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Notes on Nature

By WES FOUNTAIN

WEAPONS IN NATURE

A snapping turtle uses a decoy mechanism to lure fish within its reach by waving twin filaments which are attached to its tongue. Alligator snappers are known to reach the weight of 150 pounds and their jaws are powerful enough to shatter a piece of wood. The turtle relies on a waiting system for hunting. A turtle's body camouflages perfectly into a lake bottom.

A tarantula spider has no need for spinning a snare web since it is able to satisfy its needs by a combination of activity and running speed. This hairy fellow has poison glands in its jaws and is a relative of the female black widow spider.

A few spiders spin a line, weight it with a sticky ball of silk and throw it at their victims. Some spin a web to trap a nocturnal insect. The scorpion has a poisonous secretion similar to that of a bee, using its stinger to paralyze its prey. Two pincers grab the victim while the curving tail is positioned so that the stinger can be driven into the flesh.

Crabs have diverse habits and a variety of weapons. The hermit crab inhabits the empty shell of periwinkles and welks and defends itself with a single claw. Spider crabs are sluggish, depending more on their unusual camouflage to give them protection and also serve as a disguise so unwary food species will come within their reach.

Though most crabs swim, walking or crawling is more the usual method of locomotion. Crabs have a fierce appearance and the members of this large family vary from flesh eaters to shy vegetarians.

Every animal, from the biggest to the smallest, employs some sort of weapon to go about its business of feeding, breeding and living. Weapons assist nature's regulation of animal populations since they provide the predators with the means of thinning out excess populations and they supply the vegetarians with a means of protection that they employ to survive.

Give yourself a couple of years and you'll be referring to these trying times as "the good old days".

Study Mission Fields At Knox Group Meeting

Mrs. Murray Scoyne was hostess for the recent meeting of the Daughters of Knox.

The business was conducted by Mrs. Allan Holmes and included plans for the Daffodil Tea in April and a decision to attend one of the Holy Week Services as a group.

The study "Into all the World Together with Education and Medical Supplies" dealt mainly with the assistance given in this regard in the Vellore and Ludhiana mission fields of India. It was introduced by Mrs. M. Scoyne and presented by Mrs. Wm. Toth, Mrs. Wm. Spielvogel and Mrs. Ross Britton.

Mrs. E. A. Hansen led in the responsive reading of the Scripture and prayers were offered by Mrs. George Lee and Mrs. Ross Britton.

Games were conducted by Mrs. E. A. Hansen, and the hostess and her group served a delicious lunch.

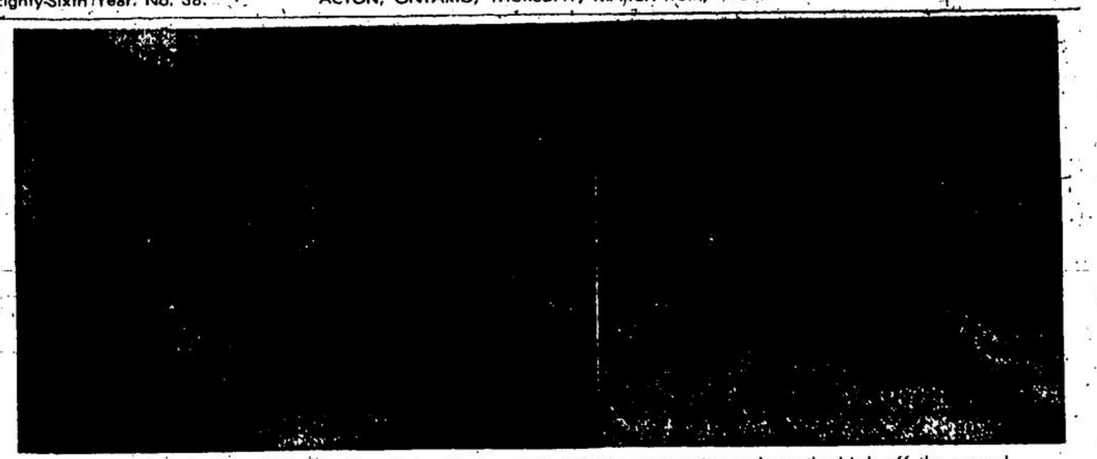
W.I. Euchre, Penny Sale In Scout Hall Friday

A pleasant social evening was held by the Acton W.I., in the Scout hall on Friday, March 3, with 17 tables of euchre playing.

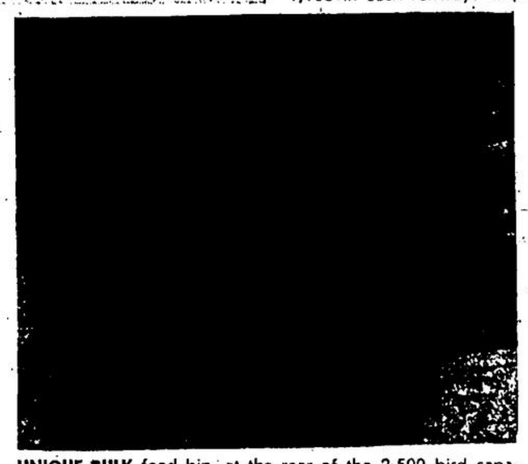
The prizes were won as follows: ladies' high, Mrs. T. Cooke; second high, Mrs. John Mellon; consolation, Mrs. Wm. Hall; men's high, Norman Price; second high, Roger Murray; consolation, Stuart Richardson; lone hands, Mrs. Garnet Rose; travelling prizes, Mrs. Jos. Wilds and Roger Murray.

Door prize of an electric clock was won by Mrs. Jas. Ruddick. A special draw for sheets and pillow cases was won by Mrs. Darlow Johnson.

Mrs. Garnet Rose and Mrs. A. Wilderspin convened the euchre, and Mrs. George Fryer and Miss Marjorie Hall the penny sale. Winners for the 25 prizes were: basket groceries, Mrs. Florio Tourner; set bowls, Mrs. C. K. Browne; necklace and earrings, Mrs. Norman Turner; box of chocolates, Mrs. John C. Dennis; miscellaneous set, Miss Millie Rowles; china dish, Mrs. Doug Rogers; towel set, Mrs. Harold Deforest; apron, Mrs. Wm. McCainsh of Palmerston; crochet doily, Mrs. J. Gergeline; box of groceries, Mrs. C. Griese; cigarettes and lighter, Mrs. Garnet Rose; travelling bag, Donald Wilds; pillow cases, Mrs. George Fountain; jewelery set, Mrs. Florio Tourner; socks and cigarettes, Mrs. A. Milton; glass fruit bowl, Mrs. K. Dodds; box of stationery, Mrs. Doris Henry; nylons, Mrs. George Holmes; Avon products, Mrs. C. Shultis; box of chocolates, Mrs. Fred Coles; cushion, Roger Lazenby; two dozen eggs, D. F. Wilds; groceries, Bob Loutett; set of glasses, Wm. Bryden, Georgetown; flowered pillow cases, Mrs. H. Jordon.



HEATHER LEYLAND feeding 15-week-old pullets. There are 1,100 in such runways to protect them from foxes. The floor is of wire construction to keep the birds off the ground.



UNIQUE BULK feed bin, at the rear of the 2,500 bird capacity house, is weatherproofed with outer plywood sheathing. It was built by Mr. Leyland, pictured above.

Ewart Leyland, Acton Egg Producer Does Own Research, Experiments

(Story and Photos by Arthur D. Staubitz)

The following is a feature article which appeared in the February issue of the Family Herald, written by Arthur D. Staubitz, Willowdale, Ont. The story is about the poultry rearing methods of Ewart Leyland, egg producer, who lives on No. 25 Highway, R. R. 4, Acton.

Which type of floor will help get the most money out of the hen house? Should a man build slatted floors, then crowd in his flock, allowing only 1.5 square feet per bird? Or should he lay an insulated concrete floor, with heavy asphalt roofing between the layers, and give each hen 2.5 square feet? Or is the built-up litter method more productive than the other two?

Ask this question of almost any three outstanding egg producers, and you are apt to get three different—and strong—opinions. Each one will swear by his own method. Does this mean that the three types of floors are equally good? Is it true that extra egg production on concrete or litter offsets space-saving advantages of slats?

Diverse Opinions

If a beginner is seeking the right type of flooring, the diverse opinions he'll meet will leave him quite confused. It would be pretty hard for him to experiment with all three, particularly if he's planning on running a one-man establishment.

But suppose he did? What would he find out?

First-hand results are still more interesting when they come from an already successful egg producer. Ewart Leyland, whose farm is two miles south of Acton, Ontario, is venturesome enough to operate with all three types of floors. More, he has experimented with pens in which the hens are given their choice — slats or litter.

Adding still more interest to Ewart's black-and-white figures is the fact that some of his laying flocks are forced moult older birds, and some are young birds in first peak production.

Older Birds

Until a short time ago, Ewart wasn't at all interested in moulting older birds. But his younger daughter, about 12, coaxed him to let her have a flock of her own for pets. So he loaned her his smallest hen house and a few dozen culls. At first she fed these pets regularly, but when the novelty wore off they didn't get too much attention. The neglect paid off, because those discarded old hens moulted and soon began laying to beat the band.

Therefore, Ewart smoked his pipe and reconsidered the question of moults. He culled a couple of hundred birds whose next laying days seemed over. For a period of two days, he took away completely the conventional laying mash they had been receiving, leaving them only with water. On the following two days, the water was taken away and the feed was changed to straight whole oats.

Moult Begins

This induced the beginning of the moult and from then until they started to lay again, they were given whole oats and as much water as they would drink, but no laying mash. When the birds had started to lay again at about a rate of five or 10 per cent (one pen took five weeks; another, four), Leyland switched them to laying mash again. Soon he found himself collecting eggs three times a day.

That's why Ewart's smaller laying houses, which have concrete floors, have a forced moult pen occupying each 2.5 square feet.

His newest and largest laying house, of vermiculite-filled concrete block, has a capacity of 2,500 birds. It's here that he keeps his young hens. Some pens have slatted floors altogether; others are partly slatted.

Compare Production

All Ewart's layers, whether young or moulted, are given the same type of feed and the same care. Ewart looks after them himself. How does their production compare?

One flock of 244 older hens, three weeks after moulting and on a concrete floor, were maintaining 75 per cent production.

A flock of 350 hens, three months after moulting, were maintaining 70 per cent production. Another flock had attained 80 per cent production.

In contrast, what about those younger layers on slats — the ones in the new house? Their top production was 70 per cent.

Finally, what about the young layers given their choice of floor? Obviously they should be still more contented but how did they produce? Actually, they held to the same production level as the others on total slats — 70 per cent.

"In either case," Ewart says, "I haven't been able to get more than 70 per cent from any of these younger birds."

Favors Half and Half

What does this prove about floor types? Well, these are one man's figures for a matter of record. And what's Ewart's own opinion? He intends to expand by constructing a new laying house. "Taking everything into consideration," he says, "I still favor the half-and-half idea, half slats and half dirt. I think I'll be building on that basis. This is, in spite of the fact that the older moults, on concrete, are topping the favored younger birds when it comes to laying eggs.

"There are other things to consider, of course," Ewart points out. "One is the additional number of birds you can accommodate on slats. For instance, a 3,600 square feet area will hold an additional thousand birds if you put in a slat floor. Too, there's the matter of labor, particularly in a one-man set-up. The floor underneath is easily cleaned. As for the slats themselves, I have some that haven't been washed for two years. Saving work is a big factor — you can handle more hens by yourself."

The slats he refers to are made in sections, six feet by four feet. Each section is good for 16 birds.

Material required to make one section includes about 30 feet of 1" x 4"; this makes the outer frame with a brace between the two middle legs. There are six legs made of 2" x 2', about 20 inches long. You'll need three strips of plywood, each of them 31½ inches wide and just under four feet long. These are grooved to hold 40 slats running lengthwise, or 60 slats if they run crosswise. One grooved plywood support is nailed inside each end of the frame, and one is fastened to the crosspiece between the two centre legs. The slats themselves are three-eighth inches by one and five-eighth inches.

These frames, or sections, can be treated with creosote or penta if you wish. A concrete floor underneath isn't a necessity, but it helps when cleaning.

Handy With Tools

Ewart is very handy with carpentry tools and this stands him in good stead when he's experiments with other things besides floors. He's keeping figures on his community nests, lighting changes, air conditioning. He has built an original bulk feed bin at the far end of the 2,500 bird, one storey laying house. It's an outside structure right beside the roadway, and the trucker can get at the top filling hatch with ease. Ewart used plywood sheathing to weatherproof the bin, from which a chute slants through the rear wall just above the automatic feeder set-up.

Ewart outwitted the district's foxes which were making off with some of his growing pullets. He built elevated wire floored runways, each with a comfortable roofed shelter and equipped with automatic watering.

"Keeping hens," he says with satisfaction, "is more than a business. When you get into it, you find it's a way of life. The more you learn about hens, the more interesting they become. Why not?"

"Wonderful Machine"

"The hen is a wonderful machine, considering that her temperature runs at 107 degrees, high enough to kill a man. Her small heart trip-hammers along at the rate of five times a second when she's roosting. That's 300 times a minute. When she's scared, this increases to 560 times a minute. Her gizzard squeezes very tightly three times a minute and will completely digest mash in less than three hours."

He puffs his pipe and adds: "Take a chick. In 10 weeks, it increases its original weight 30 times. When it starts producing, it'll lay up to 200 eggs a year, and that's 25 pounds of egg — more than six times her own weight. She's remarkably curious and has her own place in the flock's social set-up. As I say, the more you learn about hens, the more interesting they become."

And the more profitable, too. A lot of local people depend on Ewart Leyland to supply them with top-quality eggs at retail prices. This helps considerably while the market prices are down.

In Spite of Weather Many Attend Dance

There was a large attendance at the Acton Scottish Dance Club's regular dance in the Y.M.C.A. on Saturday, March 11. Instruction was given to the junior group downstairs, prior to the regular dance, and also to adults. In spite of the weather, guests were present from Guelph, Milton and surrounding districts, and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the evening.

Following the dance, there was a short discussion at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Bill Wilson on the club's latest project, to take the form of a Community Night to be held in Acton Park on Saturday, June 24, when there will be a festival of massed Scottish and square dancing, singing and entertainment by various ethnic groups.

Proceeds from this evening are in aid of the building fund for the new school for Retarded Children at Hornby, serving Milton, Georgetown and Acton.

$2,500,000 Deaf School Tenders Out About May 1

Tenders will be called for the new school for the deaf at Milton about May 1. This was reported in the Legislature Monday of last week by the Hon. Ray Connell, minister of public works.

Such an institution required unusual planning, Mr. Connell said and thus there was a longer delay than customary in the tender call. It was learned that the government has a target date of July 1 for the start of construction.

The total cost of the project is estimated at between $6 and $7 million. The first stage is expected to cost about $2.5 million. This is the stage which will be called in the first tenders.

The building is planned for a 97 acre site on the Kingdon farm on Ontario St., just south of Halton Centennial Manor.