

# THE BEAST OF PREY

## HIS SUPERIORITY TO PREDATORY MAN

*By Authenticus.*

Carnivore—Flesh-eating animal. Herbivore—Plant-eating animal. Biotic—Relating to wild life. Feral—Wild.

Animals that prey, and the animals they prey on, are equally part of the balance of nature. Where this balance has been gradually produced by centuries of time, it should on no account be disturbed. The natural enemies—the animals that prey—should not be made war on by man. If he makes war on them, he makes war also upon their prey. He cannot preserve the prey by exterminating the natural enemies.

Voices bearing this message came across the Pacific from the United States and Canada. Dr. Joseph Grinnell, ornithologist and mammalogist, of the University of California, writes that "the population of carnivore and of herbivore tends to maintain a mean ratio from one period to another." Balanced, the carnivore and the herbivore—the animals that prey, and the deer and other creatures preyed on—are necessary one to the other. If man destroys the carnivore, the deer are not better for that. They are worse. Protected red deer in Scotland exemplify this principle. There are many other examples.

### *Herbivore without Carnivore.*

If New Zealand was being entered by the white man to-day, he should, on this evidence, import no animals whatever, unless he can guarantee that they will not become wild. Certainly he should not introduce animals intended for wild life.

Unfortunately, he did this very thing when he introduced deer. He ignored the fact that deer in New Zealand would meet with no natural enemies. He violated the first principle of the doctrine of balance between herbivore and carnivore.

That doctrine now tells him his error, but is unable to tell him how to retrieve it. To try to counter-balance the excess of deer by intro-

ducing animals that prey on deer would mean an attempt at a man-made balance. Obviously, it is risky. How can a man-made balance provide the results that are provided by a balance which Nature took many centuries to build, using, for that purpose, many species? Man may juggle with this animal and with that; he may import the rabbit, and then import the weasel and stoat as a cure for the rabbit. Hitherto, with each fresh step, he has floundered deeper into the bog. But nowhere has he equalled the "biotic complex" created by Nature in uncounted ages.

### *Adjusted Biotic Complex.*

To again quote Dr. Grinnell, in a place where animals have existed "from time immemorial, as parts of the perfectly normal biotic complex"—a complex not copyable by acclimatisation authorities—those animals are mutually "adjusted," by reason of rates of reproduction "long-established," and, in the presence of predation, "wholly adequate."

Man may leave this balance alone. Or he may upset it. But, if he upsets it, and seeks to balance one importation with another, let him beware lest he blunder again, as with the weasel and stoat.

In any case, as Captain E. V. Sanderson points out in a communication to the Controller of Canadian Resources, dealing with the deer in New Zealand, "the introduction of the natural enemy is unthinkable from the point of view of the pastoralists."

Captain Sanderson, asked by the Controller of Canadian Resources for a statement of the position in New Zealand, found himself forced to the conclusion that if the deer cannot be fought by a natural enemy, they cannot be kept within reasonable limits by the human enemy. As a natural enemy, man is very inefficient.

When man acts in the role of a deer-stalker, "he takes the cream of the male stock, and therefore reduces the stamina of the deer herd. On the other hand, the less well equipped