

Journal Dec 11-1940

3 photos

CATS - TO BE OR NOT TO BE

by

William L. Finley and Ed F. Averill.

This argument started in one of the sportsmen's clubs. "There is no wild bird or animal in the United States whose destructive inroads on our bird population is in any sense comparable to the widespread devastation created by the domestic cat. This creature captures wild birds at all seasons of the year, but is particularly active in catching young quail, grouse, and pheasants immediately after they have left the nest and before they have gained sufficient strength of wing to escape," said one of the hunters.

"Some people hate a cat because it catches a bird and think it ought to be killed, but a cat is a household pet like a dog. Both may have faults, but so has the human race," replied another member of the club, who had two daughters.

"We have state and federal laws protecting song and game birds. If it is right to fine a man for killing one bird, why allow him at the same time to keep a cat that kills thirty or forty?" asked the hunter.

"I don't think my cat kills many birds. He is cared for at home, well fed and not allowed liberty at night during the nesting season. Just remember that he catches mice and rats, which are a nuisance and destructive about my home," replied the cat lover, who claims to be a conservationist.

"I think it is as natural for a common cat to want



to kill a bird as it is for a child to want candy," argued the hunter. "One way to save the life of a bird is to tie a bell on the throat of your cat when it is permitted to roam about the garden and orchard. If hunting in the woods, a cat is more dangerous to birds than any native mammal, for it is nocturnal, a good climber, a keen stalker, a strong leaper and very quick and active."

Many sportsmen have a hatred against domestic cats when they are hunting and find these Grimalkins wandering in the fields or sneaking through the orchards. The ordinary farmer that keeps a cat and a dog on his ranch likes to see the pussy in the garden or out in the field, because he feels that is a natural check against so many little ground pests that help destroy his crops. We saw one farmer milking and shot his cat with our camera as she stood up on her hind feet and grabbed the milk on the fly. We also got a picture of his little dog that was hunting mice around the hay field.

During the nesting season last summer, one of our neighbors reported that a yellow warbler built a nest and had laid four eggs in a lauristinus bush at the side of their house. These hatched a little later. He said the song of this warbler was an interesting part of outdoor life. Warblers, like sparrows and other song birds, are of real value about the home because they help destroy many kinds of injurious insect life. When the four young warblers were about half grown, a neighbor's cat sneaked in and ate the whole brood. He said scattered



feathers below seemed to prove that the cat also murdered the mother warbler, because she wasn't seen or heard again.

Much has been written about the bobcats and mountain lions that are being hunted and trapped because they kill game birds and mammals which the sportsmen want to shoot. Among naturalists, the question often arises as to whether these should really be exterminated. If a bobcat kills quail and grouse, and a cougar kills deer, they also destroy many squirrels and other animals which many people think are destructive and should be killed.

It is often reported that a mountain lion kills an average of one deer a week or about fifty during the year. For this reason, game commissioners especially feel the cougar should be exterminated. Years ago the reports of some of the most well known naturalists in the East stated that a mature cat in good hunting grounds kills on an average of fifty birds a year. Kittens and half-grown cats do not catch many birds, but an old cat that wanders off into the fields and woods is terribly destructive.

It is quite true, however, that some cats do not kill many birds, and those that are intelligent and high-bred may be taught not to kill any. Some cat lovers believe that their pussies do not kill more than an average of ten birds a year. The late Mr. Edward H. Forbush, who was then State Ornithologist for Massachusetts, claimed that if this is the case, the farm cats of that state would be killing about 700,000 birds annually. He said there was also an enormous number of village



and city cats, many of which had good opportunities for catching birds, so there was always a much greater mortality of song and game birds every year. It would be hard to estimate the destruction of bird life in many other states and also throughout the whole nation.

While many people think that cats should be shot, others claim that this would be an extreme treatment which should not be advocated. T. Gilbert Pearson, former President of the National Association of Audubon Societies, claimed that it is idle for the lovers of cats to contend that it is only the half wild and unfed animals which indulge in bird killing. To help safeguard the many birds about the dooryards where cats live is to watch them carefully, especially during the spring months when the birds are busy rearing their young. Cats, like many dogs, should be controlled carefully.