
Telephone GRImSyke 400