



Wildlife Refuges

► RESTORING America's wild birds and beasts to at least some part of their ancient heritage is a great deal more of a job than it might seem in the first flush of enthusiastic approach. It means a lot more than just turning loose a few coveys of pen-raised grouse, or a pair of trapped beaver, and letting them shift for themselves; or damming up a stream to make a pond and waiting for the ducks to come.

How complex the problems attending the establishment of homes for wildlife may be is well set forth in Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson's recent book, *Wildlife Refuges* (Macmillan, \$4). Dr. Gabrielson is in a position to speak from experience, for he has presided over the fortunes of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service through most of the decade immediately preceding the war, which was the time of the great expansion of the refuge system in this country.

In attempting to reestablish a wildlife population in an area from which the rush of our earlier civilization has swept it, we must do more than just bring in a breeding stock, or protect a still-remaining population, he points out. The chances are that when we wiped out or reduced the original stock we also changed the environment, making it less able to support wildlife. We must therefore study the situation very carefully, and try to make our woods or pond as hospitable to the birds or animals we want to inhabit it as the primal wilderness was—or at any rate, approximate that as nearly as we can.

This may involve some radical interferences with what may appear to be the ways of nature in a given spot. We may find it necessary, for example, to

go out and deliberately plant berry bushes or sumac to provide cover and food for game birds, or to encourage mixed hardwood scrub to give the deer something to browse on. To the old-time, orthodox, timber-growing forester all this must seem like simply promoting weeds, but that kind of thing is what wildlife wants for a home, and if you want wildlife it's the tastes of deer and grouse and ducks you have to consult.

You inevitably run into conflicts of interest among the wild creatures, too. For example, it's a good thing to have

muskrats on a duck refuge, for they make inroads on the dense growths of cattails, which are not good duck food, and give the more desirable bulrushes a chance to develop. On the other hand, however, muskrats are bank-burrowers, and that is apt to be hard on laboriously built earth dams and dikes.

Obviously, the job of the modern wildlife manager, who must undertake the part of a deputy Providence, is no sinecure. But perhaps these very perplexities are what make it attractive.

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