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September 1994

## The Probe, Issue 147 - September 1994

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# To Be or Not to Be Released in the Wild—That is the Question

*Scott R. Craven, Wildlife Extension Specialist, University of Wisconsin, 226 Russell Laboratories, 1630 Linden Drive, Madison, WI 53706*

Should abundant urban nuisance species such as raccoons, rabbits, squirrels, and opossums be translocated after being captured alive? Should any animals be translocated? These are important questions for the wildlife damage management profession, resource management agencies, and the public.

Each year unknown, but undoubtedly huge numbers of animals are live-captured and relocated by nuisance wildlife operators and by members of the public. The practice of relocation is appealing to the public because of the notion that the animal can go on to “live happily ever after” in a new home, or at least it’s an “out-of-sight, out-of-mind” situation. For professionals, relocation keeps clients happy and avoids the potentially controversial matter of euthanasia.

The risks of widespread translocation are well-known or hypothesized but not frequently considered: potential spread of disease, poor survival of released individuals, adverse effects on resident species at release sites, shifting of problems from one victim to another, costly transportation, etc. Despite these risks, translocation remains popular. Further, it cannot be disputed that wildlife translocation does not have success stories to support it. These include restoration programs for endangered or extirpated species, stocking programs for hunted or trapped species, relocation of problem large mammals such as bears, and others.

So where does this leave policy makers faced with decisions about curbing the growing flow of nuisance animals from cities and suburbs to rural fringes, public parks, and other lands perceived as “open habitat”? It leaves decision makers in a dilemma and they need information and guidelines now as the urban-wildlife interface increases.

The following request is reprinted from The Wildlife Society’s Wildlife Damage Management Working Group summer newsletter.

*“Members of the Wildlife Society’s Wildlife Damage Management Working Group (WDMWG) are working to improve the management of problem wildlife on many fronts. During several recent meetings, the topic of nuisance wildlife translocation surfaced and generated much debate. There is a lack of consistency between states in the way vertebrate pests may be handled and/or released. There are also many differences in opinion and several philosophies about this issue within the private nuisance wildlife control industry. Some private industry groups are attempting to influence wildlife agencies and pass state-level regulations that agree with their personal or corporate philosophy. WDMWG members indicated that it would be useful to develop a white paper for TWS Council review, which would help establish a national policy on translocating nuisance wildlife. This policy could be used by individual states as a basis for new legislation or regulations, providing more consistent management of problem wildlife species across the nation.”*

In 1992, I prepared a report on urban wildlife translocation for the National Pest Control Association. The report was primarily based on the results of a nationwide survey designed to quantify the issue and provide guidelines on relocation (timing, species, distance moved, techniques, hazards, etc.) for wildlife damage management practitioners. I was disappointed in the amount of information available and the lack of uniformity in regulations. As a result, I agreed to provide leadership in development of the white paper for the WDMWG, and would be interested in hearing

*Continued on page 5, Col. 2*

# Alternate Use for Softcatch Traps

Tommy King, USDA/APHIS/ADC/DWRC, MS Research Station, MS State, MS 39762

Kevin Bruce and John Paulson, USDA/APHIS/ADC, P.O. Box 316, Stoneville, MS 38776

In late January 1994, ADC/DWRC biologists began a radio-telemetry study of the movements of American White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) in the Delta Region of Mississippi. Pelicans wintering in this area prefer to loaf on mud flats adjacent to open water in lakes or flooded fields. Initial capture attempts included the use of rocket-nets and a shoulder-fired netgun at pelican loafing areas. Due to the wariness of the pelicans and logistical problems, these methods proved unsuccessful, so we began to search for other feasible capture methods. Although leghold traps are primarily used for capturing mammals, padded leghold traps have been used to humanely capture some species of birds involved in wildlife damage problems (e.g. removing raptors and ravens preying on endangered species). Therefore, we decided to try padded leghold traps as an alternative method for capturing pelicans.

We modified Victor #3 Softcatch traps to reduce the possibility of trap-related injuries. These modifications included replacing both factory coil springs with weaker #1.5 coil springs in order to reduce the initial impact of the padded jaws. The factory chain was replaced with two feet of elastic shock-cord to reduce injury caused by

lunging. Additional box swivels were attached to improve the swiveling system. Ten to 12 traps were set on the mud flats and staked under 3 to 5 inches of water in areas most frequently used by pelicans.

The two pelicans that were captured showed no apparent signs of trap-related injury and were released after marking. We plan to further test this capture technique on pelicans this spring. Also, we feel that this technique, with appropriate species specific modifications, could be useful for capturing other birds.

## CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

**October 22-26, 1994: National Symposium on Urban Wildlife, Embassy Suites Hotel, Bellevue, Washington.** For more information, contact Lowell W. Adams, National Institute for Urban Wildlife, 10921 Trotting Ridge Way, Columbia, MD 21044.

**November 3-4, 1994: The Science of Overabundance: The ecology of unmanaged deer populations, National Zoo's Conservation and Research Center, Front Royal, VA.** (Bill McShea, Conservation & Research Center, Front Royal, VA 22630, (703)635-6500, FAX (703)635-6551.

**November 16-19, 1994: Fifth Annual International Meeting on "Rabies Control in the Americas - Coping with Invading Rabies Epizootics, Skyline Brock Hotel, Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada.** (Sarah Crosgrey, ON Min. of Natural Resources, Midhurst District Office, Midhurst, ON Canada. (705)722-3663, FAX (705)722-5720.

**February 10-12, 1995: NADCA Membership Meeting, Itasca, Illinois.** Held in conjunction with the Wildlife Control Technology, Wildlife Damage Management Instructional Conference (see below). Contact: Scott R. Craven, 226 Russell Labs, Univ. of Wis., Madison, WI 53706, (608) 263-6325.

**February 10-12, 1995: The Wildlife Damage Management Instructional Conference.** Presented by Wildlife Control Technology magazine. To be held at the Nordic Hills Resort and Conference Center, Itasca, Illinois. Contact: Peggy, (708) 858-4928.

**April 10-13, 1995: 12th Great Plains Wildlife Damage Control Workshop, Doubletree Hotel, Tulsa, Oklahoma.** Contact Ron Masters, (405) 744-6432 or Grant Huggins, (405) 221-7277.

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Your contributions to *The Probe* are welcome. Please send news clippings, new techniques, publications, and meeting notices to *The Probe*, c/o Hopland Research & Extension Center, 4070 University Road, Hopland, CA 95449. If you prefer to FAX material, our FAX number is (707) 744-1040. The deadline for submitting material is the 15th of each month. Opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of NADCA.

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# **ADC News, Tips, Ideas , Publications . . .**

## **Wild Pigs Ravage Northern California Vineyards**

Marauding wild pigs continue to ravage grape vineyards in Northern California. One winemaker lost half of the grapes in a small vineyard to the tune of \$25,000. "The pigs weren't that interested in my chardonnay, but they really love the pinot noir, probably because it has so much more flavor," said George Davis, owner of Porter Creek Vineyards near Healdsburg. Davis said he knew he was in trouble when he saw one herd with 8 adults and 25-30 young ones.

According to a report in the October 6, 1993 issue of the Santa Rosa *Press Democrat*, the wild pig population is exploding. As a result, farmers in the oak woodlands of the North Coast lose an increasing portion of their crops to the porkers—not only grapes, but corn, pumpkin, and young fruit trees. Growers have tried fencing, but the pigs just go through it. Davis is going to place an electric wire at snout level in a further effort to fend off the pigs.

While California Fish and Game regulations allow anyone with a hunting license to hunt pigs, hunters must purchase pig tags.

## **Mountain Lions on the Prowl in Colorado**

Mountain lions killed 107 lambs and 1 ewe during a five-night period in Rio Blanco County, Colorado, in June. ADC specialists were called to resolve the problem. The sheep were moved to another pasture temporarily while the specialists sought the lions. One mountain lion was snared two nights following the last kill. The Colorado Division of Wildlife requested that ADC remove any other lions from the area so the sheep could be returned to their grazing area. Ten nights later, ADC specialists snared a yearling mountain lion and determined that no additional mountain lions were in the vicinity. The sheep were returned to the area and no further losses occurred.



*The editors of The PROBE thank contributors to this issue: Mike Fall, James E. Forbes, and Wes Jones. Send your contributions to The PROBE, 4070 University Road, Hopland, CA 95449.*

## **Control Methods' Impacts on Laughing Gulls at JFK**

Biologists from the Ohio Field Station have completed a preliminary count of the laughing gull nesting colony in Jamaica Bay, New York, for 1994. A series of 28 overlapping aerial photographs were taken from a 1200-foot elevation of three marshes totaling 600 acres located adjacent to John F. Kennedy International Airport. The photos were enlarged (36" x 36"), covered with clear plastic, and gridded into 5-acre plots. An observer examined each grid with a magnifying glass and circled all detected nesting with permanent marker. A total of 4,600 nests was recorded in the initial count. The observer could detect over 90% of the nests on the aerial photographs, based on the number of nests detected in ten 100' x 100' "ground-truth" plots with known numbers of nests. Thus, the actual number of nests in the colony in 1994 was probably around 5000, representing 10000 adult birds. Thus, the laughing gull nesting colony has declined by only about 33% in 1994 from a high of 7600 nests in 1990, in spite of over 32000 laughing gulls being shot on JFKIA during the summers of 1991-1993 by ADC biologists. ADC management programs at JFKIA in 1991-1994 have reduced laughing gull-aircraft collisions by over 90% compared to 1988-1990 when the airport averaged over 150 strikes per year.

## **Gulls, Terns, Mergansers, and Herons Plague Washington Fish Hatchery**

In eastern Washington, ADC entered into a Cooperative Service Agreement with Douglas County Utility District (PUD) to control bird predation on fish at a hatchery near Azwell, Washington. The hatchery is cooperatively managed by PUD and Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife. The hatchery manager estimated that birds caused \$50,000 in damage to salmon smolts and steelhead fingerlings that were contained in rearing ponds and as they were released into the Columbia River through a one-half mile long release channel. Ring-billed gulls caused most of the damage, but Caspian terns, mergansers, and great blue herons were also involved. ADC specialists constructed an overhead cable grid system over holding ponds where most of the fish were eaten by the birds. The system is similar to that used successfully by ADC on other hatcheries in the state. Fish and Wildlife personnel are also interested in having ADC conduct a hazing project next spring.

# Do Livestock Guarding Dogs Lose Their Effectiveness Over Time?<sup>1</sup>

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William F. Andelt, Department of Fishery and Wildlife Biology, Colorado State University, Ft. Collins, CO 80523

Livestock guarding dogs have been used on an increasing number of ranches and farms throughout the U.S. for the past 15 years to protect sheep, goats, cattle, and other livestock from predation. From the outset of research and use of guarding dogs, there was speculation by some that, even if dogs were initially successful in reducing predation, coyotes and possibly other predators, would eventually learn to circumvent the dogs and continue killing livestock.

A recent article titled, "Coyotes forming packs to deal with guard dogs" appeared in several western newspapers and supports that earlier speculation. The article stated that some coyotes are forming packs that are no match for guard dogs; they're dividing up to divert the guard dogs; or they are simply wearing the dogs down through exhaustion.

In this paper we present data on changes in effectiveness of livestock guarding dogs and discuss factors that affect the performance of guarding dogs. Information used in this report was obtained primarily from sheep producers who participated in the Animal Damage Control (ADC) Livestock Guarding Dog Program and from a 1993 Colorado State University survey of livestock producers in Colorado.

Fifteen of the 36 (42%) dogs in the ADC dog program were used on rangeland with herders, 4 (11%) without herders, and 17 (47%) on pastures. On herded range conditions, 8 (53%) of the producers reported that their dogs' performance was worse than in previous years. Three (20%) were better, and the performance of 4 (27%) remained the same. On unherded range, 1 producer reported worse performance, 1 better, and 2 the same. On pasture conditions, the performance of 2 (12%) dogs improved, and the rest (88%) stayed the same. There was no

indication that changes in performance were related to the breed of dog.

Two producers in the ADC dog program who reported poorer performance in their dogs stated that it seemed coyotes had learned to "work" or circumvent the dogs. Three producers said there were "too many coyotes" for the dogs to handle. Two said that limits placed on ADC's ability to do predation control on federal lands contributed to the poorer performance of the dogs. We infer from this statement that there were too many coyotes for the dogs to handle. Three producers said the dogs helped, but were simply not able to adequately protect the sheep in the face of an increased number of coyotes. One producer in Wyoming said his dogs were facing the "highest coyote population in 30 years."

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*"Livestock guarding dogs generally have been rated effective in reducing predation on livestock. However, for many livestock producers, guarding dogs alone are not able to keep coyote predation on sheep within acceptable limits."*

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In Colorado, 16 of 25 (64%) producers using guarding dogs primarily on open range indicated that their dogs' predator control performance did not change from past years, 3 (12%) said their dogs improved, and 6 (24%) said their dogs' performance worsened. Thirty-three of 52 (63%) using guarding dogs primarily in fenced pasture said their dogs' predator control performance did not change from past years, 13 (25%) noted improvement, and 6 (12%) said their dogs got worse. Twelve of 14 (86%) producers using guarding dogs on open range and in fenced pastures or who maintained their sheep in feedlots said their dogs' predator control performance did not change from past years, where 2 (14%) said their dogs became worse.

Most of the 16 producers in Colorado who reported an improvement in their dogs' predator control performance related the improvement to the dogs becoming more mature. Half the producers grazing sheep in fenced pastures

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(3 of 6) and half of those grazing sheep on open range (3 of 6) and reporting decreased effectiveness of their dogs, related the decrease to the increased number of predators (2), predators learning to outsmart the dogs (3), or both (1). The other 6 producers who reported decreased effectiveness of their dogs related the decreases to factors that we do not consider the fault of the dogs such as old age (3), less care given by producers in raising dogs (1), not enough sheep to keep the dog interested (1), and a female guarding dog in heat that attracted other dogs that killed sheep (1). Even though 14 producers indicated their dogs were less effective now, 5 (36%) still rated their dogs' predator control performance as excellent, 3 (21%) as good, 5 (36%) as fair, 1 (7%) as fair to poor, and none as poor or unacceptable.

Overall, 82% of the producers contacted in this study reported that the performance of their dogs remained the same or improved during 1993 compared with previous years. Eighteen percent of the producers reported a decrease in their dog's effectiveness. There was no significant difference between the ADC program producers and the Colorado producers in the proportion of dogs whose performance over time remained the same, became worse, or became better.

The reported percentage of livestock guarding dogs that work effectively has ranged from 66% to 90%. Effectiveness can vary among breeds and is dependent on other factors including: 1) how the dogs were raised; 2) the habitat and topography of the grazing area and whether the grazing is on rangeland or in pastures, 3) the density and type of predators, 4) the availability and type of prey, 5) the number of dogs used, 6) the maturity of the dogs, 7) the behavior of the livestock, and 8) the mix of other methods used to manage predation. The interaction and potential for synergism among these and other factors make it difficult to accurately predict the effectiveness of a dog or dogs. Likewise, it is sometimes difficult to accurately determine the reason or reasons a particular dog is not successful.

It is also important to understand that effectiveness is a relative term. Some dogs completely stop predation while others only decrease it. Whether the decrease is sufficient to consider the dog a success is somewhat subjective and must ultimately be determined by the livestock producer. Therefore the fact that a coyote kills a sheep in a flock protected by a guarding dog can be

viewed as a failure or a success (i.e., the coyote didn't kill multiple sheep) depending on one's perspective.

Livestock guarding dogs generally have been rated effective in reducing predation on livestock. However, for many livestock producers, guarding dogs alone are not able to keep coyote predation on sheep within acceptable limits. They need and use other forms of predation management in addition to dogs. Where the effectiveness of dogs has decreased from a previous level, common elements emerge. Most of the decreases have occurred on open range conditions with a presumed increase in coyote density. While the overall effectiveness of dogs is not necessarily decreasing over time, there are circumstances where guarding dogs alone are not sufficiently effective.

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<sup>1</sup>This is a condensed version of a paper presented at the 16th Vertebrate Pest Conference, March 2, 1994, Santa Clara, California.

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*Continued from page 1*

## ***Release in the Wild***

from NADCA members who have an interest in this topic. In particular, I would like to find three to four members who could and would write portions of a draft policy statement and would be willing to review a later draft. I'm also very interested in hearing from members who have data, published or otherwise, anecdotal information, or just a professional gut feeling on nuisance wildlife relocation you would be willing to make available to the team I hope to assemble for this task. I plan to devote some time to it this fall with a target date for completion of spring 1995. If you are interested, please contact: Dr. Scott Craven, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 226 Russell Laboratories, 1630 Linden Drive, Madison, WI 53706 (phone 608-263-6325). The profession will be very grateful for any assistance. Thanks in advance.

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# New Book Available – Wildlife Removal Handbook

*Reviewed by Rex E. Marsh, Wildlife and fisheries Biology, University of California, Davis, CA 95616*

A new book was published this spring entitled *Wildlife Removal Handbook—A Guide for the Control and Capture of Wild Urban Animals* by Stephen Vantassel (1994).

This recently published guide contains 16 short chapters. Beginning chapters discuss the business aspects of urban ADC and include such topics as getting started in business, telephone basics, preparing contracts and providing trap rentals. The author's experiences could be very helpful to those who are just starting or who are considering going into business. Readers, however, should keep mind that the laws and regulations in states other than Massachusetts may be very different and, also, what



might be considered acceptable methods of control tends to vary substantially from region to region. For example, newcomers into the business should not be misled by the author's use of a leg-hold trap for feral house cat control, as this would be met with considerable objection in most areas, even if used only under very unusual circumstances. In addition, the roof top trapping of raccoons with a 220 Conibear, although very effective, would also be very apt to stimulate opposition and would not be considered good for public relations, especially for a new entrepreneur.

The book provides chapters on a collection of interesting ideas and how-to techniques for the removal of skunks, raccoons, tree squirrels, woodchucks and feral cats which have worked for the author. Some individuals

may take exception to some of the methodology, but the author's success with innovative techniques is noteworthy.

The book clearly illustrates that trapping is more of an art than a science. Some of the chapters are a bit meager and could be significantly expanded to provide more information. The chapter on deodorizing skunk odors, for example, provides very limited coverage. It mentions, i.e. promotes, only one deodorizing product and ignores the time-tested materials like neutroleum-alpha or the newer materials such as Epoleon® which could prove to be far superior.

The volume is easy to read, but would be enhanced by the use of subheadings which would enable the reader to quickly reference information within the chapters. More illustrations on methods and equipment would also be helpful. No references are cited.

In summary, this handbook, based on the author's own ADC business experiences, will be of most help to the inexperienced beginner rather than the seasoned urban ADC trapper. Nonetheless, useful tips will likely be gained by anyone who reads this 70-page book, and it may well be worth having along with the other references on your shelf. Priced at \$10.95 plus \$2.00 shipping, the book is available from Stephen Vantassel, 123 Newhouse Street, Springfield, MA 01118.

## Send Your Articles to The PROBE

THE PROBE is soliciting new articles for publication. If you have an idea, want to suggest a topic, or want to volunteer to write an article, we want to hear from you! Send your comments or articles to: Robert H. Schmidt, Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, Utah State University, Logan UT 84322-5210, telephone 801-797-2536, Fax 801-797-1871, or e-mail to [rschmidt@cc.usu.edu](mailto:rschmidt@cc.usu.edu).

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# American White Pelicans and Catfish

Tommy King, USDA/APHIS/ADC/DWRC, MS Research Station, MS State, MS 39762

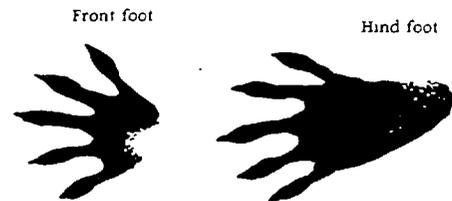
Kevin Bruce and John Paulson, USDA/APHIS/ADC, P.O. Box 316, Stoneville, MS 38776

Mississippi leads the nation in the production of farm-raised catfish with approximately 100,000 pond acres of water. In the mid 1980s catfish producers became concerned with increasing numbers of double-crested cormorants feeding on their ponds during the winter months. A 1988 survey of catfish producers in Mississippi revealed that an estimated \$3.3 million worth of fish was lost to double-crested cormorant depredation each year. In addition to these losses, catfish producers estimated that they spend \$2.1 million/year on efforts to control depredation by fish eating birds.

Over the past several years, the number of American white pelicans wintering in the Delta Region of Mississippi has increased and, similar to cormorants, are present from November through April. Wintering pelicans may pose a severe financial threat to the catfish industry. Prior to the winter of 1992/1993, estimates of pelican numbers wintering in the Delta did not exceed 3,000, and pelican depredations at catfish facilities were limited to short infrequent visitations and the birds were easily dispersed from the area. Pelican numbers were estimated at 6,000 to 8,000 during the winter of 1992/1993, but during the winter of 1993/1994 pelican numbers decreased to an estimated 1,000 to 3,000. This population decline may have been due to an unusually dry winter resulting in few suitable loafing sites for the pelicans.

During the past two years pelicans seem to have become more persistent in their foraging efforts and therefore, more difficult to disperse from catfish farms. Unlike cormorants, pelicans often feed at night, necessitating 24-hour harassment patrols. Although pelican energetic demands are not well documented, it is believed that a pelican may eat from 1 to 3 pounds of food per day. As many as 1,000 pelicans have been observed feeding in one 12-acre pond. Understandably, the presence of large numbers of pelicans is a cause of great concern among catfish producers. Damage abatement recommendations thus far have consisted of harassment measures like those used for cormorants and other fish-eating birds. These include the use of harassment patrols, pyrotechnics, electronic noise devices, inflatable human effigies, scare-crows, and propane cannons.

In order to learn more about pelican numbers and movements ADC/DWRC biologists began aerial censuses and a radio-telemetry study during the winter of 1993/1994 (see "Alternate Use for Softcatch Traps" on page 2). Information gathered from these and other studies will help biologists better assess the impact of pelicans on the catfish industry and will assist in developing a management strategy aimed at reducing pelican damage to an acceptable level.



## Proceedings Available

The Proceedings of the 16th Vertebrate Pest Conference will be available by November. Containing more than 60 papers covering topics on commensal rodents, field rodents, birds, predators, and public health issues, this publication contains papers presented at the 16th Vertebrate Pest Conference held in March 1994 at Santa Clara, California. Cost of the volume is \$25.00. Orders and payment should be sent to: VPC Proceedings, c/o Terry Salmon, Business Mgr., North Region - DANR, Univ. of California, Davis, CA 95616-8575. Add the following shipping and handling charges: \$4 for 1-4 volumes, plus \$2 per additional volume if shipped to addresses within the United States.

The following recently-past VPC Proceedings are also available:

- 15th VPC (1992) \$25.00 plus shipping & handling
- 14th VPC (1990) \$15.00 plus shipping & handling
- 13th VPC (1988) \$5.00 plus shipping & handling

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**NATIONAL ANIMAL DAMAGE CONTROL ASSOCIATION**

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