

Pet Owners Contribute to Wildlife Destruction

by D. Arthur Holler

Snow had been falling continually since early the preceding night. December 1972, was almost over and I was spending as much time as I could at my Grandma's house, in Courtney, N. C. Most of this particular day I had been walking through the snow blanketed woods, following first one set of tracks and then another, feeling warm and comfortable with the exercise and contentment of the winter woods, in its solitude of whiteness and quiet. I surprised a red screech owl on a low limb of a beech tree, and watched as he scrunched up as close to the tree trunk as he could, squinting his eyes shut, and doing all that a red owl contrasting against smooth grey bark could do to impersonate tree bark. He gave up in about 10 seconds under my continual stare, and flew away, making not a whisper of a sound in the totally silent winter world. As snow began to quietly fall again, I sat down against a large red oak, thinking that if I, too, were silent and still enough, I could slowly, by thought, flow into this peaceful, tranquil woods, and be a part of each tree, each snowflake that fell. My body did not feel present, real. But the gun in my lap was very real.

I stood up quickly. Was the squirrel dead? I went the fifteen feet over to the head protruding from the snow. Yes, weakened by cysts on his body, he was frozen. I thought then of the fall, seven years ago, the last time I had hunted. I had been sitting with my brother for about 20 minutes, and the squirrel finally came back into view. I shot and he fell, only to catch on a small limb three feet overhead. The shot had broken his back, but he was yet alive, slowly breathing, not moving, only staring down at me. From three feet away, I blew his head off. I have never hunted since.

But there I was again, with the same automatic .22, walking in the winter woods to meet my uncle. He also had a rifle with him. We were hunting, but not for what most people hunt. We walked into the woods, overlooking my father's bottomland, along South Deep Creek. My uncle had earlier that day heard the dogs running the deer toward the bottomland pasture. After walking only five minutes, we heard the dogs barking. We sat down against trees and waited — they were coming our way.

Suddenly four whitetail does and a buck came into view. They came up even with us, but fifty yards down the hill, and stopped. Their mouths hung open, tongues hung out and their sides heaved violently. All was quiet for only a moment as my uncle raised his .22. Suddenly the dogs came into view down the slope and set to baying. The deer took off in an instant as the dogs approached. My uncle waited, took aim, and fired four times.

We rose and walked over to where the two dogs lay dead in the snow. They belonged to a neighbor, who also "owned" at least three other adults, which annually

produced at least one litter. They eat whatever they find wherever they can find it. I have seen them, dirty, skinny, perpetually half-starved at my father's chicken farm, scrounging for dropped eggs around the very deep holes where dead chickens and cracked eggs are thrown. How many young puppies have fallen into the holes, I wonder.

Where were these dogs shot? They were just two of a small pack of dogs, most probably with "owners", who chase and kill the wild deer around that part of Yadkin County. You may doubt the ability of dogs to kill full grown deer. I invite you to look at the June 1969 issue of North Carolina Wildlife, in our library for photo proof.

Why am I writing this? To whom am I speaking? I'm speaking to all of us who own our pets, cats and dogs, and I wish to bring to attention a rising and alarming fact that is spreading, literally and alarmingly, across our country. Each of us who owns a cat or a dog may be unconscious contributors to a growing destructive force of our country's wildlife.

More than pesticides, more than predators and automobiles, feral dogs and cats are destroyers of wildlife in the U.S. They are surpassed, "naturally", only by man. By feral, I mean dogs and cats allowed to roam unattended, for periods of time. True feral animals are those who, though once domesticated, have reverted

to a semi-wild or wild state.

How do we as pet owners contribute to wildlife destruction? I'll give another personal example. Last summer I lived out in Guilford County, with plenty of area, fields and woods, for my dogs "to roam". One morning I went out to find a young rabbit George had brought to the house, still alive, but unable to stand from injury. I had to kill it, breaking its neck with a sharp blow. This was well into the summer, after most young animals were grown and on their own, yet still George was able to run down a rabbit.

Spring is not only a time for dormant trees and flowers to burst forth, but also for our wildlife to produce their offspring. Soon animals such as rabbits, muskrats, and woodchucks are bringing forth young, most of these helpless against predation by our pets when they are "out running around." Many ground nesting birds, quail, whip-poor-will, and wood-

cock, for example, have no protection except that they may be overlooked. And cats, oh yes cats, try and imagine their destruction of nesting young birds and numerous beneficial reptiles such as garden snakes. Many creatures, such as rabbits, will produce second litters during the summer. Letting our pets out, unattended for their exercise, could end up as pain and death for many innocent and helpless creatures, especially during this springtime of the year.

Man took from the wild and domesticated the dog and cat, and now we must realize our stewardship and responsibility toward these pets. Like each one of you who owns a pet, I own George and Mule because I love animals. But I love the wild creatures that share my daily life even more, and I now realize, as I hope all of you do also, that we can prevent — we must prevent — useless pain and death of our already struggling wildlife.



Photo by: Truslow

Folk Dance Company to Perform

APRIL 26, 27, 28 - 8:15 p.m.
 APRIL 29 - 2:00 p.m.
 Reynolds Auditorium
 Reserved Seats — \$3.50
 General Admission — \$2.50
 Sunday Matinee:
 all seats — \$2.00

Agnes de Mille is creating a new company to be a national folk company like the Russian Moiseyev. Aided in grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, she is gathering together works of her own and of other choreographers that celebrate America in song and dance. Guest artists from New York and Boston

will join a company of dancers and singers from the School of the Arts in these premiere performances. The NCSA Orchestra, conducted by Norman Johnson will accompany the Heritage Dance Theatre. Costumes and sets will be constructed by the School of Design and Production under the supervision of A. Christina Giannini and Max de Volder.

To order tickets for this event, send a check and a stamped self-addressed envelope to Box Office, Box 4657, Winston-Salem, N. C. 27107. Be sure to indicate the date and whether you wish reserved seats or general admission. You will soon be receiving a special flyer with an order blank, if you prefer to wait.

Hitchhiking In America

by Ed Bury

Hitching as practiced today is a healthy mass-reaction to America's preoccupations with safety and security, money and materialism, police and paranoia. Today's young travelers are putting their faith on the line and their packs on the road. They want freedom and adventure, and traveling by thumb is made to order — it's unpredictable, it's cheap, and it's about people. The widespread notions about its dangers and illegality only make it more attractive.

Hitching in America is not for everybody. It's long on paranoia and short on comfort. Its pressures can easily distort the experience or warp your vision of America. To do it, you should be a character with character, because hitching is a test of who you are. You need to be confident in the face of doubt, tolerant when victimized by the weakness of others, tough in order to endure the physical hardships, flexible enough to go with the changing fortunes of the road, and finally you need a sense of humor toward off the ever-threatening cynicism.

Hitching is a test of humanity because you'll see people at their best and their worst. Some people will crap on you and laugh. Most people will simply ignore you, and that can be even harder.

Being on the road means learning to "be here now," taking each moment and extracting whatever it has to offer. You'll stand countless hours in dozens of places, struggling with the mysteries and miseries of reality. Gradually a feeling of contentment and fullness can be reached, no matter how forsaken and weird your situation may be. If it's skill you want to acquire, then hitchhiking may be for you.

The dangers of hitching are real but over-emphasized. The number of victim-hitchhikers is small compared to the numbers of hitchhikers. But there are rapes, robberies, beatings, accidents, and even

murders once in a while. There are police arrests, fines, and jail. However, that's where we're at as a country, and violence and injustices victimize not just hitchers but everyone at random. Hitchers are more exposed, however, and do run somewhat more risk. Yet it's foolish to expect the worst or fear that possibility constantly. Expect the best from people and you'll usually get it. People can be wonderful, especially to hitchhikers.

Hitching is technically illegal in only 8 states (AR, CT, DE, ME, NV, NJ, ND, WY) but this doesn't mean much. What actually happens is that police anywhere can hassle you if they feel like it. And they frequently do. Always carry ID with you (or you'll be considered a runaway). Cash or traveler's checks will prevent a vagrancy charge. Hitching on freeways, interstates, and toll roads is always forbidden but you can stand at the access roads (in front of the NO PEDESTRIANS sign) and legally catch rides.

The best hitching combination is a man and woman together. Two guys will get there OK, but it'll take much longer. A single man will have no trouble, but a woman traveling alone takes an unnecessary risk. Two girls traveling together is feasible, but not fool-proof.

Bring a frameless pack (a frame is too bulky), food and water (for those times you may get stranded in the desert or the boondocks), camping equipment, a road atlas, and a sign announcing your destination. The best source of information as you go are other hitchers and travelers; always check into the grapevine wherever you can.

