

February 25, 1944

Mr. Fred Zimmerman
Wisconsin Conservation Department
State Office Building
Madison 2, Wisconsin

Dear Fred:

Here is Cyril Kabat's report on the Prairie du Sac
census for the Conservation Bulletin.

Bob McCabe's report on the Arboretum and Fish
Hatchery will reach you shortly.

I am sending a copy of the Prairie du Sac report
to Paul Errington so that he will know this winter's
census figures to date.

Yours sincerely,

Aldo Leopold
Professor of Wildlife Management

cc Errington ✓

Wild Life Census at Prairie du Sac

Cyril Kabat, University of Wisconsin

Since 1939 the Conservation Department has taken, in cooperation with the University, a census of all wildlife on a 4500 acre area near Prairie du Sac. The University had previously taken this census since 1929. During the last two winters the census has been made by Albert J. Gastrow of Prairie du Sac and myself.

This winter (1943-44) is notable for its low population of quail, pheasants, meadowmice, and rabbits, and its high population of red foxes. There were 45 red foxes on the area at the beginning of this winter; 28 have been killed to date. Running back through the preceding years the fall red fox population was 13, 9, 4, 5, 8, 3, 0, 0, 0, 0, 2, 2. It is evident that a gradual increase has taken place since 1936-37, the last winter when none were present.

There are 11 gray foxes on the area this year as compared with 2 a year ago.

Quail started this winter with 233 birds, as compared with 353 in the fall of 1942-43. The population has now shrunk to 156, a 35 per cent loss. The loss last winter at this time was 80 per cent.

The 1942 December census shows that pheasants reached their peak in the fall of that year. The area is deficient in good pheasant cover, and population levels are affected by local stocking as well as survival and breeding. Less hunting and increased local stocking failed to register gains in this year's pheasant crop.

No rabbit census has been made this year, but the flushing rate, a good indicator of abundance, has been the same as a year ago. This does not sustain the general impression that rabbits are scarcer this winter than a year ago.

Prairie du Sac ruffed grouse, like rabbits, do not conform to the impression that this is a low year. There are 42 on the area, an increase over 35 last year.

The skunk census is incomplete, but the indications are that a new high will be reached. The census is made by counting tracks emerging from dens during late winter thaws. Of five dens, only one has showed activity so far.

Among other species registering gains this winter are raccoon and badger.

About the usual number of horned owls are on the area this winter, but contrary to the usual rule, none have nested so far. Usually there are four going nests by February.

The accompanying table summarizes the censuses of the last two winters.

At the present time Gastrow and myself are trying to trap and band the quail population. We are having great difficulty, for the winter has been so mild and open that the quail will not enter our traps. So far we have caught only 50 of the 156 surviving birds.

Wildlife Censuses at Prairie du Sac for the Winters of 1942-43 and 1943-44.

Species	Winter 1942-43		Winter 1943-44	
	Dec.	Mar.	Dec.	Feb. 1-15
Quail	353	70	233	156
Pheasants	41	17	14	7
Ruffed grouse	35		42	
Red fox	13	7	45	17
Gray fox	2	2	11	8
Horned owl	6		7	
Badger		8	15	
Opossum		12		10
Raccoon		12	15	
Skunk		30	Incomplete	
Mink		4		5
Weasel		4		5
Cooper's hawk	2		3	3
Red-tailed hawk	6		5	5

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