

I wrote what appears below, as an add on to the letter that is attached - which letter was sent to Forrest Cameron, manager of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, as comments regarding the proposal to reduce grazing, haying and so forth on the Refuge in 1990.

Hank Vogler was raised at Lawen, a small farming community lying 30 miles South of Burns, Oregon.

Hank told me that John Scharff had come from, or been raised on a sheep ranch. He had studied Forestry and had planned a career with the Forest Service - but was presented with the job of managing the Malheur Refuge - which he held for the next 33 years.

Hank said that John, having been raised on a sheep outfit, had grown-up learning to control predators. He understood the effect of predation on wildlife. And too, predator control was an accepted management practice on refuges prior to the mid or late 1950's. Consequently, John carried on an extensive and effective predator control program on the refuge during the early part of his career. People in the Valley knew that if you drove cattle along the road adjacent to the Refuge, you better leave your dogs home for John always had poison out at every quarter section brace along every roadway. He also kept poison out at the Refuge dump so as to keep the crows down. Hank said the results were dramatic. At one of the original ranches (which had been purchased by the government for the creation of the Refuge) where a permittee was allowed to live and operate a farming/ranching operation for many years - (as was told to us by others who we interviewed there in the Burns area) ducks and geese feeding in the meadows were so numerous that when friends or others "stayed the night" (as was the custom in those days), they had a difficult time sleeping for all the noise the birds were making.

John Scharff was well respected and well liked by all that Bertha and I came in contact with throughout Harney County. John Scharff loved the people as well. Not only did he understand the local customs and culture of the west, he was a part of it. He was a good man - far different from those that have followed him.

I must say, I certainly relate to what Hank was saying in his letter, for I too grew up during the time when predator control was popular. I remember, by the time I was eight years old or so - which would have been in 1946, every kids in school was packing a sling shot (made of two strips of rubber cut from old inner-tubes, and attached to a crotch cut from a willow tree) with them during summer months, shooting rocks at one thing or another almost constantly - and birds were everywhere. I can remember we were always shooting at birds flying over us just to see how close we could come to them - and we didn't have to wait to shoot either for they'd be birds flying over us almost constantly.

People in ranching were still quite self reliant at that time. We had milk cows, chickens and pigs. And like everyone else we put in a big garden each year. Dad too, would put in a small field of wheat each year - enough to feed the pigs and chickens. He never was able to harvest much of a crop however. There were so many black birds, they would come in just before the grain was ready and eat most of it. It was the same with raising corn and strawberries. My mother would plant corn each year and she had a large patch of strawberry, but rarely did she harvest any. The birds ate the berries and stripped the corn before either were ready to harvest.

There were an awful lot of snakes, toads and frogs at that time too. - but no skunks and no coyotes - why we hardly ever saw a coyote until along in the late 60,s or early 70's. There were so few predators during that period that Mom and Dad never seemed to worry about turning their chickens out to forage for bugs

and tender shoots of grass. If a person was to do that today they would lose all their chickens to predators. There has been a steady decline in birdlife since that time, however, - beginning in the 1960's or thereabout. There are far fewer snakes now too, and frogs and toads - very much the same scenario as was alluded to by Lester McCann in his books, "Time to Cry Wolf" and "A New Day For Wildlife." Stripped skunks, coyotes and eagles have come back however. And we now have red fox and racoons, which was something we did not have before. in our country - which I suppose, is all right if that is what the people of this nation want. But if it is, don't blame the loss of wildlife on ranching or farming - they are not at fault, its governmental policy that is at fault. So don't lie about it - tell the truth.

Cliff Gardner  
January 1995.

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