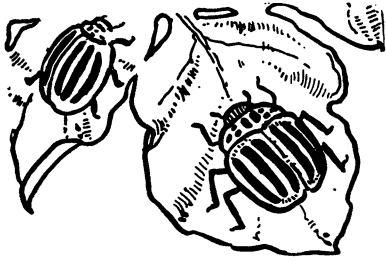

NATURE RAMBLINGS

By FRANK THONE



Potato Beetle

The great state of Colorado received a totally undeserved black eye when popular nomenclature settled upon "Colorado Potato Beetle" as the accepted designation of the ten-lined devouring pest that saddens truck-raisers and gladdens manufacturers of arsenical sprays and of appliances to spread the same on potato fields. For the potato beetle is not a native of Colorado, but of Mexico, and the only thing that Colorado had to do with it was to be the first considerable potato-raising region that lay athwart the path of invasion. After fattening in Colorado fields, the beetles spread over the rest of the country, dragging the good name of their first unwilling host in the dust.

One thing that has helped in the rapid spread of potato beetles is the unwillingness of almost all birds to eat them. There must be something ill-tasting or disgusting about the brown juice secreted by both the hard-shelled adults and the nasty, squidgy red larvae, for not even the usually omnivorous hen will eat them. That has left only two enemies: small boys, unwillingly drafted, and the more wholesale-killing spray gun.

One bird, however, is credited with an appetite for potato beetles. Prof. E. L. Moseley of the Ohio State Normal College at Bowling Green declares that he has seen bob-white, or American quail, systematically "working" rows of potatoes, cleaning off the beetles as no small boy ever could, because the bird can work from underneath and catch them as they lurk beneath the leaves. In places where adequate and well-enforced game laws have given the bob-white a chance to increase in numbers, says Professor Moseley, it is often unnecessary to spray the potato crop at all.

Science News-Letter, July 6, 1929

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