

TALLY-HO IN THE HIGH STREET

A FRIEND of mine who lives in the outskirts of the local spreading town rang me up the other day to complain that a fox had been at his pet gander. This man likes geese and he keeps a goose and a gander—they never seem to produce any offspring—in his backyard.

He had been woken early in the morning by a most fearful row and he was just in time to see a big fox departing over the fence at the bottom of the garden. Now my friend knows a fox when he sees one. In his younger days he spent nearly every winter Saturday hunting with the pack of hounds with which I am connected.

This was why he rang me for he wanted to know whether hounds could meet somewhere near at hand and try to do something about the urban foxes which, he said, were becoming a menace to the resident poultry.

Arrangements were made for hounds to meet at a house five miles from the built-up area. It was intended to draw towards the houses during the course of the day.

The first cover, a wood of an acre and a half in extent, produced a fox which circled twice and then set his mask straight for the suburbs. A five-mile point ended up among the pavements. Hounds were called off in case of damage to private property.

by HENRY TEGNER

They were taken back into the country to draw again and the same thing happened. We had three separate foxes in front of us that day and they all went to town, as it were, to save their brushes.

To show willing, hounds met again three weeks later near suburbia. Before drawing, the master sent the car followers ahead to try to form a cordon between the countryside and the town. When hounds found their fox he set his mask, like a homing pigeon for suburbia and ran through the cars without hesitating. Hounds followed him down the paved roads eventually to mark their quarry to ground in a hole beneath the back-garden of a council house amongst litter, empty cans and garbage.

When we reached the pack there was a line of curious human faces peering over the back-garden fences at the sight of foxhounds and dismounted men and women standing amid their steaming horses. There was nothing to do but to leave the fox where he had found sanctuary.

I have always had a high regard for the intelligence of the fox. He is certainly one of our cleverest wild animals.

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SPORTS TURF RESEARCH INSTITUTE

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The eleventh Annual General Meeting of the Sports Turf Research Institute was held at St. Ives Research Station, Bingley, on Monday, 16th April under the chairmanship of Mr. Alan Sowden.

In the annual report, reference is made to the great honour done to the Institute by H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh who, in June, 1961, graciously gave his patronage to the Institute.

Reference is also made in the annual report to the research programme carried out during the year. This included further work on moss control, top dressing experiments and variety trials with grasses. New fungicides for use against diseases were investigated and, at the request of May & Baker, Ltd., trials were carried out with a view to evaluating two forms of urea formaldehyde resins in comparison with other nitrogenous fertilisers.

The Revenue Account for the year ended 31st December, 1961 showed an increase in general income of £2,266 to a total of £30,663, whilst expenditure rose by only £732 to £29,083. The surplus of £1,580 was capitalised in accordance with the provisions of the Articles and will be used to further the main objects of the Institute.

The Institute's advisory service continued to be in great demand throughout the British Isles and Europe and education was continued through courses at Bingley and by the giving of lectures.

Elections to office included the re-appointment of Lord Brabazon of Tara as Honorary President, Sir Bracewell Smith, Mr. Carl Bretherton and Sir William Worsley as Honorary Vice-Presidents, Mr. Alan Sowden as Chairman and Mr. Carl Bretherton as Vice-Chairman.

TALLY-HO IN THE HIGH STREET—*cont.*

With the growth and spread of our towns and cities into the surrounding countryside, it is not surprising that a breed of urban foxes has grown up.

Surroundings of this nature are usually extremely safe for foxes, providing plenty of shelter and bounteous feeding. The only hazard a town fox has to face is traffic—a menace that is also man's.

The fox is an extremely adaptable creature. When myxomatosis swept the land clear of rabbits, which were supposed to be their mainstay, foxes quickly accustomed themselves to an alternative diet.

Foxes have found it easy to adjust themselves to a city life. City dwelling for a fox can be comfortable. In the open country men with hounds will hunt them.

There is plenty of good sustenance too in these urban places. Mice, rats, unenclosed poultry, plenty of garbage and a plethora of unconsumed scraps put out for pets.

A fox is not an underground dweller in the same sense as the badger. Plenty of vixens have their cubs above ground. If they have them in an earth, they often shift them early to another habitation.

Townee vixens soon learn that there is no need to bother with a deep hole. In any case, such places are not easily found in and about human dwellings and the fox itself is not a good excavator.

Once they have established themselves as suburban dwellers, foxes are almost impossible to eliminate.

I know one breeding earth in an open space in the midst of suburbia in which the occupants were dealt with by gas, but it is the only one and I doubt whether the mass murder made much of a dent in the local vulpine population. Urban foxes are here to stay.

*With grateful acknowledgments to
The Farmers' Weekly*
