



By DICK MILLER
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"CONSERVATION" is a word with which we should all be familiar. It means "saving." We hear a lot about conservation these days; water conservation, soil conservation, wildlife conservation. It is an important word, one we should not forget. Conservation.

When my grandfather was a young man homesteading on the plains of Kansas, those plains and the mountains to the west were teeming with wild animals. Unfortunately, my grandfather and others of his generation were not very wise. They, as had the generations before them, killed the animals they needed and spread civilization further and further into the animals' strongholds. Naturally, the animals retreated. Those that did not retreat were destroyed.

It was in the time of my father that Man began to realize the predicament of wildlife and passed laws to try and protect animals. Hunting seasons were regulated, bag limits established, and serious research began.



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MANY ANIMALS were nearing extinction--some WERE extinct; the passenger pigeon, the heath hen--and the range of others was being rapidly lessened. Animals that once roamed far and free were now confined to small, isolated areas.

The grizzly bear, for example, is now limited to a very few rare spots in the mountains. One has to travel to British Columbia and points north in order to hunt the grizzly, and it is not an easy hunt.

I have been privileged to visit the wild areas of the northern frontier where I hunted caribou, bear, moose and other animals that not so long ago were indigenous to our own Rocky Mountains. And strangely enough, this illustrates one of those rare facets of conservation; to save the animal, the animal must be hunted.

When a certain breed of animal increases to the point that there is no longer enough food or enough room, the animals are stricken by disease and Mother Nature thins the ranks. It is a rough law but a true one.

HUNTING PROVIDES the answer. By allowing a specific number of the animals to be killed by hunters, the number of animals is brought into accordance with the amount of natural feed. Usually only the older animals--the trophy heads--are harvested, thus leaving room for the new crop of young. In this way, the herd is kept in balance and there is much less waste of fine animals.

Not long ago it was discovered that the range in Yellowstone Park was not sufficient to provide for the elk. It was decided that five thousand elk would have to be killed to even the ratio. Government hunters killed the five thousand elk and there was a great wave of public protest. All in all, it was a sad thing but it was necessary to save the remainder of the elk.

Research is constantly underway to determine as many facts as possible about our wildlife. An animal is captured--say, a Canada Goose--and a metal band is placed around his leg. On the band is printed the date, the place, and other pertinent information. The goose is released. Later, perhaps a hunter kills the goose. He sends the band and certain information--such as the date and place the goose was killed--to the proper government agency. In this way, conservationists can determine flight paths, speed, hunting pressure, and they can set hunting seasons and bag limits accordingly.

ASIDE FROM the esthetic value of wild animals, there is also another aspect. All animals depend to some extent upon other animals for their livelihood. If one breed of animal is allowed to become extinct, what happens to the animals who depend upon it for their existence?

As an example, the African lion feeds mainly on zebra. In this way nature maintains her balance. If something should happen to the zebra,

Historic Beckwourth Pass Named For Negro



BECKWOURTH PASS, looking west along Alternate 40, opens onto the big Sierra Valley. Mountains in the distance include

7,255-foot-high Beckwourth Peak. At the eastern end of the short pass lies the edge of the great deserts of Nevada. —Plumas County Chamber of Commerce photo

JIM BECKWOURTH, in 1852, was seated on a keg of whiskey outside his cabin which still stands on a hill beside Sierra Valley. From the direction of the pass he had discovered the year before (now crossed by Highway 40A), wagon trains were rolling in. To a reporter, Beckwourth described the Argonauts:

"Weary, way-worn travellers, their wagons holding together by a miracle, the oxen held up by the tail in order to keep them on their feet. The poor girls have suffered the most and the elegant young men of good (whom they had envisioned marrying as soon as they stepped into California) are now too often found to be worthless."

It was fancy talk for an old trapper, Indian chief, army scout and horse thief. But if James Pierson Beckwourth spoke like a gentleman, it was because his father was a Virginia plantation owner. His mother was a Negro slave.

APPRENTICED to a blacksmith in St. Louis, Beckwourth had run away in 1823 to join the fur traders led by William Ashley. His skill and courage earned him the respect of such men as Jedediah Smith and Jim Bridger. The Snake Indians called him "Bloody Arm" for his prowess in battle. When the fur trade waned, he had taken an Indian wife and lived among the Crow as a respected chief and warrior for more than six years.

Returning to civilization, Beckwourth moved from one adventure to another. He had entered the Santa Fe trade, had stolen horses from the Californios as the United States and Mexico moved toward war, had served the army as a courier, guide and Indian fighter. Gold was discovered in California and Jim Beckwourth tried his hand briefly as a storekeeper in Sonora.

In 1851 he had wandered through the Pit River country where he saw a gap in the mountains far to the east. Investigating, he found himself

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the lion is also imperiled because his food supply is gone. On the other hand, if the lion disappears, the zebra herds multiply until they are a menace to farming communities and have to be killed off as a protective measure.

In Alaska and northern Canada, the caribou herds are kept in check by the wolf. If the wolves were all killed, the caribou would increase too rapidly. Sick animals, usually pulled down by wolves, would spread their diseases to other caribou and eventually the entire herd would sicken and die. In some cases this has happened. In other cases, the disease was even picked up by humans. In this way epidemics begin.

If you are interested in conservation, the following books are available in your school or public library. The Dewey Classification number for these books is 333.

- Barker, Will. WILDLIFE IN AMERICAN HISTORY. Luce, 1962.
- Graham, Edward H. WILDLIFE FOR AMERICA. Henry Z. Walch, Inc., N.Y., 1949.
- Lathrop, Dorothy P. LET THEM LIVE. Macmillan Co., N.Y., 1951.
- Lauber, Patricia. DUST BOWL. Coward--McCann, N.Y., 1947.
- Shippen, Katherine B. THE GREAT HERITAGE. Viking Press, N.Y., 1947.
- Smith, F.C. THE FIRST BOOK OF CONSERVATION. Franklin Watts, N.Y.
- Urell, Catherine. THE BIG CITY BOOK OF CONSERVATION. Follett, 1956.
- Urell, Catherine. BIG CITY WATER SUPPLY. Follett, 1953.

near the headwaters of the Feather River where close by lay a low pass through the eastern wall of the Sierra.

THE COMMERCIAL value of a low level road leading to their city was not lost on the officials of Marysville whom Beckwourth told of his discovery. They helped finance the starting of the road and agreed to reimburse Jim for the rest of the road-building expense. When Beckwourth guided the first wagons through the pass and down a ridge to Marysville, the citizenry celebrated so wildly that part of the town burned down--and the mayor said he had no funds with which to repay Beckwourth.

So it was that in 1852 Beckwourth was settled in lush Sierra Valley at the upper end of the Feather River canyon. His rheumatism was convincing him that, having dictated his memoirs, he should be content with his life as a store- and hotel-keeper. But squatters infringed his claim. In the Sacramento Valley, ranchers grew edgy over raids by horse thieves. Remembering old Jim's background, they talked of direct action.

BECKWOURTH knew better than to try to convince an armed posse of his innocence. He moved on to Denver, married again and fought the Cheyenne. At the age of 68 he rode out in winter to convince his old friends the Crow to remain peaceable. There, among his adopted people, he sickened and died.

Today the motorist driving west from Reno on Alternate 40 follows Beckwourth's road through the 5,221 foot pass--lowest in the Sierra--and passes through Sierra Valley and the town of Beckwourth. Where the Middle Fork of the Feather begins to cut down through the mountains still stands Beckwourth's old cabin.

At Mohawk the old road branched off down a ridge to Marysville via Johnsville and La Porte. Another route went through Quincy and past Bucks Lake, now a PG&E power reservoir. This road avoided the spectacular but then--impassable Feather River canyon.

Jim Beckwourth brought more to California than another gateway. The first white girl through the pass rode on the saddle in front of him. She was Ina Coolbrith, later to become the respected poet laureate of California.

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