

December 12, 1933

Mr. Robert Page Lincoln,
Outdoors Column,
Minneapolis Tribune,
Minneapolis, Minn.

Dear Mr. Lincoln:

I have had my attention called recently to your write-up "Quail Investigations in the North", apparently based upon a part of one of my papers.

Insofar as your write up indicates that you have read only the first half of the paper you are quoting I am inclosing a reprint of the complete original as submitted to American Game. American Game, on account of space limitations, split the original manuscript into two parts to run in consecutive issues. This to my idea completely ruined the paper, and I can hardly blame you for getting wrong impressions from the part constituting in actuality scarcely more than the intended introduction.

A scrutiny of the reprint, I think, will show that my presentation of conservation problems is not terribly out of balance and that I am completely aware of the existence of the farmer as well as a number of other things. The primary purpose of the article was not to propose a panacea for wild life ills but to present analyses of the problems. It was also intended to call the attention of sundry myopic agricultural, conservation, and sporting factions to the possibility that there are certain social and biological matters which they cannot ignore and expect to get away with, in short, that fundamentals must not be lost sight of. So far as I know I don't labor under many delusions as to how much the public may be counted upon in the way of unselfish, conscientious effort.

Yours very truly,

PLE:B

Paul L. Errington,
Asst. Prof. in Charge
Wild Life Project

OUTDOORS

By Robert Page Lincoln

Nationally Known Minneapolis sportsman and conservationist, and accepted authority on northwest fishing and hunting.

QUAIL INVESTIGATIONS IN THE NORTH.

DR. PAUL L. ERRINGTON, a well known student of the quail and an authority on its range and habitat, foods and habits, has made a number of observations with regard to the quail as found in Wisconsin, the conditions in which state may be considered as approximating or coinciding with our own conditions in Minnesota. Dr. Errington looks upon the management of the northern bob-white as being governed largely by the manipulation of three primary factors, namely, winter food, cover and predators, the latter including predaceous man. Upon the quail's access to proper food and plenty of it, contends this authority, depend much of his cold endurance and the alertness and stamina which enable him to escape his enemies. Cover, too, has its part, but it tends to take care of itself unless man unwisely interferes. The role of predators is not necessarily to be measured in terms of the quail they get or do not get; the relationship here are so obscure and so involved that we are more likely to lay stress upon minor incidentals which we see than upon fundamentals less apparent.



Robert Page Lincoln.

Dr. Errington in his Wisconsin quail investigations stated:

"A ragweed and smart-weed bearing stubble field, if left unplowed winter and spring, makes available for bird life tremendous quantities of edible weeds seeds—staple food for many species at a period when hunger means mortality. Agronomists recommend plowing before the weed seeds mature, on behalf of crop sanitation. Commonly the plowing is done late in the fall when the seeds are turned under in condition for subsequent germination, thereby defeating the purpose of the agronomist's recommendations

"The fall plowing might be in accordance with the advice of entomologists, but what has the man whose specialty is soil erosion to say on the subject of ground laid bare to winds and waters for months at a time? Thus we see how easily a relatively simple measure like the maintenance of a source of winter food by the simplest and most natural methods leads to a veritable hodge-podge of conflicting doctrines.

"Artificial feeding of bob-whites at definite stations has drawbacks. The stations are usually too few to take the place of adequate wild food and as a rule demand much human attention, especially during inclement weather when the food is not certain to be regularly replenished, however critical the need. Then, too, all sorts of rodent and bird competition may be focused on a limited food supply. Sometimes predators, though perhaps unable to capture strong birds, may by their presence at an only station, prevent the quail from feeding. Any system of feeding which cramps the quail into rigid routine behavior is intrinsically unsound; the birds have insufficient alternative courses of action in the event of emergencies.

"The only truly effective feeding station discovered in the north (in Wisconsin) was the corn shock, from which the corn had not been picked. Suppose that, as the initial step of a quail management project, we supplement the food supply by leaving out over winter strategically distributed corn shocks, what can we expect to feed aside from quail? Corn in the shock will furnish food also for mice, rabbits, squirrels, crows, jays, pheasants, prairie chickens, and possibly many other species, even muskrats. The worst criticism of corn shocks is that they winter in nice style the field-living, destructive Norway rats."

By the above and a number of other facts, Dr. Errington proves that getting the quail started and well established in the northern sphere of activities is not as easy as it would seem on the face of it. That any number of farmers would leave their fields unplowed, with rag-weed and smartweed covering them in abundance so that a handful of quail would find winter food thereon is rather expecting the approach of the millennium in game conservation and protection.

Likewise that the farmers should leave their cornshocks sprinkled promiscuously over the landscape in the interest of feeding vermin as well as

possibly a few pheasants and fewer quail is something that belongs in the mystic realm of make-believe. In fact that any farmers in their present starved and back-to-the-wall straits, should give thought to a handful of introduced quail, when they don't know themselves where their next meal is coming from, is something that must cause a snicker to run through the gathering.

A number of chair-warming so-called conservationists, well-fed and in ample funds, write well-padded "reports" for the edification of the untutored. The farmer is told to do this and the farmer is told to do that, always forgetful that the farmer is not a game breeder for any select group (in fact is not permitted by law to raise game birds) and has no interest, as a rule, in the game produced on the land; and certainly has nothing in common with the sportsman who elects to use his lands as a hunting ground without so much as "by your leave," or remuneration of a few dollars for the privilege.

The investigator goes into detail how the farmer should not plow down his weeds in the fall, just so that the game birds may have them as food; and that he shall leave corn in the shocks for added food and shelter; and that he should not cut out the dense weed patches on the useless acres or along the fences, merely so that the game birds will have shelter and food. These and a hundred other demands are put to the farmer, without so much as asking his permission, or his opinion with regard to the same. Since the farmer's opinion is never asked, I will put in a word for him.

If game birds are so important and the land needed to raise these game birds is so important, make it well worth the while of the farmer to arrange his land so that it has abundant cover, abundant food and excellent wintering places, well protected from the predatory animals, including the predatory human animal. Assure the farmer enough in real cash to make it profitable to cater to the hunter as it is to raise oats, wheat, corn and hogs, and you will immediately see a change in front and a real interest created among the farmers. But until that day arrives, the attempt to make the farmer interested will only have a spasmodic effect, never, at any time, more than lukewarm in its interest, and surely never entertaining serious consideration.

The oddity of it is that the farmer's land never comes in for attention as being private grounds at all. Indeed, the farmer is never considered as being lawfully right in keeping hunters off his land. By reason of this very hunting act has arisen that strange enmity as between the farmer and the sportsman that never seems to be downed. But give the farmer a chance to make a few dollars for privileges, and the solution to the matter is arrived at by one fell stroke. It is the entering wedge to friendly relations, and it may possibly lead to the farmer thinking seriously with regard to making his land more fit for the maintenance of an active number of game birds, not alone of one variety, but many.

Until the farmer is granted actual money in remuneration for what his land has to offer to the sportsman he is not going to show any interest in the matter. With the farmer it is a practical, not a sentimental proposition, and the sooner we come to realize this fact the sooner will we get somewhere in our negotiations with the tiller of the soil on whose lands we must perforce do our hunting. Dr. Errington has touched on this phase but sparingly, although he does not give recognition to the "pay-for-hunting-privilege," as I have stated above. He does, however, come close to the mark by saying:

"The public might as well realize that the destruction of brush and other game bird cover and removal or destruction of winter food mean the decline or even the absolute failure of wild life dependent upon it. This, in the case of the northern bob-white cannot be remedied by closed seasons, by posted lands. It cannot be remedied by pouring out upon desolated environments birds from the game farms, or, worse yet, imported from the south. It cannot be remedied by the usual thoughtless campaigns against hawks and owls, by which almost invariably those species are killed that should be unmolested. The remedy, if there is one, rests with the man on the land, and with those who influence him into doing what he does."

And the only real remedy for the situation is to make it pay the farmer, to make his land fit for the game birds to live on, and there perpetuate their kind. Let the hunter pay for hunting privileges on the farm, and the farmer can be counted on to do the rest!

Tomorrow—The Ducks You Do Not Get.