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FISH LIVE ON THE FIRING LINE

(These Wildlife Articles are Written by William L. Finley and Ed F. Averill)

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The most valuable food fishes in nearly all the streams of the country have either disappeared <sup>or</sup> ~~are~~ are on the down grade to destruction. As this fact is forced on the minds of the angler and commercial fisherman, they are more eager to discover the causes and take steps to prevent extermination. The life of a fine flavored fish is always on the firing line.

If a sportsman is casting for trout and happens to see a heron, kingfisher or water ouzel hunting along the creek, he is too prone to jump at the conclusion that birds and not man are running our fish numbers in the red. When a gill-netter or purse-seiner gets a glimpse of a seal or sealion, he is generally satisfied the problem can be solved of saving the salmon runs by killing off these aquatic animals.

The Canadian government in many ways has shown keenness in conserving her wildlife resources and has shrewdly advertised throughout the United States to encourage our citizens to tour their parks and forests and cruise their picturesque rivers and coasts. On the other hand, the press of the country heralds the fact that under orders by the British Columbia Department of Fisheries, expert hunters have completed their annual killing of sealions along the coast. This is done according to an up-to-date method of warfare. Hunters are equipped with machine guns to mow down bulls, cows and pups on the offshore rocks which are their ancestral breeding grounds.

The reason behind this slaughter is the report that sealions live on salmon and are thus damaging an industry.

The problem that should be solved is whether the sealions are reducing the salmon runs or whether <sup>these fish</sup> they are over-exploited by commercial interests. These cannot be solved by heresay evidence supplied by fishermen, but careful study should be made by unprejudiced experts. If a sportsman sees a hawk catch a game bird, he is likely to have an everlasting prejudice against him and advocate the killing of all hawks. After many years of careful research, scientists ~~approve~~ <sup>prove</sup> that many of these predatory birds are of real economic value because they are nature's check upon mice, gophers, squirrels and other rodent pests.

Years ago the commercial fishermen of California insisted on exterminating the sealions along their coast. An examination of the stomachs of twenty-five sealions killed showed that these animals were living on squids and devil-fish which were considered detrimental to commercial fishing. Over eleven hundred squids were found in the stomachs of these sealions. Under the direction of the United States Bureau of Fisheries, thirteen Steller sealions were killed along the Pacific Coast as far north as the Columbia River. The stomach contents of these animals showed that not a single salmon had been destroyed.

Out of the thousands of sealions killed annually along the British Columbia coast, how many of these carcasses have been examined by experts? Has a thorough study been made so as to weigh the evidence on both sides? Sealions form an interesting gap between land mammals and the aquatic creatures like whales. They are a unique part of the weird prehistoric life of the sea cliffs and caverns.

The Biological Survey has recently published a report

On "Birds in Relation to Fishes," which is the result of a long field study made by two biologists, Clarence Cottam and F. M. Uhler. The report says:

"No important group of North American birds is more widely misunderstood in terms of economic relationships than the diverse assemblage commonly classed as 'fish-eating birds.' Many persons lump the whole class as destructive because they assume that the so-called fish-eaters must be inimical to the popular and widespread sport of angling and even to commercial fishing. The name is not always properly applicable, however, as some of the birds so termed do not feed on fishes at all, others only to a limited extent, and many feed primarily on fishes that are either worthless to man or are themselves severely destructive to other fishes. While a few fish-eating birds are known to inflict damage of economic importance when protective measures are not taken around fish hatcheries and occasionally in newly stocked waters, a careful study reveals that under natural conditions such damage is usually slight and in most instances is more than offset by the birds consuming large numbers of spawn-eaters and predators of valuable fishes."

At one of the national conventions of the Izaak Walton League of America, ex-President Hoover, an enthusiastic fisherman, laid the responsibility for the relative scarcity of certain food and sport fishes where it belongs when he stated:

"The history of our food fisheries over the last fifty years is a melancholy book that would have taken some of calm and optimism out of Izaak Walton. At one time our littoral waters teemed with huge runs of salmon, shad, and sturgeon. But they were

easy of capture because they come right up to the fisherman's hands once a year en route to spawn in our streams.

"Despite some feeble limitations imposed by state law, we have witnessed the practical destruction of the whole of the salmon, and shad, and sturgeon from the Atlantic coast. We have seen the destruction of salmon along the Pacific coast until finally there is but one large salmon fishery remaining-- that upon the Alaskan coast, where we still take \$50,000,000 a year in fish. But even Alaska, with the devious assistance of the tin can, will-- unless it is vigorously restrained-- have been lost in another ten years."

Sometimes the complaint is made that birds like herons, cormorants, pelicans and others are fish-eating birds and should be destroyed. Even where birds are seen along a trout stream, they frequently capture insects, crustaceans, frogs, salamanders or snakes, which are more easily caught than elusive trout. Even when fishing, these birds are more likely to catch minnows, suckers and other species that are not utilized as food by man. The bulk of the fish diet of pelicans and cormorants is of no commercial value. Often they eat the fish that live on the eggs of trout and salmon and are therefore beneficial instead of harmful.

Because of its large size, the great blue heron is widely known among fishermen. Eight of these were killed along a trout stream in western Montana. The stomachs of these birds contained twenty-eight suckers, fifteen frogs, nine sculpins, seven trout, one minnow, one mouse, and several large water tigers and dragonfly nymphs. The destruction of large numbers of well known fish predators or spawn-eaters more than offsets damage to the trout supply.