

# THE GAME FIELD

By EDWYN SANDYS

One of the most formidable obstacles in the path of those who strive toward the proper protection of game is the misunderstanding of the subject by a large and more or less influential class of citizens. These good people, hard-headed, hard-working and keen in their pursuit of business and political and social advancement, have no sympathy for anything, which, in their opinion, encourages the wasting of valuable time. To them the true sportsman is a shiftless sort of fellow, an easy-going, unbusinesslike chap, who is given to neglecting highly important matters for the sake of prowling about in quest of a few almost worthless birds. It never occurs to these unsympathetic ones that their one always-in-season-game—the dollar—and their desperate chasing of it causes them to neglect matters of grave importance. In their ceaseless striving they forget that truest of short stories of old which crisply tells about the beam and the mote.

But it is not altogether by their frequent harsh criticism and permanent half-concealed contempt for "loafing gunners" that these proper and hustling souls accomplish harm. The very narrowness and sternly-defined boundaries of the path they tread frequently gives them a considerable amount of influence within their small spheres of activity. They are known and respected as shrewd, progressive business men; they have fairly won their positions among their fellows, and also naturally possess a certain amount of influence over them. In politics they are decided, often aggressive, hence their support to any movement and their signatures to any petition carry weight. Like the great majority of average people, they are apt to pass hasty judgment upon matters which they do not at all understand, and are ready to do a good turn, when it costs nothing, for people who may be useful to them in other directions later on.

So far, so good. Some schemer, or malcontent, in their town learns of a proposed change in the game laws, which, if carried through, will interfere with the heretofore enjoyed privileges of one, ten, or one hundred men, and will be of lasting benefit to ten thousand other men dwelling beyond the limited horizon of the place in question. At

once the walking delegate is busy. The proposed measure would not at all suit the convenience of himself and immediate friends, so it must be headed off. A meeting is held, a petition prepared and signed by those present, then the walking delegate sallies forth to secure the weightier names of the prominent business men who were too busy and uninterested to bother about that meeting.

The siren song of the delegate usually is to the effect that the proposed change will be the worst of class legislation; it will favor the rich and oppress the poor; it will turn what has been a free-for-all into a special event, which the poor may wistfully scan from afar, but take no active part in; it will preserve the game which we protect and feed, for the special benefit of a lot of rich fellows away off somewhere, who only come near us to kill off our game, tramp over our grounds and, incidentally, our rights. This sounds good, costs nothing, down goes the name and the keen business man has made a hit with "the boys." The next business man listens to the song, sees the big name, scratches his below, and so it goes down the line, until the last useful man, who is utterly ignorant of matters concerning the real welfare of game, has done his benighted best to frustrate the earnest, patient efforts of a band of devoted sportsmen, who do know about game, and who are only trying to preserve what is left for the direct benefit of the very men who have in ignorance marred the important work. The bill is introduced to the powers that seem to be, the opposition unfurls its long petition, the powers that should be, but ain't, read the names of influential business men, and—well, the bill gets it where the quail got the number eight!

Of course, the great trouble is that the wrong people have the say. They may know all about their own affairs and much about politics and popularity purchasing, but they are densely ignorant of the game they try to play when that game has hair or feathers on it. Because Marconi is a "lightning sharp" is no good and sufficient reason why we should appeal to him concerning the wireless signaling of the "lightning-bug," nor is the dirigible French balloonic necessarily the highest known authority on the wingishness of the Archæopteryx. Our game-law makers some-

times forcibly remind me of Kipling's Colonel, who "can manage the Railways of State, Because of the gold on his breeks, and the subjects wherein he must pass; Because in all matters that deal not with Railways his Knowledge is Great."

THE men who know most about game and the sort of laws required for its protection are the true sportsmen, who have no axe to grind nor desire to make money out of what to them is what it should be—a clean, wholesome pastime. From sheer love of sport, these men study deeply of the best authorities, and obtain a scientific and practical knowledge of game and its needs, which no mere gunner or dealer ever can hope to possess. To properly handle the question of game protection one must be possessed of a broad and comprehensive knowledge of beasts and birds, and also be himself sufficiently broad in his ideas to fairly weigh those oft-times opposing interests—the local, and what might be termed the national, for the welfare of game really is a matter which concerns the nation.

A CHEERING sign of the times is the present widespread interest evinced in the introduction of foreign game birds, and the more valuable movement toward the restocking of old-time covers, which, through over-shooting and other causes, have become barren of feathered game. Regarding the importation of foreign game, there is little to be said. The trouble appears to be that most of the parties interested are looking in the wrong direction. The best of the European birds include the capercaillie, black game, red grouse, partridge, and woodcock. The latter would be no great acquisition, as we have a much better though smaller member of his family. Judged by the standard of sporting and edible qualities, the American woodcock so far outranks the European species that any comparison is entirely unnecessary. The partridge we already have, and the day may yet come when the bird will afford sport to more than a select few. It is an excellent bird, a vigorous flier, and, while much larger than our quail, not unlike it in several habits. Its size would place it between our quail and ruffed grouse, but in this country it would be inferior to either native as an object of the sportsman's pursuit. Partridge shooting, early in the season, is somewhat like quail shooting, a bit easier, and lacking that charm of infinite variety which quail shooting never fails to offer. This, however, is less the fault of the bird than of the conditions. Here, a

man may in one day follow quail through every sort of ground from marsh to heavy forest. Possibly in time the Americanized descendants of British partridge may learn to adopt the tactics of their kin. Even then they would remain easier marks than quail in the open, and still easier than quail or ruffed grouse in cover.

The black game is an exceedingly handsome and gamy bird, a strong flier, and by no means an easy chap to get the better of. Time alone can prove how much of our huge territory will afford him suitable haunts. At first glance it would appear that the New England country, portions of the Canadian Provinces, and certain sections of our Pacific side would comprise the best territory for him.

The red grouse is a *rare* good bird. Nearest related to our ptarmigan, he would here find a niche for himself between the ptarmigan and the sharp-tailed grouse. As a sporting bird I should, of course, rank him far ahead of the ptarmigan, and perhaps even a bit before the sharp-tail. The problem is just where to find a suitable country for him. At home he is a bird of the moors, of which we have, growths and all considered, no close imitation. Some parts of our far Northwest and of British Columbia would come nearest to matching the Scottish strongholds of the royal red fellow, but the prospect even there would be rather dubious. In speaking of all these birds I, of course, am not referring to the possibility of rearing and preserving a few (which, with care and expense, might be done at many points), but of establishing a species, with a fair prospect of its furnishing future sport worth the having.

The last and greatest bird of the foreign quintette is the capercaillie. While we have nothing at all like him, his place here would be between the big sage grouse and that king of all gallinaceous game birds, the wild turkey. As the sage grouse is the cock-of-the-plains, so is the capercaillie the cock-of-the-woods. He is indeed a grand fellow, and, so far as I can see, portions of New England, especially Maine, a large area of Quebec, part of Ontario, and possibly of British Columbia, also of Michigan and Wisconsin, should furnish him the sort of home he prefers, *i. e.*, a region of pine fir, etc., and a winter climate somewhat like that of his native ranges. The sport he would afford would properly be for the rifle, and would be something akin to but greatly inferior to turkey trailing, inasmuch as the great grouse usually is shot while in the act

of calling from his perch in some tree. Still, to stalk a bird of his size and wary nature would be no bad sport.

So much for the birds in question; now, how about their actual value as additions to our long list of game? While it is far from my desire to discourage the importation of foreign game, yet my firm conviction is that the money would be better spent if devoted to the welfare of our own birds and to the restocking of depleted covers with native game. It frequently is both wiser and better to endure the ills (?) we have, than to fly to others that we know not of. In the Mongolian pheasant we found a foreigner that was worth while importing. The birds has done well in the West, where he at present is as much at home as any native, and he has proved that others of his near relatives might wisely be considered. Sportsmen should bear in mind that of gallinaceous game birds, including the pheasant, we have fourteen species, which, with their races, number no less than forty-four separately named birds, of which the great majority is well worth the best of care. In fact, no country surpasses this in the matter of upland, shore, and water birds. Hence there is no pressing need for foreign game. While it is possible to find a species hero and there worth adding to our list, the real need of the hour is a protection that will protect, and the securing and rigid enforcing of all needful laws for the welfare of the native game. Our growing sons have a right to expect this much of us, and we should look to it that the record of our stewardship forms clean, instructive reading.

“ WHICH do you consider the hardest bird to kill?” is one of a lot of recent inquiries from youthful nimrods. That depends. Perhaps five veteran sportsmen would give five different answers. Off-hand, I should say that a teal late for supper and with a sharp wind at his tail would come pretty near being it. Conditions play so important a part, that the answer is not readily found. An upland shot frequently finds water-fowl, especially canvas-back, extremely difficult, and vice-versa. The chief trouble here includes the tendency to underestimate the distance and speed of the game, and also the entirely novel conditions under which the gun must be handled. Get a duck shooter and a man from the uplands to change places, and I would bet on the man trained on water-fowl making the bettor showing. His hardest tasks would be grouse, quail,

and cock in thick cover, but in the open he should get his share of any and all sorts of game, simply because his previous training surely taught him how to hold well ahead, and to pull without stopping the smooth swing of the gun. These two points are as valuable to the upland shooter as to the wild fowler, and duck shooting teaches them better than any other form of the sport. In fact, the only thing likely to bother the wild fowler would be the cover, and with his natural all-round handiness he should speedily grasp the point and curtail the holding on process. It would be simply a question of hurrying up—a comparatively easy task.

But with the upland man attempting duck, it would be entirely different. In a sink-box he surely would feel like a member of a lost tribe—everything would be against him, and if he didn't make a mess of it he would be a phenomenon. At point or flight shooting he probably might at first fare but little better. Not only would fowl appear to be much nearer than was the case, but those actually within fair range would be considerably farther off than the average distance of his previous practice. With his feet under him, or upon his knees, he might handle his gun easily and rapidly, but still he would have the estimating of distance, the leading or the bird and the smooth, sustained swing of the gun to bother him. The snappy, usually short-range work of the uplands only answers for duck while they are hovering over decoys; for fowl whizzing past low down, or for overhead work, it will not do. Such fowl must be led, and generously, or they will only shed a few rump feathers, or fly entirely clear.

Returning to the direct question, I should say that the snipe is the most difficult bird to hit. Small, swift, and erratic in his movements, he seldom lies so close as do quail, cock, and grouse. When going straight away with the edges of his wings to the gun, a cross-section of his body will represent an exceedingly small mark—in fact, one a deal smaller than careless observers imagine. Crossing, or passing over, the size of the mark is greatly increased, but even then it is much smaller than that offered by any other of our important game. Only that duffer, the rail, and some of the lesser but frequently swift shore-birds, present so little surface for the deadly lodgment of shot. Apropos of snipe, those who find the straight-away, or rather the as near that as snipe ever go, too difficult, should beat down-wind

instead of the opposite and usual method, for this reason: Nine-tenths of flushed birds go boring up-wind with swift dodges to right and left, this dodging being the real difficulty of the shooting. By beating down-wind, the gunner compels the birds going up-wind to pass him to right and left, instead of cork-screwing away. This means two important things—a side-view of the bird, hence more to shoot at, and a lessening to almost nothing of the otherwise baffling dodging. I tried this long years ago, and at once the snipe's strength became his weakness, for, instead of flickering off like a feathered will-o'-the-wisp, lo! he was plugging by at close range like a varlet plover.

THE recent death of Albert E. Pond, special game and fish protector of the New York State Forest, Fish, and Game Commission, deprived the State of a valuable worker. Mr. Pond was a member of the New York Zoölogical Society and the Seventh Regiment Veteran Association.

TO the sportsmen of the quail sections the present month is an excellent time for some practical work. Reports from many points say that so far the birds have done very well. What often proves to be the most trying month of the year is at hand, and the men of each northern section should make it their business to see that from now on the birds do not suffer from lack of food. Wild forage is growing scarce, but any shortage may easily be met by the placing of a few sacks of cheap grain at the proper points. Remember that two birds saved now may mean from twenty to forty next fall, and a few days of rare good shooting as payment for a trifle of trouble.

Where birds are regularly fed, it will be well to keep watch for hawks and other foes—notably half-wild house-cats. A reliable remedy for all is a charge of shot, but one cannot depend upon getting a chance at the pests. A couple of tall poles, capped with small bits of board to form resting-places for a couple of energetic rap-traps, are excellent things to stand near the feeding-place. Birds of prey are given to alighting upon such posts, providing they be higher than the other convenient perches in the vicinity. Other lofty perches should be removed. The traps should be made fast with wire or inconspicuous cord, and set (to spring under a moderate pressure), before the pole is raised into position. An angle of a rail fence is a handy place for the

pole. Another trap, and a deadly one if properly arranged, is a neatly-stuffed quail, fixed in a crouching attitude to a small bit of board which may be covered with snow or earth, as desired. The decoy should be placed on open ground, so that the hawk can get a good rap at it. By the edge of some rag-weed is as good a place as any, for a live quail would naturally go there. Care should be taken that the bird is plainly visible from all directions. Surround it with snares of brass wire, the spread of loop being about four inches. Three snares, arranged like an ace of clubs and about two inches above the bird's back and head, will answer very well. To support them, split the stems of weeds a trifle, and let the wire rest in the clefts—an extra weed-stalk or so can be easily fixed, where desired. Fine, stiff stalks are the best. Make a small loop in the free end of the wire, tie a fine, strong cord to it, and tie the cord to a bit of dead wood or other suitable clog. Make the cords several yards long and cover the clogs, otherwise they will be too conspicuous. Visit the snares twice a day, about noon and at dusk; take a gun with you. If the hawk be snared, shoot him so soon as within range, lest the sight of you cause him to struggle desperately and break away. Should there be no captive, see that the snares are as they should be, and wait for future developments—there's a hawk somewhere about that belongs to you if you give it time. If a captured hawk has damaged the quail, smooth it the best you can and leave it there. Hawks are not very critical, and another may come.

TO the novice: Don't forget that when shooting in snowy cover you frequently carry your gun at the trail. This means that the muzzle may dip into the snow, or scoop up a little while you are getting over a fence or log. Even so slight an obstacle may mean a burst barrel, so wise people who desire to remain here a while longer never fire a gun with snow in the muzzle.

THIS is a period of rest for most bird dogs in the North, and the rascals wax fat. Don't allow your dog to pile on fat. I let mine round out nicely, but nothing approaching grossness. That, much is good for him—more would be bad. Let your dog run with the sleigh, don your skates, and make him pull you a few miles; neither will hurt him, and he'll enjoy the fun. If you can't work him this way, take him out at least twice a week and make him beat a few fields. You, of

course, will avoid anything like keeping him too fine. A let-up in work is good for him, but hog-fat loafing is worse than over-work.

**F**ISHING through the ice is no bad fun these cold white days. Upon many northern waters fishing with "tip-ups" is a regular winter pastime. The rough-and-ready "tip-up" is made of two pieces of lath, one about two feet long, the other half that length. A hole is bored near an end of each, and the two are fastened together by a screw, which allows the shorter arm to shift under slight pressure. Four or five of these being made ready, a line to suit the depth of water is fixed to each movable arm, a medium-sized hook made fast, and each outfit wound up. Equipped with these, an axe to cut through the ice, a big pocket-knife, and fat pork or other meat for bait, the fisher is ready for business. Above some known fishing-ground he chops the necessary holes, about a foot in diameter and a few yards apart. After removing all fragments from the holes to prevent too rapid freezing, he takes his big knife and chips out a neat socket for the end of each "tip-up" and places each in position. Some small ice or snow tamped about each stick at once hardens and makes everything firm. Then, after baiting up, he drops in his hooks, straightens each movable arm, and bides the issue. When a fish bites, the arm of that particular tip-up is at once jerked from the perpendicular, thus signalling the catch. For a couple of hours, on a good day, a man frequently is kept "on the jump," for a school of perch is apt to be enjoying "recess" when the baits go down. Which the ice is right, a man can have fun skating about and still keep an eye upon his tackle. At many points shelter houses are hauled upon the ice, and when a party of middle-aged city men have taken possession, there is fun galore. A lot of heavy-weight, white-whiskered, red-faced boys, playing all sorts of pranks to kill time, or rushing from the shelter on real and false alarms, to go slipping, sliding, whooping, maybe crawling in mad haste to the "tip-ups," forms indeed a comical spectacle. It is good for the elders, too, to shake off their cares and laugh till the hills laugh back; and if now and again some solid old bull, or bear, suddenly sits down on the ice-trust so hard that the whole of Wall Street shakes—what of it? He may grunt a bit to-morrow morning, but he's having clean, wholesome fun to-day. The captured fish, when tossed upon the ice, freeze stiff in a few

moments. Sometimes a fish so frozen is carried home in that condition and shows signs of life after being put into cold water to draw the frost out of it.

**I**N Delaware the protection of game is confined to quail, and the results of the past season's efforts of the Delaware Game Protective Association have been most gratifying. In this State the law provides that the enforcement of the game laws shall be placed in the hands of the Association, so that no interest is taken by any State or county official in game matters. The open season, which extends from the 15th of November to the 31st of December, was particularly well observed, and extraordinary precautions taken to prevent the shipping of game out of the State; and with signal success. There is a law peculiar to this state, which imposes a penalty on the purchase of game for purposes of profit or sale; this allows the sale of game by the person who shoots it, and while not strictly, as it should be, for the purpose of game protection, it was a compromise law passed for the benefit of the farmers of the State, many of whom consider the game on their farms a legitimate source of income when killed and sold. In spite of this law for their supposed benefit, the sentiment in some districts is very much opposed to the Game Protective Association; the farmers being so short-sighted as to feel that harm is done their interests by the law that prohibits the shipment of game out of the State. Some carry it so far as to announce that members of the Game Protective Association shall be denied shooting privileges on their premises. It is to be hoped, however, that the recent season, more successful than usual, will show them the benefits of game protection and bring to their notice the value of shooting rights on properties where game is plentiful; convincing them that the permanent value is in live game for the sportsman and not in dead game for market.

The law which compels non-residents to procure licenses before shooting was well observed. It is also learned that while there were reports of trapping and netting of birds, the practice has been reduced to a minimum.

The unusual observance of the game laws was largely due to the unremitting vigilance of the Game Protective Association, which showed it meant business by several arrests at the opening of the season; these had a salutary influence throughout the season.

A word to the wise, etc., etc.