

Wide-eyed weasel poised to strike

If it hadn't have been for that high wind, I'd never have been in the barn just after supper. When it began gusting to the point where it was causing a wind tunnel effect, it wasn't a major decision to close the back door. Having battened down the hatches so to speak, I stopped to look in at the young pheasants. What greeted my eye, however, was like a preview to a horror movie. There on the floor of the grain room that we had converted to a small brooder house was a weasel, beady-eyed and ready to strike. Somehow, I broke out of my



BACK TO NATURE

Art Briggs-Jude

mesmorized state and quickly located a stout stick. Opening the door, I stepped inside just in time to see the weasel pounce on one of the young. The domestic hen, fostering the 19 poults, immediately launched herself at the intruder. The weasel, however, paid the hen little heed as it darted around her and added a second pheasant to its casualty list. This confusion of feathers, litter, and fleeing pheasants had all

the makings of a massacre. In fact the blood thirsty killer was so intent on carrying out its deadly mission it seemed oblivious to my presence. As it dashed into the terrified flock to claim yet another victim, I swung the stick and knocked the culprit sideways. The mother hen, frustrated in her previous attempts to come to grips with the elusive brown predator, now landed on the downed weasel with feet and wings flailing. Her attack, however, was one of futile revenge for the weasel was already dead. As I refilled the upturned feed

troughs and picked up the carcasses to leave, my thoughts drifted to other predator losses we suffered in the past. Several years ago, seven near-grown turkeys were killed on Labor Day weekend, thanks to a family of foxes; while a mink victimized 21 chickens last fall in a one-night orgy. A year ago, a pair of skunks took three of our breeding pheasants and later that summer a couple of raccoons broke through the loft of the small barn and cleaned out 11 more. Actually, there have been many other single and multiple

casualties among our poultry since we revitalized the old farm nearly nine years ago. When faced with similar losses, I wonder how many of these so-called animal rights activists would stand idly by and watch? True, we may be creating unnatural populations by raising these fowl in pens, but as many who have visited our homestead know, most of the feathered clan reared here have the run of the place. In fact, all but the wild released pheasants are shut-in side during the dark hours.

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