

BY JOE KOSACK



William Penn landed at Chester in 1682. Within a year, Penn's Woods had its first bounty: 10 to 15 shillings for a wolf; females paid more.

Bounties would go on to become a staple in Pennsylvania's attempts to civilize its outdoors, to put an end to agricultural losses, to save game for hunters. They'd last centuries.

It was hardly new thinking. The Old World had cultivated the practice for centuries before it surfaced on the other side of the pond. Think Big Bad Wolf. Wolf in Sheep's Clothing. The Boy Who Cried Wolf.

In 1802, Pennsylvania's bounties extended to mountain lions, or "panthers." Why it took a century longer to reprimand the big cats is unclear. Maybe their uniqueness to colonists bought them some time.

But don't for a second think that bounties were for only big beasts. Add to the bountied animals list weasels, foxes, bobcats, minks, hawks, owls, even squirrels. All at some time in Pennsylvania's past were considered vermin worth paying to have killed.

At this point it's probably worth pointing out that wildlife management historically has had to compete with interests that belie its intentions. Modified by the whims of the majority, scientific understanding, and even political creativity, conservation has been beset with more than its fair share of flawed thinking.

From their start, bounties were immensely popular, because they pressured the predators



BOUNTIES

THE RISE AND FALL



At far left, Nancy Fraim and her uncle, John Charles, of Lancaster, stand outside the Game Commission's South Office Building in Harrisburg in January 1947, with 40 pelts from foxes John trapped from Nov. 27 through December 1946 and turned in for bounty. The 1948 photo on the previous page shows the bounty office within the building that gives a glimpse of the number of predators Pennsylvanians turned in. At left, weasels turned in for bounty in 1923 are displayed on a gate.

that killed livestock and game, which were important to most Pennsylvanians. It's why predator bounties became one of the first tenets of the American conservation handbook, and why they lasted so long.

Bounties fought fire with fire, represented good-versus-evil. They also provided financial incentive.

In a wilder Pennsylvania, they seemed a good fit. But there was a lot about predators that science had not yet learned or taught Americans.

A COSTLY BAND-AID

As big game declined through the 1850s from market hunting and unregulated harvest, many Pennsylvanians took to small game. But the increased pressure would eventually drain small-game populations, too. Times became tougher and tougher for hunters.

A sympathetic General Assembly tried to save game, livestock and songbirds through the Scalp Act of 1885, which

placed a 50-cent bounty on weasels, minks, gray and red foxes, and all hawks and owls, excepting saw-whet, screech and barn owls. It also provided a 20-cent fee to the local notary or justice who recorded a bounty affidavit. The measure was supposed to benefit agriculture, backyard bird feeders and, of course, hunters.

Today it stands as the height of senseless slaughter and wasted tax money. In about 18 months, about \$90,000 – \$2.2 million today – had been spent and 128,571 targeted animals, mostly hawks and owls, were killed.

“Granting that 5,000 chickens are killed annually in Pennsylvania by hawks and owls, and that they are worth 25 cents each, the total loss would be \$1,250, and the poultry killed in a year and a half would be worth \$1,875,” wrote Clinton Hart Merriam, chief of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Division of Ornithology and Mammalogy, in the agency's 1886 *Report to the Secretary of*

Agriculture. “Hence it appears the state of Pennsylvania has expended \$90,000 to save its farmers a loss of \$1,875.”

In addition to the \$90,000 Pennsylvania spent on bounties, Merriam, then one of America's most-prominent naturalists, reasoned the Commonwealth had incurred losses to agricultural interests by destroying 128,571 beneficial predators that killed at least \$3,947,130 – \$96.4 million today – in mice and other rodents, as well as insects that caused crop losses over those 18 months.

Merriam's assessment of the Scalp Act was damning. But it took the fieldwork of B. H. Warren, then a state ornithologist for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, to finish off the Scalp Act. Warren would go on to become the Game Commission's first executive secretary.

Warren, as later published in his 1890 *Birds of Pennsylvania*, had found through dissections of more than 170 red-tailed hawks that they ate mostly field mice. His

work proved that the dreaded “hen hawk” was really a mouser.

In 1887, the legislature repealed the Scalp Act, largely for its expense and widespread fraudulent bounty claims, but also for its chronicled pointlessness. It had led to the loss of at least 180,000 Pennsylvania predators at a time when at least science knew better but didn't have the upper hand.

But bounties weren't done in Pennsylvania, or many other states. They still had their champions in hunting and farming communities, even in birdwatching circles, where songbird-chasers such as the pigeon (sharp-shinned) hawk and long-tailed chicken (Cooper's) hawk were cursed regularly.

The General Assembly approved bounties “for the destruction of certain noxious animals” in April 1907. It provided a \$4 bounty for bobcats, \$2 for foxes and \$1 weasels and minks. The bounties were paid with a legislative appropriation. When the funding dried up, so did the bounties.

Joseph Kalbfus, the Game Commission's second executive secretary, noted in his 1907 agency annual report that he would have preferred to add housecats, great-horned owls and goshawks to the General Assembly's bounty list. As one of Pennsylvania's first small-game champi-

ons, Kalbfus supported bounties.

Three years later, campaigning in his 1910 agency annual report for a return of bounty appropriations from the General Assembly, Kalbfus reported “a generous bounty for the extermination of vermin of all kinds” is a solution to the state’s deficit game populations, particularly quail.

His comments reflect an attitude that dominated conservation at the time: killing feral cats and large predators would save songbirds and small game.

It wasn’t an accurate assessment, but it was popular.

Through the early 20th century, some counties continued bounties, paying for them entirely, according to Seth Gordon, the Game Commission’s third executive secretary. Occasionally the Commonwealth would provide appropriations, but it wasn’t often, he wrote in the January 1923 edition of *American Wildlife* magazine.

ANOTHER APPROACH

Without the ability to set its own regulations and operating with a limited annual appropriation from the General Assembly, the Game Commission got into the wildlife-management business by working with legislators to make stronger game laws and establishing a law-enforcement presence in Penn’s Woods. From there, the agency considered propagating game, but opted for state game refuges, which were started in 1905.

Refuges made more sense, according to Game Commissioner John Phillips, whose service began in 1905. They could provide absolute protection and the “systematic extermination of vermin,” he said.

In 1906, the Game Commission began stocking whitetails and quail, and started to trap-and-transfer wild turkeys. With time, rabbits, squirrels, even ring-necked

pheasants, would be released. Many other species would follow.

For years, the Game Commission’s ambition to do more was hindered by limited funding. That changed, on April 17, 1913, when legislation to create the state’s first hunting license was passed by the General Assembly and signed into law by Gov. John K. Tener, after a lengthy battle.

But tucked away in that legislative package, among the directions it offered for how license monies would be spent, was a mandate for the Game Commission to pay bounties, an agency first. Bounties were back and no longer tied to General Assembly appropriations. But their details were vague yet.

Then in Act 467 of July 25, 1913, the legislature created a new bounty list: wildcat, \$4 bounty; gray fox, \$2; weasel, \$2; goshawk, 50 cents; sharp-shinned hawk, 50 cents; and great horned owl, 50 cents.

Kalbfus voiced his disapproval of the bird bounties and succeeded in having them struck in follow-up legislation, Act 126 of 1915, which fixed bounties on wild cats at \$6, added red foxes to the list through a \$2 bounty for all foxes; and set a \$1 bounty for weasels and minks. County officials and justices of the peace were empowered to pay claims to be reimbursed by the Game Commission. Claims were validated by cutting off the animals’ ears and burning its pelt.

It took two years to establish a bounty-reimbursement procedure through legislation. At about the same time, the state Auditor General and the Game Commission started to probe widespread reports of bounty fraud. Reimbursement was held until their investigations were completed.

“Prior to the passage of this act, no one could, under any condition of circumstances, have made me believe that

there were so many men in Pennsylvania willing to commit perjury for a dollar,” Kalbfus wrote.

The investigations uncovered \$75,000 in fraudulent claims and led to the imprisonment of more than a dozen officials and many more claimants. But the fraud didn’t lead to a bounty repeal. It simply brought about a tighter-written bounty law.

The march against predators continued.

“Unless certain destructive species of birds and mammals not hunted for sport to the same extent as game are kept under control, all other conservation efforts will amount to little...,” Gordon wrote in an article titled “How Pennsylvania Controls Vermin” in *American Wildlife* magazine, then the bulletin of the American Game Protective Association, formed by gun companies and endorsed by Theodore Roosevelt.

“Through their effort to control undesirable species by a bounty system or organized vermin operations, Pennsylvanians feel that they are simply helping to right the balance of nature, instead of upsetting it,” Gordon wrote.

So, at a time when scientific observation had cleared most predators of the accusations against them – citing good habitat as more important to game than predator reductions, prominent conservationists and wildlife-management organizations still were focused on giving The People what they wanted. But it wasn’t cheap.

EXPANDING COVERAGE

The Game Commission created a Bureau of Vermin Control, which managed bounty payments and taught trappers to become more efficient. The bureau also asked game protectors and refuge keepers to help manage “vermin.”

“Each of our 30 refuge keepers makes a special effort throughout the entire year to destroy vermin of all kinds, not only in the refuges, but over as much adjacent territory as he can cover along with other duties,” Gordon reported in *American Wildlife*. “This work is done mostly with traps of various sizes, but firearms and dogs are also used quite extensively. Strychnine (rat poison) is used to a limited extent, but during the past several years we have depended mostly on traps, firearms and dogs. Our regular game protectors kill vermin whenever possible, but their many duties do not permit running extensive traplines.”

The Game Commission’s use of strychnine can be traced at least back to 1906, when Kalbfus reported his game wardens had determined “... beyond question, strychnine is the solution of the vermin problem.” It’s unclear exactly how long the agency used it.

The Game Commission, from June 1, 1924 to May 31, 1925, paid \$66,159 in bounties for 438 wild cats, 7,177 gray foxes, 4,109 red foxes and 22,583 weasels.

But agency officers also killed 3,000 feral dogs and cats, 50 bobcats, 110 gray foxes, 183 red foxes, 255 weasels, 9,979 crows, 397 hawks and 60 owls.

Predators were the Game Commission’s public enemy No. 1 in the Roaring Twenties. It was an organizational mind-set that would take decades to lobotomize.

In 1929, goshawks were added to the bounty list through legislation: a \$5 bounty from Nov. 1 to May 1.

Pressure remained on predators in the ’30s. During the Great Depression, in fiscal years 1932-33 and 1933-34, the Game Commission paid more than \$120,000 in annual bounties.



Bounty office employees Harry Van Cleve and Charles Baum pose with goshawks that were turned in for bounty. From 1934-35 to 1937-38, Pennsylvanians submitted 2,097 goshawks to the Game Commission, a surprising number given that, in other years bounties were paid for goshawks, submissions exceeded 100 just once.

From an annual budget that allowed \$1.1 to \$1.2 million in spending, the 10 percent outlay for bounties seemed excessive.

GOSHAWK BLUES

One of the most significant occurrences in Pennsylvania's bounty history is the reported 1934-38 slaughter of goshawks. During the four fiscal years, an unimaginable 2,097 goshawks were submitted for bounty. In other years when bounties were offered on goshawks, submissions exceeded 100 birds only one time – 118 in the 1945-46 fiscal year.

Gordon referred to an “unusually heavy migration” of goshawks in the winter of 1935-36. He said the last previous large migration of goshawks occurred in the winter of 1927-28, when no bounty was provided on goshawks.

These “invasions” are corroborated by W.E. Clyde Todd, Carnegie Museum curator of the ornithology and author of the pivotal 1945 *Birds of Western Pennsylvania*, as well as respected ornithologist George Sutton, both of whom covered Pennsylvania's birds extensively in the 1930s.

Although several uncharacteris-

tic heavy goshawk migrations inspired goshawk bounties, Todd believed a “growing scarcity of ruffed grouse,” also had influenced the goshawk bounty. What bothered Todd more than the goshawk bounty was the number of protected hawks that were shot in mistake of goshawks.

“The results of this act were precisely those that its sponsors had hoped for: it cost the state very little, since comparatively few goshawks were actually killed; but large numbers of other species were sent in by those who knew no better,” Todd wrote in *Birds of Western Pennsylvania*.

But at \$5 per goshawk, with bounties paid on more than 2,000 goshawks over this four-year period, it's clear the bounties cost plenty. With inflation, that 1934 five-spot had the value of \$90 today.

Newspaper accounts substantiated Todd's concerns: many hunters clearly hadn't a clue how to differentiate raptors. A

1929 article from the *Lebanon Daily News* covered how more than 100 raptors were submitted to the Game Commission for goshawk bounty; only seven were goshawks, or goshawk fledglings. So, countless other birds of prey died as mistake kills.

But it seems unlikely the Game Commission paid bounties on birds that weren't goshawks.

That something so wrong occurred at a time when America watched Rosalie Edge rescue migrating hawks from the annual fall gunneries assembled to shoot

raptors as they passed Hawk Mountain seemed incredulous. But it truly still was business as usual.

And with the support of organized hunting clubs and associations committed to bringing game back, bounties were going nowhere.

Pressured by Gov. Gifford Pinchot and Pittsburgh naturalist Bayard H. Christy in the early 1930s to repeal the goshawk bounty, the Board of Game Commissioners responded that the statute providing bounties on goshawks “...was not introduced, nor sponsored, at the instigation of the Game Commission.” The agency's involvement was limited to paying bounties on qualifying goshawks.

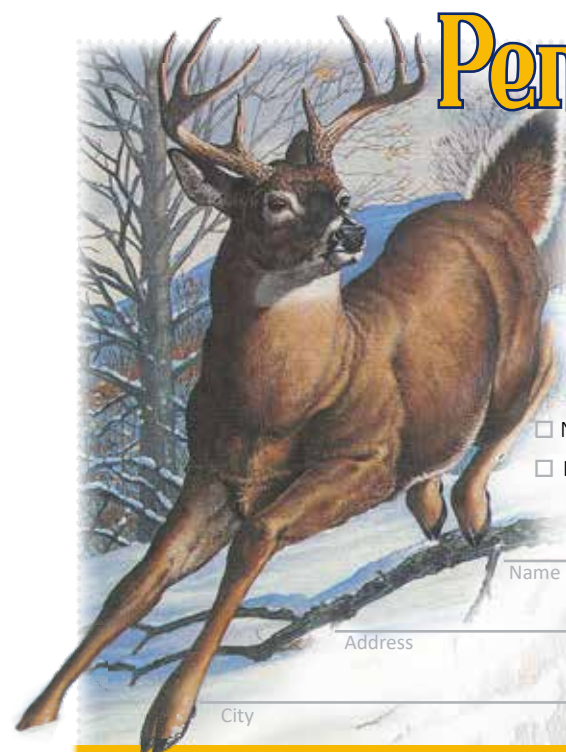
In 1937, the Game Commission through a recodification of the Game Laws, received authority to establish its own regulations. With that new privilege, at its July meeting, the Board of Game Commissioners repealed the bobcat bounty and dropped the goshawk bounty from \$5 to \$2. Then, it created a great-horned owl bounty: \$2 for each adult, \$1 for fledglings.

Bounties were still needed, as far as the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs was concerned. The organization at its annual convention on Feb. 12, 1940 supported a continued bounty on goshawks, as well as removing protection on all hawks – excepting “sparrow hawks.”

Todd didn't.

“Birds of prey have just as much right to exist as have game birds, and no sound and scientific conservation policy would conceivably discriminate one in favor of the other,” he wrote in his *Birds of Western Pennsylvania*.

The goshawk bounty remained on the books until the 1950-51 license year,



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when the agency paid bounty on 32.

BOUNTY BUNK

Writing about bounties in his 1960 *Bounties Are Bunk* pamphlet, Roger Latham, a former Game Commission wildlife biologist, said bounties were mainstream wildlife management since the 1920s.

Forty years ago, any wildlife-management professional who challenged bounties likely would have found himself shunned by most members of any wildlife-management or hunting community, Latham wrote.

It stood to reason predators would catch a break when World War II erupted

and Pennsylvania's hunters found themselves "over there." But Gordon, now on a second tour as Game Commission executive director, had concluded from field reports that the "fox population in Pennsylvania increased to the point where it was causing considerable damage to small game, livestock and poultry."

The claim seemed unlikely, but it quickly created concern. In response to the problem, Gordon established a "Predator Control Committee," which studied predator control and acted in an advisory capacity.

It would lead a cadre of field officers and interested sportsmen who were trained to trap foxes.

"During the fall and winter of 1944-45, the field officers destroyed 941 red foxes, 671 gray foxes, 45 weasels, 7 wild cats, and 20,660 crows, hawks and owls," Gordon wrote in the agency's 1945-1946 *Biennial Report*.

In the 1945-46 fiscal year, more than \$200,000 in bounties were paid on red and gray foxes, weasels, goshawks and great-horned owls.

Eventually, some predator bounties were repealed: goshawks in 1951; weasels in 1954.

But foxes and great-horned owls got no such break. Through the 1950s, the Game Commission paid more than \$1.1 million on foxes and great-horned owls.

BURYING BOUNTIES

The 1960s opened with science-based conservation beginning to steer more and more state and national wildlife-management policies. The Game Commission finally had cleared one of its longest-lasting hurdles by convincing legislators and hunters that antlerless deer needed to be removed from deer populations annually.

Maybe it was time for bounties to go, too. They really weren't making a difference, according to Latham. Bounties had been paid on foxes throughout the 20th century, he wrote in *Bounties Are Bunk*, "...yet these animals have been at an all-time high for the past 15 years."

What Latham was suggesting was that when predator populations are pressured, there is a compensatory response in their birth rates. Efforts to eradicate coyotes in the West have illustrated this point repeatedly over time.

Moreover, removal of predators doesn't necessarily lead to reduced predator pressure, reported Harvey Roberts, a former Game Commission biologist, in the June 1966 issue of *Pennsylvania Game News*.

"The assumption that the removal of over 15,000 foxes would save 110,000 rabbits is not valid," Roberts wrote. "Nature doesn't operate that way. In actuality, the remaining foxes would merely find less competition, live high on the hog, and exact the same toll on the cottontail population."

From 1960 to 1964, the Game Commission spent \$520,398 – \$4.3 million today – on fox and great-horned owl bounties. It was money that surely would have been more wisely allocated buying state game lands, or equipment to manage the nearly 1 million acres of game lands the agency had by that time.

Recognizing bounties were a waste of money and falling out of favor with more and more wildlife managers and Americans, the Game Commission in 1963 sent a questionnaire on bounties to all 50 states and 12 Canadian provinces. Responses were received from 48 states and 10 provinces.

The survey found bounties still existed in 29 states and seven provinces. Seven states never had bounties: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, South Carolina and Tennessee.

Fourteen states had bounties exclusively supported by local funding. Pennsylvania's average annual bounty payment ranked fourth in the nation, even though as a state, it ranked 33rd in geographic size.

Twelve states and six provinces also reported their predator populations had not increased after bounties payments were stopped. Only two provinces experienced "serious agitation" after closing their bounty programs.

Eighteen other state and four provincial agencies also were currently working toward the eventual termination of their bounty programs.

More telling was that in 25 of the 29

states with bounties, game departments “do not favor this system as a means of controlling predator populations.”

The survey also found that in 11 states where bounty programs remained, a majority of hunters and trappers were against bounties. In seven states, they favored them.

The survey results turned heads within the Game Commission. Within months of assembling the survey’s results, Deputy Executive Director Glenn Bowers asked Executive Director Merton Golden to consider a change in the bounty program.

“In attempting to arrive at some means of gently easing away from some of our bounty payments, I have given considerable thought to some potential avenues of approach,” Bowers wrote in a May 13, 1964 memo. “One which could perhaps be given immediate attention would be to abolish the bounty on the great horned owl.”

Bowers pointed out that over the past decade, about 1,200 owls had been probated for bounty annually. Statewide, that amounted to about one owl for every 37.5 square miles.

“It appears rather obvious that taking one owl every 37.5 square miles is a very ineffective management tool,” Bowers wrote.

Within a year, the bounty on great-horned owls was gone. Bowers, who had become the agency’s executive director, pushed the repeal through.

But the Game Commission wasn’t done. Two months later, the commissioners pulled the bounties on red and gray foxes. Criticism followed. But it didn’t last and prompted no change. The Game Commission was out of the bounty business.

It’s hard to calculate how much of an impact paying bounties had on the Game

Commission’s accomplishments over time. Overall, the agency has been frugal, tremendously innovative and has accomplished much over its 125-year existence.

But one can’t help but wonder what else might have been done with the more than \$5 million the agency paid in bounties – maybe \$75 million considering inflation over time.

That’s difference-making money.

The Game Commission, though, was following the fundamental playbook most resource agencies used in managing game populations. It also managed wildlife in a state where organized sportsmen once had tremendously powerful lobbies and influence.

It’s likely the nation’s environmental awakening in the ’60s and the advancement of scientific study to better conservation also influenced the shift away from bounties. It was time. Overdue, actually.

But not every state abandoned bounties. A call for their end continued into the 1970s.

“More and more people are feeling outraged when they hear about a state still paying bounties,” said Leslie Glasgow, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish, Wildlife and Parks at the 1970 International Association of Game, Fish and Conservation Commissioners convention.

“State game officials would be prudent to take a new look at their predator-control programs, to make doubly sure they are aimed at carefully selected targets, and not at a whole range of animals as in grandpa’s time!”

Without the work and influence of Bowers, Roberts and Latham, bounties might have lasted longer. These men are primarily responsible for closing the door on bounties and keeping it closed. It was a pivotal step forward in Pennsylvania’s conservation history. **GN**