

# Offensive started against bounties

By MARION STREBIG  
Federation of Ontario  
Naturalists

I have never thought of the fox who occasionally skirts the ravine and lopes by my office window as a nuisance, nor the coyote I saw last month crossing a field and disappearing into the brush, nor the beaver who sometimes cuts on my land.

And the keening howl of wolves last summer in Algonquin Park, even though the sound made my scalp tingle and my adrenaline flow, filled me with elation.

But I do know that these and other animals often arouse quite different feelings when they come into direct conflict with property owners.

Sometimes foxes eat chickens, and both coyotes and wolves are accused of attacking livestock, and wolves of depleting deer populations.

The beaver's industrious work sometimes floods property, and its appetite for saplings may include carefully nurtured ornamentals.

My own encounters with these animals have sometimes been exasperating.

For several springs a beaver dam, flooded a section of our road. But eventually the beavers moved on leaving a pond which is gradually filling with sedges and marsh marigolds and steeplebush.

In the spring frog song is deafening, and later on birds like the tree swallow, the common

yellowthroat, and the eastern kingbird nest here.

While I have always tried to adopt a "live and let live" attitude in dealing with animals around my home, a persistent porcupine, who had decided that the open space under my cottage would make a perfect snoozing place, severely tested my adherence to this philosophy.

When he proved impervious to repeated prodding with a long (very long) stick, to shouting and banging together of kitchen pots, and even appeared to enjoy the quantities of mothballs spread under the cottage, I had to resort to sterner measures.

I had the open space blocked off with heavy wire which was buried to a depth of a foot and a half in the ground. But porcupines are armoured not only with spines, but also with unflappable complacency.

It made repeated attempts to return to its lair, but the wire held and finally even a porcupine gave up.

The "live and let live" approach requires patience, ingenuity and a sense of humor. For the most part authority has opted for quicker and more drastic solutions in dealing with so-called "nuisance" animals.

Up until 1972 the province paid wolf bounties. When this practice was discontinued, municipalities were still permitted to pay their own bounties under the Municipal Act.

After 1936, when wolves and

coyotes were declared fur-bearers and, therefore, came under the protection of the Game and Fish Act, certain municipalities continued illegally to offer bounties for certain animals, mainly wolves, foxes and coyotes.

For a long time the Minister of Natural Resources was content to turn a blind eye to such payments, but on Feb. 17, 1989 things changed.

On that date, in a joint memorandum to the clerks of all municipalities in Ontario, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, John Eakins, and the Minister of Natural Resources, Vincent Kerrio, effectively terminated the practice of bounties as of Oct. 31, 1989.

In their memorandum they recognize that, especially as habitat continues to disappear, animals and people will come into conflict, and that there will be complaints of property damage or stock losses.

However, they stress the ineffectiveness of the bounty system in solving specific problems.

The Federation of Ontario Naturalists has taken this position for several decades, and was instrumental in the repeal of the provincial wolf bounty in 1972.

In the Autumn 1988 issue of our magazine Seasons, writer and biologist R.D. Lawrence advanced strong arguments for the government to enforce the law against bounties. This article was widely circulated to MPPs and

government bureaucrats.

The old bounty system issued a blanket license to kill certain animals on sight over a wide area, but it has not and cannot solve specific problems.

The intent of the ministry is to set up alternative methods of dealing with complaints, such as using the Ministry of Natural

Resources predator control of officers from district offices and local trappers to deal with specific problem animals.

The Minister's memorandum goes on to say, "It is expected that suitable programs will be in place by October 31, 1989. Municipalities which continue to have bounty bylaws in effect

beyond this time should expect to face the legal consequences."

Let us hope the passing of the bounty system also marks the passing of an official mindset which has so long governed wildlife management: the imposition of human judgements of good and bad on animals.

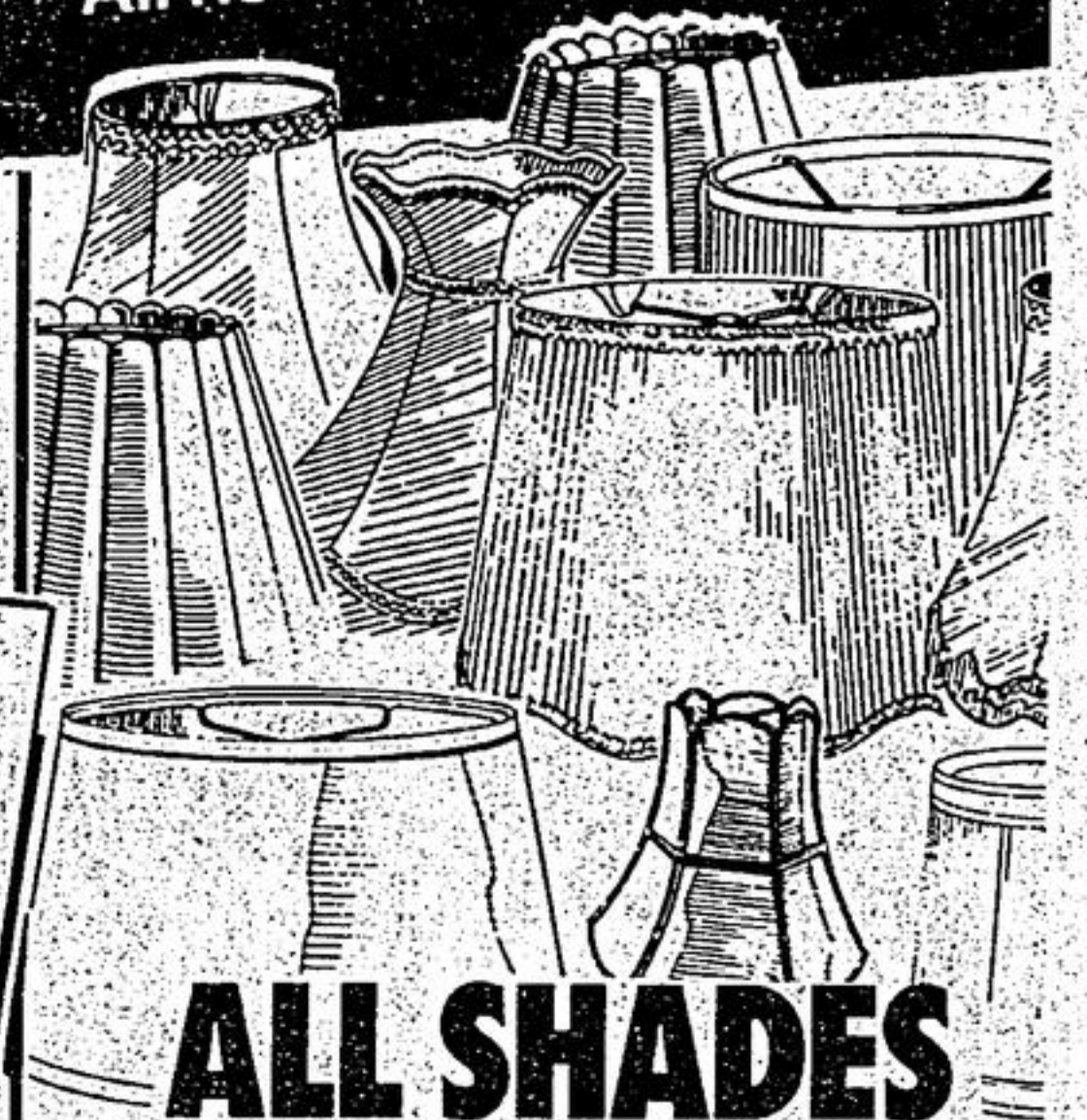
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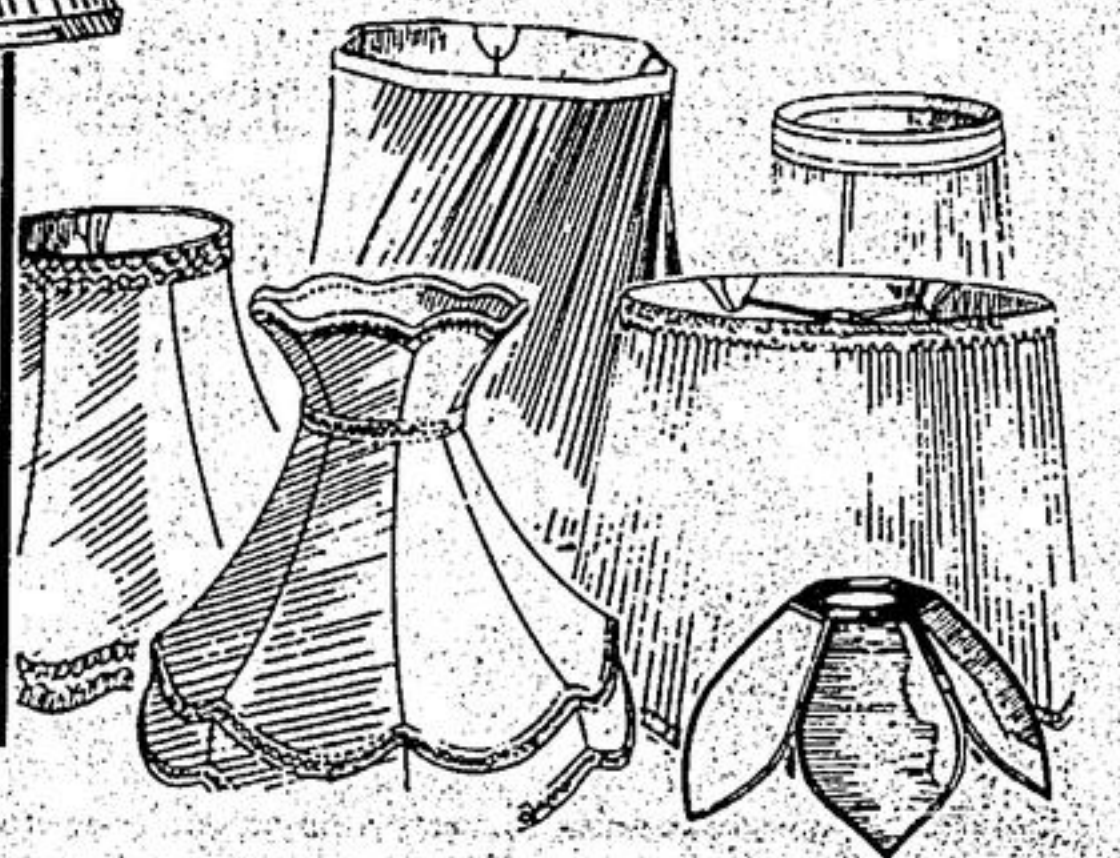


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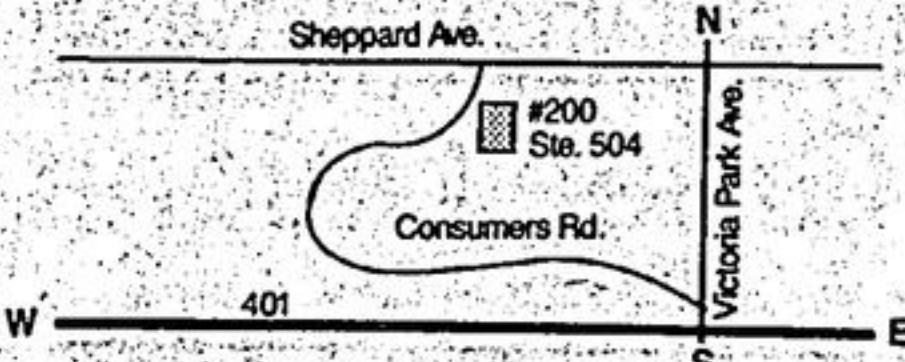
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