

## CHAPTER XXVI

### WILDLIFE

As the expansion of settlement encroached upon the habitats of wildlife during the nineteenth century, there was a noticeable decrease in the number of wild animals. Before the closing decades of the century, Jaffrey had reached its high point in "open spaces" and vistas were open from one end of the town to the other. During recent decades these "open spaces" have become reforested and provided cover for the return of wildlife, bird and animal.

Wild animals are no respectors of town boundaries and cannot be ascribed to any one town but rather are indigenous to the region. Thus wild animals reported in one town may, in their wandering courses, have visited all the towns in the area. In numerous instances, wild animals seen in nearby towns have been known to have visited Jaffrey.

By the end of the nineteenth century, beavers, once numerous in the region, as indicated by the remnants of old beaver dams, had totally disappeared and did not return until they were planted in the brooks and waters during the late 1940's. Today one may see them again, with their dams and beaver houses scattered along the streams, and beaver-made ponds are found where no ponds existed before, a factor in water conservation. Beavers are now very abundant and have produced many duck areas in Jaffrey and vicinity, and some good trout fishing has been reported for the first few years until the water is warmed by dead trees and lack of leaves for shade.

The appearance of a moose in the region has always been "big news". About twenty-one years ago one was killed in Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire, and the case was prosecuted by Game Warden John Lankhurst of Keene, New Hampshire. About 1919 a young bull moose showed up near the Charles Hayward farm on the Wilton to Milford road. From information furnished by Game Warden George S. Proctor of Wilton, New Hampshire, in the 1930's, it is learned that a moose stayed for several days in New Ipswich, New Hampshire, and was mistaken in the wee hours of the morning for one of his mules by Harry Mansfield. Going out to feed his mules in the dimness of the morning he slapped a supposed mule in his barnyard and told him to "get into the barn and eat your breakfast." On entering the barn he found both mules inside and

returning to the barnyard he was surprised to see that the animal he had slapped on the rump was a big bull moose. This moose, believed to have been a stray from the game preserve on October Mountain in the Berkshires, was seen in several towns in his wandering course in New Hampshire and finally came to a tragic end as he attempted to dispute the right of way with a railroad train in Dunbarton.

A recent visitation was in the 1960's, when a moose was seen in Hancock, Marlborough, and Keene. In the fall of 1970 a medium sized bull moose was observed on the Jaffrey side of Camp Iroquois, headed toward Town Farm and Blake Brook areas. Later it was located by Conservation Officer Kenneth P. Warren of Peterborough near the Peterborough-Dublin line, off Route 101.

The occasional bear stories in the region always find eager listeners. Early in November, 1931, a bear was seen near Wilton Centre, New Hampshire, and for five years prior there were evidences of bear going through the region. Reportedly, they came down from Vermont and passed through Hancock, Peterborough, Wilton, and Mason, New Hampshire, into Massachusetts, and returned in about two weeks' time. A large bear was taken in Francestown, New Hampshire, a year ago. Stoddard and Hillsborough have had a few taken in the last two years, and pictures were taken at Pratt Pond last year of a medium sized bear. The only bear stories in Jaffrey come from the Annett area where several tracks headed toward the Sharon Swamp section were reported.

With fur prices down and the former coon hunters now being too old, their coon dogs having passed on to greener pastures, raccoons have become too numerous and destructive in gardens and near houses where they are tapping on the windows trying to get inside, or scavenger hunting in garbage cans. Young men are no longer joining the coon hunters' fraternity.

Bobcats or wildcats are still being hunted although in a lesser degree than formerly since some of the older men have retired or passed on. Jaffrey's biggest wildcat areas are Gap Mountain and Monadnock. In 1969 five wildcats were brought to Conservation Officer Warren from Jaffrey and four in 1970. Locally, John Kulis of Hancock, formerly of Jaffrey, was a great bobcat hunter. Instead of hunting, he now enjoys writing about them. The leaders in this sport today are the Fergusons, father and son, of Fitchburg, Massachusetts, who every year bring them in to Conservation Officer Warren. The Someros and Ahos of New Ipswich have been

succeeded as cathunters by the Hardys, Hills, and Koskis of that town, but the champion hunter in the area is "Bobcat" Bill Curtis of Hancock, who is now in his eighties.

Until 1960-70 Jaffrey had several pair of otter but due to late beaver trapping and the introduction of the Connbear trap they have been trapped almost to extinction in the Jaffrey area. Conservation Officer Warren has not observed any tracks during the past year in his travels through Jaffrey.

Mink are still plentiful but their pelts are down to a new low of five dollars. Jack rabbit numbers have remained about stable but the smaller brown Coney rabbit is on the scarcer side. Foxes have become vermin.

Game hunting, on the whole, is decreasing, due in some measure to lack of food for wildlife. With the farms decreasing and housing and industrial developments pushing the animals further back there is now a lack of cover for them and hunting is not the sport it used to be. The Nimrods of the older generations are gone and the younger generation no longer show interest in the sport.

There is a serious decline in the number of deer in Jaffrey and the entire western side of Cheshire County. In Hillsborough County the number is on the low side. This is due to the large annual kills and the kill by dogs, pet and wild, as well as to lack of cover and food. In Colonial times "deer reafs" were annually elected in the towns. Deer numbers declined during the "open space" age in Jaffrey and for some time prior to 1910 or 1911, according to Jaffrey's wildlife authority, Lloyd Wellington, there were no deer here, and to get one one had to go to Dummer. After 1910 they started filtering south into the Jaffrey area and reached a peak some fifteen or twenty years ago. Since then there has been a gradual decline to present low levels.

Some of the older residents who were living in the 1930's remembered sightings of the wild or passenger pigeons, formerly common to a large part of the country. The pigeons kept up their annual visitations in varying numbers until less than a hundred years ago. It was remembered that from the upper part of Squantum Village there was a wide western panorama, including views of Gap and Monadnock Mountains. One day, sometime after 1870, the people of the village were called out to see a flight of passenger pigeons that appeared like a long low-lying cloud extending from the south of Gap Mountain, along Monadnock, and over the horizon into Dublin and beyond. These thrilling sights will never

again be seen, for the passenger pigeon is now extinct because of man's rapacity.

The weird cry of the loon used to be heard in Jaffrey. It was remembered by some of the older residents some forty or so years ago that there were almost always loons in Hubbard Pond in Rindge. In flying from Hubbard Pond to Contoocook Lake in Jaffrey, they used to pass over Squantum Village almost daily. It is probable that the congested area of camps and the motor boats have discouraged them from staying at the lake. Loons have been observed quite recently at Gilmore, Thorndike, and Contoocook Lakes. Silver and Nubanusit Lakes in Harrisville have a resident family and usually one offspring each year. Marjorie (Knight) Shattuck, of the Jaffrey History Committee, recalls seeing loons across from the Red Dam when she went canoeing on Contoocook River with her brother in the 1920's. According to Harold Royce and Lloyd F. Wellington, a loon still comes to Gilmore Pond.

There was an open season not too long ago on quail or Bob Whites, and Lloyd F. Wellington remembers his father, the late George F. Wellington, going quail hunting and mounting some of the specimens. Now the only quail to be found are those released by trainers or from area game preserves at Temple and New Ipswich. Trainers like Wellington and Gagnon of Rindge lose some while training.

The native pheasants formerly found locally, have gone the way of the wild turkeys. This is due to the fact that the law allowed the shooting of female or hen pheasants, and today with the release of only male pheasants there is not much possibility for reproduction in the wild.

Partridges, or grouse, have become a scarce bird in late years, although the occasional drum is sometimes still heard and one may flush here and there but not in the quantity formerly. One of the major factors for their disappearance is believed to be the disappearance of the old dirt roads, which now are mostly oiled. The huge quantities of salt used on roads in winter and the sprays in nearby orchards are all contributing factors to the scarcity of the grouse. Conservation Officer Warren has received several calls, however, from the contractors in the Jaffrey area where grouse had a nest of eggs where a cellar was to be dug, during the past two years. Woodcock and ducks are about stable in numbers.

Of the smaller birds the greatest interest centers on the bluebird which, of recent years, were seldom seen. In 1967 Officer Warren

had a dozen or so bluebirds that stayed until the end of October. At the writer's farm there were a dozen or fifteen that did the same that year, but since then have not been so numerous in their annual sojourns.

But in the face of modern economy it is amazing to those who study wildlife that any are left, as their struggle to survive is an uphill one, with farms on their way out and lack of cover and food. In general, the numbers of wildlife in the region are decreasing.

Fish in local ponds and streams are still abundant. Four to five-pound pickerel were taken from Cheshire Pond in January and February, 1971. Large mouth bass is the leading sport fish and Contoocook Lake is one of the best areas. Horned pout are prolific in all ponds. Native trout have become scarce and the best trout fishing is after the streams have been stocked. Contoocook River is known to be one of the best areas for rainbow and brown trout.

### WOLVES

The wolves are gone long since, but stories of them remain. From the files of the Peterborough Transcript, under date of July 29, 1880, the following reminiscence of Benjamin Cutter is here quoted:

"One night many years since, a wolf entered Col. Josiah Mower's barn through a hole in the underpinning, killed and feasted on a sheep, which inflated him so that he could not retreat in the way he entered. On going to the barn in the morning, Mr. Mower discovered him trying to escape through a window which was too small for him to pass through."

Wolves, with their menacing cries, were the bane of the settlers and farmers from the earliest times to the killing of the last wolf on Monadnock. An account of this episode was found among the papers of the late Albert Annett and is here presented:

### WOLF! WOLF!

"Shut in and oppressed by the dark endless woods around them, the instinctive thought of the first settlers was for light and air. They came from towns that had been settled for a hundred years. They were used to looking out upon broad fields and the open sea. There was a constant menace in those deep recesses of the forest, so grim and mysterious. It was the primitive feeling known the world over to the tribes on the fringes of civilization as forest fear, or fear of the wilderness.

"Wild beasts lurked in those hiding places. Cunning eyes looked out from bush and tangled covert. In the twilight slinking forms were seen emerging from the woods reconnoitering and retreating, or darting across a corner of the clearing. The watch dog growled in his sleep by the fire or roused by stealthy steps around the house, the scruff of his neck rose and swelled as he barked his defiance. There was often panic in out-house or barn; and sheep and cattle, chickens and turkeys set up a tumultuous alarm.

"The old long-barrelled fowling piece, or Queen's arm, was hastily taken from the antlers or hooked supports over the fireplace, and the master of the house sped to the rescue of his helpless stock. Sometimes it was a bear, sometimes a wild cat, bob cat, lynx or luciver, all one under varying designations. Quite as often it was a wolf, the most cunning and the most dreaded of the pests of the wilderness. But most often it was a false alarm, or the feeble beam from the old time lantern revealed a scattering of feathers or a pool or trail of blood of the firstlings of the flock gone to appease the powers of darkness.

"At first there were catamounts. Tradition tells of one killed by one of the Hodge family in Jaffrey who came on an exploration trip before settling in the township. A more definite instance of one of these animals killed is given in the History of Fitzwilliam. A monster was killed in Troy by Deacon Fife, who lived at one time on the southern spur of Monadnock, now the summer residence of E. W. Hamlin. Dea. Fife and his son, finding that a deer had been killed by some savage animal near their home, borrowed the great bear trap belonging to Dea. John Lovejoy of Rindge and were successful in trapping the marauder which was despatched by a ball through the heart from the rifle of young Fife. From the nose to the tip of its tail this catamount measured thirteen feet and four inches, and for its skin the Boston Museum is said to have paid forty-five dollars. In this account we have a circumstantial story from reliable sources.

"There is no question about the plague of the wolves and the very real terror that they inspired in children and young people; but no reliable account has been found of their having attacked a human being in this vicinity. Perhaps their bark was worse than their bite. Their haunting yelp in the fall of the year carried to great distances upon the frosty night air, and often sent a chill to the marrow of the listener's bones, especially when he was alone on the road with night shutting down. Hundreds of wolf stories

once told around the fireside are now forgotten or remembered only as generalities.

"Aunt Hannah Davis used to tell the young people how once as a girl, she set out on horseback from her home by Contoocook Lake for the factory village and wolves came out of the woods and followed her yelping behind her horse, until she came to the house of Simon Whitcomb, (the L. F. Sawyer place) when they slunk back to the woods.

"The Gould children, living on the present Garfield farm, were out on the hill east of the house at play and began mocking the yelp of a wolf off in the woods toward Hubbard Pond. The cry was taken up here and there, all the time drawing nearer until a pack in full cry broke into the open field at the foot of the hill, just as the alarm reached the farm house, and the children were called to the protection of the house, as we are given to understand, none too soon.

"During and after the Revolution, a man named Nehemiah Porter lived at the east end of Bullet Pond in the house now owned as a summer residence by M. C. Damon, of Leominster. One winter day a young man working for Porter was killed by a falling tree or limb in his clearing near Hubbard Pond. The body was loaded on an ox sled and carried to the house, a quarter to a half mile away, leaving along the track a trail of blood. After the custom of the time a neighbor, Dea. Jewett, living on the Brooks Place near Emerson Pond, was called to sit up with the corpse. He came to the house accompanied by his dog. Scenting blood the famished wolves had followed the trail to the house and they made night hideous by their ceaseless clamor around the door. Thinking to scare them away, Jewett threw his dog out of the window when it was instantly set upon and torn in pieces by the furious wolves.

"Stragglng bears and wild cats have been occasionally seen down to the present time. In the fall of 1913, unmistakable signs of a bear were found in the Annett woods near Hubbard Pond. One or more large beech trees showed the great claw marks where bruin had performed his morning calisthenics by rearing against the tree and scratching deep into the bark on opposite sides, after the manner of the harmless domestic cat. A bear, perhaps the same one, was seen in other towns at that time and was killed by hunters in Hancock (?). A moose also paid us a visit of ceremony in the year 1921, and consented to be photographed as he hobnobbed

with the herd of cattle of William F. Robbins near the same pond.

"But the last hold of the wolf was Monadnock, which in its almost inaccessible caves and ravines harbored them for nearly a century after the first white hunters came. They often did great damage to the farmers' flocks. Sheep pens were a necessity in the pasture to protect the flocks over night. What is believed to be the remnant of one of these safety pens has been found and photographed by C. T. Johnson on Gap Mountain. The historians of Dublin, Troy and Fitzwilliam have preserved interesting tales of the wolf hunts that concerned Jaffrey. A woman living on the Mann place on the town line south of the farm house of Henry M. B. Stearns, going up on an errand to the barn, was startled by finding a full grown wolf in the building seeking what he might devour.

"It has come down in unquestioned history and tradition that Phineas Spaulding (Ernest Spaulding farm) lost sixteen sheep from his flock from wolves in a single night. These losses led to a determined war for the extermination of the wolf. Bounties were paid in Jaffrey as late as 1790, and these for a grown wolf became as high as twenty dollars. To guard against fraud, it was an old-time custom to nail the wolf's head to the door of the meeting house, as evidence that the bounty was justly earned, as well as for the glorification of the hunters. No written evidence of this custom has been found in Jaffrey, but the fact that new doors were required for the meeting house after a few years of use, is presumptive evidence of hard treatment by hammer and nails in the hands of the constable from his repeated posting of notices to the freeholders and inhabitants and, most likely, also from posting the gruesome evidence of the passing of the wolf.

"A wolf hunt on Monadnock with accompaniments, such as is related in the History of Fitzwilliam, was a sporting event comparable to riding to hounds. After repeated depredations upon several flocks by wolves, the whole community was aroused. Every gun was put in order and the resolution was made to clear out the wolves from Monadnock. There was a gathering of the clans from all surrounding towns. Phineas Reed of Fitzwilliam was chosen Captain. They formed a cordon around the Mountain and advanced simultaneously toward the top, but their elusive quarry slipped through their lines, all except one old bear, two cubs and four foxes. They shot the bear and one cub, and the other cub rewarded his merciful captor by biting off his thumb on his way

home. After descending the mountain, Capt. Reed's men heard a wolf bark, as if in derision, near-by in the woods. They formed a ring of fires around the place and stood all night on guard. In the morning they drove the wolf out into a clearing, where at least fifty shots were fired at him by those expert marksmen, but again he broke the ring and came out in a meadow belonging to Rev. Laban Ainsworth, evidently the meadow on the mountain stream to the south of Ballou City. Here young Nathan Stanley with an old "Queen's Arms" fired at him two balls and a slug and ended his destructive career. Following the hunt, according to custom, the army with its bounty of twenty dollars adjourned to the tavern where judging by the procedure on similar occasions a good time was had by all.

"Several other successful hunts followed in Swanzey, Marlborough and Troy, but they had become too popular and at one of the largest the bounty was so attenuated that its expenditure furnished only one glass of rum and two crackers apiece for the heroic hunters.

"In 1797, after the wolves had destroyed in a single night ten of Elijah Alexander's sheep, and a little later twenty owned by Levi Randall, two hundred men assembled and after a general shooting up of the countryside succeeded in killing one wolf and fatally wounding another. This time the arrangements were more adequate. Jonas Robeson, a store keeper in the place that is now Troy, met the victorious returning hosts on the ridge between Gap Mountain and Monadnock, with a wagon load of crackers and sugar, and a barrel of rum. It was a memorable occasion.

"The winter of 1819-20 marked an epoch in the march of civilization. The last wolf in the Monadnock Region met the final judgment. For a long time a single old gray wolf, grown savage and cunning in his war with mankind, had ranged between Monadnock and Watatic, taking liberal tribute from barnyard and pasture as he passed. The farmers declared war to the death and swept the entire countryside, with the besom of destruction. But day by day the crafty beast eluded them, after leaving in the path gruesome evidence of his presence. They followed his track in the snow through Jaffrey, Fitzwilliam, Winchendon and Rindge, and even into Templeton and Gardner. Storms came on and the snow became deep but still the hunt went on. Many of the original avengers of blood dropped out, but others, more hardy and persevering, took their place. The trail grew hot and was marked

every night by some ravaged farm yard where, as if in defiance, the wolf demanded his rations. While the hunters rested he raided the nearest barnyard.

"Phineas Whitney entertained the wearied men one night, and while they rested or slept, the old wolf was busy outside killing Whitney's sheep, drinking their blood and tasting only the most delicate part of their meat. Then like a true sport, not too greatly to handicap his pursuers, he lay down under a bush and waited their pleasure, apparently so that they might not complain of an uneven start in the morning. For nine or ten days the hunt was continued, shots flew in every direction, but the wolf was seemingly as fresh as in the beginning. Col. Jewett's bloodhounds were put on the track and followed close in the chase, but night came and again lupus was safe.

"The next day was the Sabbath, kept by the people of Fitzwilliam in the spirit of the times, as a day of worship and rest. But word got around in the morning that the wolf was coming that way, headed for Monadnock. Alas! for precedent and high principles long established. There was no Sabbath service in the churches of Fitzwilliam that day. Not since the Concord fight had there been such excitement in the Monadnock towns. Lines of men with long guns were formed along the roads to Rindge and Jaffrey. The baying of the hounds marked the progress of the chase. The wolf was at last driven into Scott Meadow, where the first hit was made by Shubael Plympton and then a second by Lewis Robbins. With two or three bullets through its body the old gray wolf gave up its life".

#### THE LAST WOLF ON MONADNOCK

Wilderness, mountain, and the Evening Star!  
 Clearing, and cabin, and a cry from far  
 So keen the still night shuddered and grew chill,  
 "A wolf," the settler said; and, boding ill,  
 The white sheep huddled closer in their pens;  
 And on the mountain side where God built dens  
 Of old, a gaunt wolf wailed to the mocking sky —  
 A sound of dread as when the doomed shall cry  
 To the rocks to fall and cover them. Despair  
 And outer dark; afar down stair by stair  
 A haunting cry, then stillness on the steep.  
 Void — vision dim — and peace among the sheep.  
 Wilderness, mountain, and a light from far;  
 Clearing, and cabin, and the Morning Star! — A. A.