

# CHOOSING A FIELD DOG— BIRDS DESTRUCTIVE TO GAME

By EDWYN SANDYS

FOR the benefit of several inquirers, I may say that I have no great love for extremes in size in field dogs. It is true that repeated mention has been made, in my stories, of a certain very large setter, but he was an extraordinary animal, his sole fault being his extra lumber. He had a rare intelligence, disposition and bird sense, but his extra substance contributed not one particle to any of those. In fact, he would have been a better and much handier all-round animal could he have been fined down one-eighth, or a bit more. He was resolute and no end game, but only when he was worked down to the famine-suggesting point could he properly display his grand quality. On the prairie he would have been all right, but in the much-fenced country in which he worked, his size and weight let him in for a lot of valueless exertion in clearing obstacles, while being also hard upon his forepaws in the oft-repeated landings after such leaps. Had I the choice between a first-class over-sized dog and an equally good under-sized one, the bantam would be selected, and for several reasons. In the first place, he could wriggle through lots of stuff which would embarrass the big fellow, be much easier stowed in wheeled vehicle, boat or canoe, not so apt to pound his feet, better for slipping through wire, less noisy in such brush as ruffed grouse cover and, most likely, able to creditably acquit himself upon much less fare. All these things are important in certain sorts of country. Hence, my choice is the medium-sized, or even the under-sized dog, rather than the great big, perhaps very handsome, type. The best field-service does not demand a heavy-draught type of dog, any more than smart road-service calls for the same type of horse. Your over-sized dog, too, is apt to show some faults of conformation, which may impede his prolonged usefulness. In this case, enough seems to be preferable to too much, and the oft proved happy medium to be the better.

Apropos of field dogs. When making choice of a pup from a litter, give the preference to a smart, medium-sized one of promising conformation, rather than to the largest. See that he has a good head, with nice low-set ears, for if these are bad in a youngster, they are mighty apt to prove a heap worse in the matured animal. Poor nose, small, badly set-on ears and too much tail, are faults only too common, and they seldom improve with age, the reverse being the more probable result. Also keep in mind the sort of country to be later worked. Your dog should be conspicuous in thick cover, hence, black and tan, all liver, red and blue roans, all black and all white, are undesirable. All of them, except the white,

are hard to make out when motionless among logs and brush, while the white, of course, is practically invisible against snow. A dog having liberal, sharply-contrasting markings upon a white coat, is easy enough to see at any time, while not necessarily lacking in beauty. If you don't buy an ugly puppy, you may never own an ugly dog, and while beauty may be only skin-deep, still there is a satisfaction in owning a handsome animal instead of a homely one. "Handsome is that handsome does," is all very well, but I'd a deal sooner see it done by one that was handsome anyhow. They can't always be doing, and the intervals may prove rather trying, because the homely end of the proposition is always with you.

## OWLS AND HAWKS

Too many gunners labor under the delusion that all birds of prey are destroyers of game. The truth is that not a few of our hawks and owls are very useful, and never should be shot. To glance at the habits of the more common species: The great horned owl, the "hoot owl" of country folk, is a savage destroyer of our finest game, from wild turkeys down to Bob Whites. He also kills hares, skunks, rabbits, squirrels and the various smaller animals, and also is a deadly foe to domestic poultry of all kinds. He hunts at night, and the best way to get rid of him is by means of the steel trap placed upon a platform of a small bit of board nailed to the end of a long pole. The trap should have chain and ring, the latter sliding on the pole, or be made fast by a length of clothes-line, which is easily obtainable, and the owl will not cut it. The beautiful snowy owl is a day-hunter. He preys upon game, small birds, rodents and fish, but he is comparatively rare, so is guilty of but trifling damage. Owing to the uncertainty of his wanderings? he seldom is trapped, usually falling victim to the gun of some countryman. The barred owl, the hornless, gray fellow with the blue-black eyes and ivory-colored bill, while an occasional killer of poultry, chiefly feeds upon game and small mammals. While this owl's record is not altogether black, I shoot it and the white and the horned fellows at every opportunity.

Very different is the American barn owl, sometimes called the "monkey-faced owl." This bird should not be shot, as it renders useful service by destroying great numbers of mice, moles and various large insects. It does not molest domestic fowl; in fact, a pair of barn owls about the place are of greater value than a couple of hens. The long-eared, or cat-owl, too, should be spared. While he eats a small bird now and then, the chief food is mice, beetles, etc. The short-

eared owl of the marshy districts is another day-hunter that makes himself extremely useful by destroying mice and other small mammals and reptiles. So far as I know, he never molests either game or farm fowls. The small screech owl, the rascal that sends the mournful puppy-wail through the dusk of evening, is a most interesting and very useful bird. He feeds mostly upon mice, but now and then takes a small bird, by choice an English sparrow, which is no great crime. He is said to also eat cut-worms, which, if true, gives him still stronger claim to protection. Needless to say he should be spared. This owl passes through some curious color-changes from a very pretty gray to brown, rusty-red and almost sooty-brown. The so-called "mottled owl" is this bird in the gray phase. It has saucy-looking ear-tufts and a light horn-colored bill. The beautiful little saw-whet, or Acadian owl, is the bantam of its family in Eastern America. It is an out-and-out night-hunter, killing many mice and beetles, and in hard times an occasional small bird. It is easily tamed, and makes a most interesting pet; of course, it should not be destroyed.

Anyone anxious to prove what the smaller owls eat, without having to dissect the birds, need only search when the snow goes from under dense fir-trees and pines, which are favorite retreats. Upon the ground will be an abundance of what are termed castings, *i.e.* pellets composed of the indigestible parts of whatever food has been taken. At first glance, one of these castings looks not unlike a small, dried-up field-mouse. It usually consists of the hair, larger bones and teeth of the short-tailed field-mouse, and the careful breaking-up and examination of a number of these pellets will reveal some interesting facts. When the owl takes a mouse, he first crushes the larger bones, then, if possible, swallows the prize whole. After the process of digestion is completed, the firmly compressed hair, bones and teeth are ejected through the mouth, and form the castings found beneath the roosting-place. I have seen both captive and free owls eject these pellets, which then are covered with mucus and as slippery as wet soap; this, of course, to facilitate their ejection.

Like so many of the owls, not a few of our hawks are misjudged, especially the graceful, long-winged, easy-moving marsh hawk, or harrier. This bird is as useful as it is beautiful, its food mostly consisting of reptiles, locusts, grasshoppers and small mammals. I have never heard of its attacking poultry, and I have spent a great deal of time with the marshmen at one place and another. Those not posted certainly would imagine the male and female of this hawk to be of different species. The male is bluish-gray above; below, white, mottled with brown; wings, long and pointed, brownish; tail, long; upper tail-coverts white.

This plumage seen in full sunshine against a background of grass, presents a lovely blue-and-silvery effect worthy of a gull. The female is dark reddish-brown; below, rusty with spots.

The big, red-tailed, or hen hawk, while it certainly does lift a fowl now and then, really does vastly more good than harm. According to our best authorities fully eighty-five per cent. of its food consists of troublesome rodents. The somewhat smaller red-shouldered hawk is more valuable, as it seldom molests feathered creatures, greatly preferring rodents, reptiles and insects. Very different are those two much smaller feathered thugs, the sharp-skinned hawk and Cooper's hawk. These two should be shot on sight, for they kill game and poultry at every opportunity, never hesitating to dash close to the farmhouse door after their quarry. The desperado would have been a great card in the palmy days of hawking, for he is so swift that he has been named *Velox*. Cooper's hawk, while lacking much of the other's speed and dash, is a persistent destroyer of the same quarries. Both are terrors to the breeder of fancy pigeons. Cold lead for theirs! I have trapped both by means of a stuffed white pigeon to the back of which was fixed a whitened muskrat trap. Nor is such trouble wasted; for, when either of these pests has once secured fowl, or pigeon, he will return again and again, unless taken.

Other destructive hawks worthy of the death are, the goshawk, the broad-winged hawk, the rough-legged hawk, the peregrine falcon, or duck hawk, and the pigeon hawk. Every wild-fowler knows the dashing peregrine and the way he can knock out terrified ducks. Swift, strong, fearless, he certainly is the typical freebooter, but much as I admire his reckless method, there's no denying the fact that he performs a deal of mischief. I have seen him strike too many fowl to be mistaken.

#### SAVING THE BISON

The present agitation in behalf of our few remaining bison, usually and erroneously termed "buffalo," should win the support of every true sportsman. For a host of enlightened men to allow the threatened extinction of the once mighty race, would be a serious blot upon our American sportsmanship; which, after all, is of the very highest type. The preservation of the bison really is more a matter of sentiment than anything else. In my own opinion, the bison is not, and never was, fit quarry for a sportsman's rifle. In the old red days, of course, many excellent gentlemen thought differently, as was their privilege, but we of to-day need not repeat the errors of our fathers. The killing of grand animals merely for the sake of a hide, head, hump, tongue or whatever trifle the slayer actually made rational use of, is not, and never was, that

higher type of sport of which this magazine teaches. But the responsibility for the slaughter of the bison does not rest upon American sportsmen, but upon those who slew as a business, or through ignorance of what true sportsmanship meant. I can recall a time when one of the inducements offered a man in connection with a trip through the then Far West, was that he could slaughter big game from the steps and windows of railroad cars. That very thing was done, too, and many times, but I am positive that our sportsmanship of to-day would not stand for such outrageous work. We have greatly advanced along this line, as upon many others, and no matter what a few scoffers may say, I do not believe that the same opportunities to-morrow would bring a repetition of the old-time carnage. That same spirit which creates and supports such fine nature schools as the Bronx Park and kindred institutions established, and to come, is diametrically opposed to everything savoring of slaughter. The trend of that one real controller, public opinion! is along newer and sounder lines, and while the natural sporting instinct will not die so long as this nation remains great, it surely will develop to that much-to-be-desired point when the actual killing of wild things will be a minor instead of the most important feature of our sport.

It is far from my intention to preach against the killing of wild creatures in reason and in season. I believe that a man is of such greater importance than any wild creature that it does not greatly matter what he may do to the creature, so long as the doing falls within those lines which our greatest men have decided to be rational and right. So far as I can see, the killing of an ox, a goose or a wild beast or bird, amounts to the same thing, provided the dead creature be used for some reasonable purpose. And the feeding, amusement and health of men are reasonable purposes, but only so long as the man himself remains reasonable in his demands upon those lower creatures over which he was granted dominion.

And in our sport there is, or should be, another very important matter—*i.e.* we should never forget the rights of those who will follow in our footsteps. We should preserve, protect and propagate our beasts, fowls and fish, so that generations yet to be may know and love the sports and outdoor life which have played so important parts in the upbuilding of this nation. None of us can see very far ahead, but wise men can see a mighty long way in the other direction, and such men truly know how much we are indebted to that wholesome, hearty, outdoor, sporting life for our present proud position among the great powers of the world. If sport in reason be wrong, then the greatest of our parent races and of our own have been and are as far wrong as records show that it is possible for intelli-

gent and, in every other respect, noble people, to wander. With this truth in mind, it does appear, to say the least, a wee bit peculiar, that only a mere handful of self-appointed critics are in the least able to distinguish that which is right. It is all very fine for these people to rail against the cruelties of sport, or anything else for which they happen to have no personal inclination but the interesting fact remains that clean sport never had so strong a hold upon our best-bred and best-educated people as it has to-day.

For the benefit of my rather sarcastic correspondent, "A Naturalist," I would say that there are two, possibly three, species of moose on the American continent. The two are known to science as *Alces americanus*, of Maine and Canada, and *Alces gigas*, of Alaska. So far as I know at this writing, the question of the third species has not been finally decided by our best authorities, but I should not be astonished if its existence was soon proved. Moose vary according to locality, and more than some writers imagine. I have seen choice specimens from the East, the Canadian Northwest and Alaska which, to all appearances, seemed to represent three distinct species. But such matters are not to be decided offhand. A very close observer not long since told me that the very young calves of the East and the Northwest differed enough to strongly suggest an allied yet distinct parentage. That, however, is a point which I shall leave to better-informed people to decide, for my observations have had little concern with infant moose, either north or west of Lake Superior. My farther trips have been for sport and, of course, in the shooting season, by which time young moose have lost their infantile peculiarities. The calves grow very rapidly. The Eastern youngster is light-red, with a dark stripe on his back, and when but a few days' old appears entirely too small for his mighty parents. If he weighed thirty-five or forty pounds when born, he might add anywhere from three hundred to four hundred and fifty pounds during the first six months. The antlers, too, of mature bulls, vary greatly, the excessive development of certain sections probably resulting from some peculiarity of diet.

My very latest reports concerning the winter-killing of Bob Whites and other game came to hand March 1st. Unfortunately, they contained nothing cheering, which leaves the outlook even more gloomy than the dismal aspect of matters a month ago. There unquestionably will have to be no inconsiderable amount of restocking; which, of course, will demand both money and no slight amount of work by sportsmen located near the depleted covers. Let the good men and true be up and doing, for we cannot afford to lose our small non-migratory game from the old resorts for which the birds themselves have done so much.