

Game wardens need help catching poachers

AUSTIN — If a burglar were rifling your possessions, would you help bring him to justice? Most homeowners would be only too glad to assist police in this regard. Yet many Texans make no effort to stop wildlife cheaters from getting away scotfree.

Game Warden Captain Bob Cross of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department points out that in this state, all wildlife — birds, mammals, fish — are by law the property of the people. The legislature acts for the people by making laws protecting this valuable resource and it is in the interest of each individual citizen-

owner to help see that these laws are obeyed.

"The game warden," says Captain Cross, "is really a referee to see that everyone gets a fair share."

P&WD biologists do constant research to survey and improve wildlife populations and habitat in the counties under regulatory authority of the department. Their recommendations for seasons and bag limits insure equal distribution of the surplus animals, birds and fish to licensed hunters and fishermen.

Sportsmen help pay the cost of this resource management with their

license money. Their options, expressed at public hearings, also are taken into account in the formulation of game and fish laws.

Overall, this is an equitable system for handling the public trust, with every citizen due a uniform allotment in the state's wildlife harvest.

But, just like anyone who shoves ahead in line or grabs more than his ration, the chiseler can upset the balance considerably and deprive others in the long run.

In Texas, where there always has been a plentiful supply of game,

people traditionally have not taken poaching very seriously. Nowadays, game is as abundant as ever, or more so due to scientific methods, but human population has risen in greater proportion.

As competition increases, the job of trying to give as many people as possible a chance becomes more important, and this is where citizens can perform a valuable service.

When in the field, if you see anyone breaking the game laws or acting suspiciously, report it to the nearest game warden or the sheriff's department. These officers work to-

gether closely, but the warden is more able to get on to the case immediately. Provide as much information as possible, such as descriptions of the violators, their automobiles, boats and license numbers, as well as times and locations.

The informant should not feel uneasy in any way about this. Remember, these people are doing something criminal, stealing what rightfully belongs to their fellow hunters and fishermen. If unchecked, their selfishness can have far-reaching effects on the balance of wildlife.

Public attitude in other states has long favored such dutiful action and condemned game outlaws. If more Texans could realize the seriousness and cost to them of this type of crime, the impact would be considerable.

If game wardens are alerted quickly enough they normally can follow through and make a case promptly without the witness having to testify, in which case the source is never divulged.

Captain Cross says game wardens already do receive a good amount of

cooperation from the public and the officers hardly could operate without it. However, as time brings growing problems, citizen assistance becomes more and more needed. The department never could have enough wardens to do the entire job alone.

If just 10 percent of the state outdoorsmen would be extra vigilant and alert authorities when violations occur, within a few years there could be a sharp dip in the type of theft, to the benefit of the wildlife of Texas and all of its people-owners.

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