



UNUSUAL JOB

The little head just peeping out of the box is that of a skunk that Naturalist Crabb is tagging. This awesome job has been accomplished for about 75 skunks without assault on the tagger, Mr. Crabb says.

ZOOLOGY

Nervy Naturalist Puts Tags in Ears of Skunks

A JOB that would bring pallor to the cheek of the hardest cowboy that ever roped and branded an "ornery" steer is all part of the day's work for Wilfred D. Crabb of the Iowa Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, with headquarters at Iowa State College. Mr. Crabb catches spotted skunks, inserts metal identification tags in their ears—and gets away unscathed.

He uses a simple but effective box trap of his own devising, but key implement in his technique is what he calls a tagging chute. This is a narrow wooden tunnel, just big enough for the long, narrow body of the spotted skunk, but not wide enough to let the animal turn around. The trapped skunk is induced to enter the chute, and a wooden block is pushed in behind it to prevent backing out.

The opposite end of the chute can be opened. As soon as the little furry head appears, Mr. Crabb seizes it with a leather loop or a pair of leather gloves. This is a precaution against being bitten. It is then a simple matter to insert

an earring-like metal tag with code identification inscription. Subsequent recapture of the tagged animal gives information regarding its age, migration range, etc.

"Approximately 75 spotted skunks

have been tagged in this chute and not one of them has been able to pollute the operator with scent," reports Mr. Crabb.

The apparatus and technique for skunk-tagging is described in detail in the *Journal of Wildlife Management*.

Science News Letter, September 27, 1941

AGRICULTURE

Vitamin and Poison From Same Harvest of Tobacco

Species of "Weed," Too Rank for Smoking, May Provide Both Nicotine and Nicotinic Acid Disease Preventive

VITAMINS for the enrichment of bread and poison for insect pests may be the double yield of one species of tobacco, so rank that even the hardiest veterans cannot smoke it. Tobacco growers whose export market has been upset by the war are experimenting with its cultivation, the U. S. Department of Agriculture states, and at the new Eastern Regional Research Laboratory in Philadelphia chemists are trying out methods for extracting the two valuable compounds.

The tobacco species in question is *Nicotiana rustica*, a half-wild cousin of *N. tabacum*, or regular smoking tobacco. Tobacco's rustic cousin has high content in both nicotinic acid, which is the pellagra-preventing vitamin, and nicotine, the deadly poison used in great quantities in insect sprays.

Because of the resemblance between the two names, confusion often arises, leading some to believe that nicotinic acid has some of the poisonous properties of nicotine. This is not the case at all. Nicotinic acid was so named because it was first studied in Nicotiana, the tobacco plant, but it has since been found in a great variety of plants, including yeast. It is perhaps a pity it was not found first in yeast; then it would have been called zymic acid and nobody would have been bothered.

If the effort to increase the country's supply of nicotinic acid from rustic tobacco proves successful, it will go far toward relieving one of the most troublesome of present chemical bottlenecks. Estimates are that 200,000 pounds of nicotinic acid will be needed this year for enrichment of flour, and perhaps 20,000 pounds more for the direct treatment of pellagra. This demand is about

20 times as great as the total quantity of nicotinic acid manufactured in 1940.

Nicotinic acid is made synthetically from coal tar. However, the chemicals needed for its production in this way are expensive, and they are becoming increasingly difficult to get at all. Nicotinic acid from the plant source is more costly to start with, but it requires for its processing only nitric acid, which is cheap and abundant.

Science News Letter, September 27, 1941

PUBLIC HEALTH

"Sleeping Sickness" Decreases in West

INCREASED numbers of infantile paralysis cases in the northern part of the country brought the total for the nation during the week ending Sept. 13 up to nine more than the previous week's total, the U. S. Public Health Service announces.

The New England States reported 48 cases, compared with 27 the previous week. The Middle Atlantic states reported an increase from 169 to 213. Most of these cases were in New York State and New York City, which together had 109 cases compared with 71 the previous week. Ohio, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan also reported increases.

The Southern states showed definite decreases, and since this season's outbreak started in the south, public health authorities believe the epidemic is waning for the country as a whole.

Human cases of horse "sleeping sickness," technically termed equine encephalomyelitis, has declined in all four western states (North and South Dakota, Minnesota and Colorado) where it was epidemic in the late summer.

Science News Letter, September 27, 1941