

October 28, 1933

Mr. C. L. Horn, President
Federal Cartridge Corporation
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Dear Mr. Horn:

I just received your letter relative to the Illinois chinch bug trouble. I am quite swamped with highly necessary official writing, so its quite out of the question for me to write an article for the Moline Dispatch. However, I can give you some information which might be of value.

Dr. G. O. Hendrickson of our department took notes at the September 8 joint meeting of Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa entomologists held at Keokuk, Iowa, and Hamilton, Illinois.

On the basis of Hendrickson's notes, I would say that burning under ordinary conditions could result in the destruction of no more than 50% of the adult chinch bug (Dr. Drake here at I.S.C. says only 25%). The destruction of 50% as a maximum certainly does not constitute satisfactory control, and I have suspicions that the net effect of burning in holding chinch bugs in check may be in many areas very much over-estimated. Climatic conditions seem to have the really significant influence in determining insect populations of this sort.

The entomologists agreed generally that promiscuous burning did more damage than good; burning should be done only when the chinch bugs are hibernating in sod land in great numbers. It was agreed that burning should be closely controlled and carried on late in fall or very early in the spring. Flint of Illinois stated that burning should be largely confined to south and west sides of hedges and bunch-grass fencerows.

At the meeting, general agreement and satisfaction with the Iowa game policies was expressed. It was further agreed to incorporate in letters and memoranda to County Agents and farmers a paragraph advising brush piles and corn shocks for quail cover to replace natural cover destroyed where burning is done.

Relative to birds capable of effectively combatting a chinch bug outbreak, I don't think there are any. Bobwhites, for example, feed upon chinch bugs probably as much as any bird, but the absurdity of expecting two or three coveys of quail per quarter section to make any appreciable impression on a heavy infestation of chinch bugs should be evident. The view is prevalent among many ornithologists that chinch bugs are not palatable to bird life as

a whole, though I doubt if this point has been carefully checked up. Very likely birds other than quail eat chinch bugs, too, but the mere fact that a bird preys upon an insect species doesn't have to mean that the insect is thereby kept in check.

As I see it, there isn't much that we can do about the chinch bug except to encourage the public in some attitude of sanity. We can't expect too much of the birds--certainly not when an insect population gets plainly out of control. The best we can hope for through artificial measures is a partial local control, which should not be carried on in such a way as to lose sight of everything else. We as a species have always "burnt our barns to get rid of our rats," but that does not make extreme, short-sighted measures any more profitable.

This letter contains material which would be dangerous in the extreme, if misquoted, so please use discretion. The topic is highly controversial and to be treated properly, would demand more time, and perhaps more ability, than I have.

Sincerely,

Paul L. Errington
Assistant Professor
In Charge, Wild Life Research

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