

Route 1, Box 33, Santa Fe, N. M.

20 July, 1959

The Editor  
The New Mexican  
Santa Fe, N. M.

Dear Sir:

The New Mexican and its readers have recently shown concern about the killing of birds in Santa Fe by insecticides used for spraying fruit trees. Apparently, without knowledge or regard for their side-reactions and undesired effects, highly toxic chemicals were employed. This is typical of the way people exercise control over their biological environment. By and large only the primary purpose of an adopted measure is considered and untoward consequences are completely ignored. Private individuals as well as government agencies are guilty of this kind of negligence. Will any harm come from a program of poisoning and killing is a question seldom asked, with the result, all too often, that the outcome is undesirable and distressing. Many people including some of their public servants have come to regard the living world as their private domain wherein they may do as they please, remodeling and exterminating to suit their immediate, imagined needs. They exhibit no reverence for the multitude of life surrounding them or the delicate balance under which it exists. They believe ~~that~~ they have a perfect right to destroy any creature noxious or otherwise that temporarily interferes with their comfort. The accepted method is to kill first and to think afterwards if at all. This was the point of view that prevailed in the late proposal to destroy the prairie dogs near the National Cemetery.

In spite of numerous disasters resulting from thoughtless interference

with nature, people still go on advocating and practicing campaigns of control and extermination. Coyotes are extirpated and rabbits become a plague in the area. Land is sprayed to eliminate insect pests and the bird population is wiped out. Hawks are trapped to protect game birds and their nests are plundered by rodents. What should we reasonably expect from this earth and what have we a right to demand? Since Darwin's time the balance of nature has been a meaningful concept but only in recent years has its study become the science of ecology. Ecological studies tell us that we must exercise extreme caution in any intervention in life relationships or we will rue our impetuosity. To insist without exception on our comfort and convenience at the cost of the existence of all other life is morally wrong. This planet is not ours to despoil but to share with all living things. Doubtless there are those who will contemplate with indifference the extermination of all wild animals but they lack the imagination to visualize a barren world and appreciate not the subtle advantage we derive from an abundant life on earth. One hundred years ago Henry David Thoreau wrote in his journal, ". . . Most men, it seems to me, do not care for nature, and would sell their share in all her beauty, as long as they may live, for a stated sum. Thank God, men cannot as yet fly, and lay waste the sky as well as the earth."

Yours respectfully,

Eliot Porter