

Emmington

New Seils Building
June 10, 1935

Mr. Warren F. Eaton
National Association of Audubon Societies
1775 Broadway, New York

Dear Eaton:

I am glad you are going to bat on the pole trap issue.

Perhaps the most valuable thing I can say is that I am personally operating one sanctuary (600 acres) and half a dozen game management areas (2-3000 acres each), and have secured satisfactory increases of wild life not only without the use of pole traps, but without any other kind of predatory control. I also operate a shooting preserve which employs no pole traps, and on which predator control has been confined to the killing of a few Cooper's hawks and housecats.

I do not imply that all game areas could dispense with pole traps, but I do definitely assert that in most cases pole traps are resorted to simply because the operator lacks the imagination and skill to detect the other factors which are holding down his wild life.

Neither do I imply that the game on my areas can be increased indefinitely in density without resort to some kind of predator control, but it is my opinion that such indefinite increase is often undesirable and unnecessary, and that there is any amount of room for building up wild life populations without it.

All this pertains to wild game. The thing which needs to be brought out is that tame game in enclosures is an altogether different problem. Predators differ from each other not in their desire but in their ability to kill. Any predator has the ability to kill game inside a fence. Accordingly the working rules which have been evolved for wild game tend to break down when dealing with game farms.

To the extent that this is true, the operation of a game farm constitutes a liability for the destruction of a publicly owned resource, the predators. This liability should in each case be weighed against the assets. There has been an uncritical acceptance of the idea that each and every game farm is an asset to the conservation movement. In my opinion this is far from being the case.

I do not think it is a sound principle entirely to ban pole traps by law. Biological situations are not amenable to hard-and-fast rules. I do think the objective should be to ban pole traps except under special permit

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issued by responsible conservation officials, each permit to be subject to annual field inspection and annual publication of all birds taken.

The immediate objective should be to build up a public realization that the pole trap is in most instances an unjustifiable and unnecessary destruction of public property, and that the raptorial birds destroyed are often just as scarce and just as valuable as the game which the traps are intended to protect.

Yours sincerely,

Aldo Leopold
In Charge, Game Research

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