

Not station

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

2 July 1959

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

Dear Sir:

The item in the NEW MEXICAN on Wednesday, July 1 about birds being killed in large numbers in Santa Fe by insecticides indicates the need for much public education on the use of these poisons. Technology in so called biological control chemicals has made enormous advances since the last World War. Substances of extreme toxicity for both plants and animals are now being widely sold without adequate warning of the unwanted consequences resulting from their general use. The greatest hazard of the indiscriminate use of these poisons lies not in their primary action but in their secondary effects, which are seldom mentioned by the manufacturers and very often ignored by their principal users, including many of the governmental agencies of both local and national government concerned with game and wildlife management, and agriculture.

The field of knowledge in which biological control is most logically placed is ecology, a subject most people do not understand, or consider to be the academic concern only of professors. It is not difficult, however, and means the interrelationships of all forms of life and the environment in specified regions. Obvious as it is that there is a relationship, for example, between coyotes, rabbits and grass, still even today state and federal predator control agencies are trapping and poisoning coyotes so effectively that they have disappeared from many ranges now suffering as a consequence from the depredations of an over-population of rabbits that are eating up all the grass. Now the rabbits must be controlled. A similar situation exists between deer and mountain lions in northern Arizona. Some of the newer poisons are a particularly insidious and dangerous means of controlling since they are lethal in such minute amounts that secondary predators and carrion eaters often succumb to its effects. Poisoned bait will kill not only the animal for which it was set out but any other creature that might eat it, including dogs and cats; not only this, however, also any animal that eats of the carcass of the poisoned animal will surely die. The bodies of rodents killed by grain poisoned with 1080 will kill dogs, coyotes, badgers, foxes, skunks, ravens, hawks or any other creature that might feed on them. The situation with respect to plant control chemicals is not much better. Many people are undoubtedly familiar with the methods used in some states to control the plants that grow along highways by spraying from a moving truck. The result is unsightly, brown and withered road-side vegetation. Weed killer destroys broad-leafed plants but is much less effective against grasses and narrow-leafed plants such as tumbleweed. When used in this arid country the result is likely to be a wonderful crop of Russian thistles.

Doubtless there are many people who will express complete unconcern at the prospect of the extermination of all wild animals, especially if bugs and insects are eliminated with them. But they will speak from stupidity as well as ignorance having neither the imagination to visualize a barren world nor an appreciation of the subtle advantage we derive from insects

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other than the honey producers. It is only too alarmingly possible that such may be our prospect when one considers man's propensities for tampering with nature as though it were a cheap watch out of order. We might well develop poisons of such toxicity and complexity of action that too late we would discover in them not only insecticidal and other killing properties for which they were developed but subtle homicidal characteristics as well. For those who accept the reasoning of the A. E. C. within another area of human endeavor this possibility should not be too disturbing. If we sterilize and make barren the earth there will still remain to us, for the time being at least, the unblemished moon to gaze upon.

Yours truly,

Eliot Porter