

DEATH BY STARVATION

For years I have been bothered by the attitudes and actions of environmentalist and animal rightist. They say that they care about the welfare of our rangelands and wildlife, but never have I seen their actions support their words. Sure, they like to jump on private parties, but when it comes to mismanagement by government, they chose to ignore the truth. The same is true for the destruction and suffering that is caused by nature itself. Thousands of animals can starve to death year after year, but as long as it's "nature's way", it's all right. It's as though one kind of suffering is condoned but another is not. To illustrate my point, consider the following.

It has been found that a female coyote, after one year of age, will produce an average of six young per year. At this rate a single pair of coyotes can increase to over 100 animals in just three years. In other words if there were 50 coyotes in Ruby Valley in 1970, it is possible that population could increase to 50,000 coyotes by 1973 – that is of course, if there was food enough for them all – but of course that is not the case. Most die before they reach breeding age. Some are killed by predators, some by exposure, some by disease, but mostly they die of starvation.

A species that is even more prolific is the muskrat. It has been found that a female muskrat has three to five litters a year, with up to 12 young per litter. And quite often, before the summer is over, the females of the first litter of that season have a litter of their own. At such a rate a thousand muskrats can become 64 thousand muskrats before one summer is over.

In the 1920's and 30's my father supplemented his income by trapping muskrats. Franklin Lake lay just below our ranch meadows and after the cattle were fed each morning there was time to check a trap line. Dad made enough money one winter to buy his first car, a Model T Ford. Dad said that it always amazed him how fast muskrats could increase. He said that the lake could be completely dry for several years, with no evidence of muskrats at all, but after only three good water years there would be an abundance of muskrats in Franklin Lake.

A thing that I have found interesting, is the way muskrats leave home and scatter in all directions when they reach a certain age. I've been a witness several times – some poor muskrat headed off through the sagebrush where there is no water for miles. Dad said he once saw a muskrat at Ruby Wash, more than ten miles from water.

Few of these muskrats survive. It's just nature's way of perpetuating that particular species. I remember working one summer while still in High School – taking down the boundary fence that was being replaced along the east side of Ruby Lake. It was my job to pull the staples and lay the wires out so that they could be rolled up for future use.

The fence was located about a mile from the marsh edge where there was nothing but greasewood and sagebrush. And to the east there was even less – nothing but desert clear to the Great Salt Lake, 200 miles away. There was absolutely no way that a muskrat could survive by heading off in that direction,

but that's what the rats were apparently attempting because there were hundreds of muskrats carcasses along that fence line.

Beaver are of a similar nature. When the young reach a certain age, off they go. Some go east while others go west, and like muskrats, few survive. I remember Dad and I coming across the flat one time when we spotted a bunch of crows and magpies off to the side of the road. Being curious, we stopped and walked to the spot where the birds were, to see what might have died. And there, miles from water, apparently headed toward some of the driest country in Northern Nevada was a dead beaver.

That's the way nature is. Animals die every day, day in and day out. They are dying right now – millions of them. And as they die they suffer every bit as much or more than when they are caught in a trap or shot by a hunter. Just because the animal rightist or environmentalist doesn't witness the dying that is caused by nature's hand doesn't mean that it is not happening nor that it is less painful to the animal. The only difference is the cause. In one instance it's man that is doing the killing, and in the other, it's nature. With the least suffering being on the side of the former.

I can only conclude that these people that make up the environmental/animal rights movement are not so much interested in the welfare of animals as they are in punishing man – particularly when the man involved is of an independent nature. It appears, if there is any one group of people that the animal rightist and environmentalist hate, it is those who have the audacity to go out and make it on their own.