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## Extension Wildlife Damage Control in Arkansas

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*Arkansas Game and Fish Commission*

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## EXTENSION WILDLIFE DAMAGE CONTROL IN ARKANSAS

BY

Rocky Lynch<sup>1/</sup>

With the curtailment of a service type predator control program that existed in Arkansas for 29 years, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission in 1970 initiated a Nuisance Animal Control Section within the framework of the Commissions' Game Division. This extension - demonstration type wildlife control unit was named such because of the increase in rodent control (beaver and muskrat) within the state. Their numbers were spawned by the habitat enhancement in the delta and timber growing regions of Arkansas.

A Game Biologist visited the Missouri Department of Conservation and observed the technique of their predator control agent. With ideas patterned after their methods, we adopted the extension type animal control program. A joint "Memorandum of Understanding" with the Arkansas Agriculture Extension Service was adopted in 1970. Their department has continued to coordinate educational meetings in conjunction with specific landowner - nuisance animal related problems.

The Commission now employs four Nuisance Animal Control Trappers three of whom are remnants of the service type era. These men upon request exhibit proper control methods to ranchers, poultry and timber growers. We work closely with County Agents and have radio contact with 130 Wildlife Enforcement Officers, who can advise persons experiencing wildlife damage of our availability. Complaint letters are forwarded to the Supervisor of the program and usually a telephone call is necessary to evaluate the justification of a trapper's visit. A recent mail survey indicated an 80% favorable response toward this type of system.

As in other extension type programs, traps are provided at our cost. We recommend the Victor 3N and Conibear 330 for predator and beaver control. Both bait and blind sets are utilized. Coyote traps are not anchored but affixed to welded or brush drags.

Coyotes are presently game animals but are regulated by a very liberal hunting and trapping season. They may be taken during other open game species seasons. However, landowners may use steel traps the entire year in order to protect their livestock. Two recent studies on coyotes and bobcats by the University of Arkansas and funded by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission indicated as other studies that these animals were not of serious consequence to other upland game species. These results made possible the placing of bobcats and coyotes within the game animal status.

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With the continued cooperation of the Extension Department and the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission can maintain a very adequate wildlife damage control section. Future work in this area will necessitate at least one full-time trapper who should be able to present sound wildlife biological principles and also incorporate some livestock management recommendations in order to prevent wildlife damage.

## Coyote Research in Arkansas<sup>2/</sup>

by

Philip S. Gipson<sup>2/</sup>

To gain a better understanding of coyotes and related canids in the state, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and the University of Arkansas jointly sponsored a four-year study of the taxonomy, reproductive biology, food habits and range of wild Canis (Gipson, 1972). Coyotes have extended their range from extreme western Arkansas eastward across the state in the past 50 years. As coyotes extended their range, they occasionally hybridized with dogs and red wolves. The wild Canis population in the state today is composed of approximately 73% coyote, 3% wild dog, 1% red wolf, 13% coyote x dog hybrid, 9% coyote x red wolf hybrid and 1% red wolf x dog hybrid (Gipson, Sealander, and Dunn, 1974).

Our examination of stomachs from coyotes shows their most important foods to be poultry, persimmons, rodents, song birds, insects, cattle, deer, rabbits, woodchucks, watermelons, hogs and goats, in that order. Coyote damage is generally restricted to turkeys, newborn and very young livestock and watermelons. The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and the Arkansas Agricultural Extension Service have cooperative extension trapping program to assist farmers and stockmen with depredation problems.

We have made an attempt to evaluate the efficiency of trapping as a means of controlling nuisance coyotes. The effectiveness of trapping as nuisance coyote control device should be evaluated because: (1) Federal agencies are now prohibited from using toxicants which has resulted in greater dependence upon steel traps; (2) Since the use of steel traps is offensive to some segments of society, evidence is needed to determine if traps can provide an efficient means of control. Our evaluation method involves determining the proportion of stomachs from coyotes trapped in response to damage complaints, containing items reported damaged. This provides an approximate index to the efficiency of trapping as a means of controlling nuisance coyotes. To date our findings indicate that trapping for coyotes damaging turkeys and watermelons in the immediate vicinity of turkey rearing pens or melon patches can be highly efficient. Trapping for coyotes damaging livestock on open range or in large pastures is less efficient since it is difficult to limit captures to target coyotes on open pasture lands.

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