

SKUNKS AS DESTROYERS OF POULTRY. TWO PERSONAL EXPERIENCES.

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It is well known that skunks have a fondness for eggs as well as poultry, but of the numerous accounts that are related from time to time, it is difficult to secure the authenticity necessary to make them of true scientific value.

Two instances of skunks robbing poultry houses have come under my observation recently, and as both had points of interest, they may prove worthy of relating.

The first of these occurred in October two years ago, when a young skunk dug beneath the foundation of a poultry house and killed six birds by seizing them by the back of the neck close to the head, and apparently sucking a small amount of blood from each. A most interesting feature of this attack was that the brains had been eaten from every one. The animal was trapped the next night while entering the building.

The other case which was that of egg sucking occurred here last spring.

Several hens were "sitting" upon eggs in nests about a foot from the ground. The nests consisted of boxes with only the fronts open, and then were partly closed with wooden bars some three inches apart to prevent the hens leaving the eggs excepting at special hours.

On the third of May it was noticed that nine eggs had been broken open and the contents eaten, as well as three bad eggs that were not in the nest. The hen was still sitting comfortably on the nest, and had apparently not been disturbed. There was a hole beneath the foundation of the building where the animal had entered. The next night ten more eggs went, and the following night eight more, which completed the settings of two hens. All the eggs were taken from beneath the hens and eaten in the nest without any sign of the birds having been disturbed in spite of the fact that the animal had to squeeze between the bars to get into the nest. The eggs were all opened at the large end, the top being taken off as if with a knife, without damaging the other parts of the shell. The shells were found next morning round the hens—not under them—which tends to confirm the theory that the hens had not been materially disturbed, as in that case some of the shells would have almost surely been found under them.

After the above damage had been done a thorough search

was made for the robber, which was at last discovered between a snow drift and a building in a hole formed by the thawing of the snow beneath. By means of smoke and some poking (which occasioned a very strong odour) a skunk was dislodged and shot. It proved to be a female that would have shortly produced young. It was broadly striped and measured 27 inches in length, with an additional three inches of hair on the tail. The weight was seven pounds two ounces.

A VIVIPAROUS SNAKE.

On a small island one and a half miles above the Chat Falls, Ottawa River, Mr. E. E. Lemieux on October 1st last, killed a large milk snake (*Natrix sipedon*) in which he found forty-one young snakes averaging about 8 inches in length. It was killed at 10.30 in the morning when the sun was shining brightly, and when first seen was taking a sun bath quietly coiled up on a flat rock close to the river. It measured four feet from head to tip of tail. It was not skinned until the following morning, when the young snakes were of course all found to be dead. They were coiled singly and crowded together. On the morning of October 3rd—another bright day—a live young snake of exactly the same size was found under a stone near the same spot, probably one of the same family.

As this seemed a very late date at which to find the young of this snake still unborn, Dr. Leonard Stejneger, the well known herpetologist was written to and the following is his reply in part:

"This snake brings forth living young, 40-50 at a time, during the autumn. In New York the records cover a time from August 17th to September 30th. Several other snakes of similar habits are known and the births of the young often cover a much longer period. It does not seem probable that the female carries the young over to spring. In the first place I know of no record of very early births of these snakes; second, I know of no record of females having been captured while hibernating which had fully ripe embryos; third, there seems to be no good reason why the young should not go immediately into hibernation themselves; and further, even if such an abnormally late brood should perish it would mean very little in the economy of so prolific a species."

In this connection it may be said that there is no foundation in fact for the popular belief that female snakes swallow their young when danger threatens.

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Criddle, Norman. 1907. "Skunks as Destroyers of Poultry. Two Personal Experiences." *The Ottawa naturalist* 21(8), 162–163.

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