

OUR GREATEST FOOD LOSS—SHALL WE HAVE
CATS OR BIRDS?

Margaret M. Nice, 1917.

(Abstract)

One billion dollars worth of our crops are thrown away every year, for that amount is eaten by insects. Birds are the chief enemies of insects. Cats do far more harm to birds than people can do good. F. M. Chapman estimates there are at least 25,000,000 cats in the United States. If only one third of these are fed milk, they would consume 2,000,000 quarts a day, which at the rate of 8 cents a quart brings the maintenance of our cat population to \$160,000 a day or \$58,400,000 a year. Let us estimate the worth of their services in killing mice and rats at \$2,800,000 and that leaves the annual net cost at \$55,600,000.

The estimate of 31,000,000 birds a year slaughtered by cats in this country is based on the assumption that only one quarter of our cat population kills birds and that those cats kill only five birds a year. This estimate is exceedingly conservative. A bobwhite eats 75,000 insects a year; if the average bird killed by cats eats 50,000 insects, cats save each year one trillion, five hundred and fifty billion insects.

Let us try to estimate the money value of these birds to man. A toad has been valued at \$19.88 by Kirkland and at "\$5.00 or less" by Miller. The latter found by extended study that a toad eats 3,200 insects a year or 1-23 of the number a bobwhite consumes. If a toad is worth \$5.00, a bobwhite is worth \$115.00; if a toad is worth \$1.00, a bobwhite is worth \$23.00. As both these estimates seem beyond the limits of probability, let us in order to be perfectly safe, reduce the value of a bobwhite to \$5.00 and the average bird killed by cats to \$3.00, although this will make the toad worth only 26 cents. Then the value of the 31,000,000 birds killed by cats would be \$93,000,000.00. Adding the \$55,600,000.00 for milk makes the cats of this country cost us \$148,600,000.00 every year.