

SEPTEMBER 8, 1988

Coyotes have broken deep into once clean parts of the sheep country out here. Lambs and young ewes are being killed, and the fawn crop is threatened. Such preventive measures as helicopters and guard dogs have been in big demand.

In my immediate neighborhood, it'd been so peaceful the last few years that we'd allowed fur trappers in to work, instead of bounty men. The result of this polecat-and possum venture turned out to be a perfect way to remind the renegade coyotes passing through of the dangers of leghold traps. In those few fateful months of the fur season, we developed a wide scattering of smart, trap-wise sheep killers.

A small spurt in the rabbit population in the spring helped save some of the lamb crops. About then, I think it was, an outfit from out of state began buying jackrabbits in the north part of the country to train greyhounds to race. After it was too late, I realized that I should have been up there outbidding those dog racers so I'd have some rabbits for my coyotes to chase, instead of having them ripping up the hindlegs of my yearling ewes.

Another bet I overlooked was not trying to find a way of harnessing all the advice I was receiving on how to stop the killers. On any day in Mertzon or San Angelo, I'd find from five to 10 expert eradicators seated professionally at the cafe tables under the air conditioner. However, other than these specialists in fur and fang, the closest I came to finding an actual outdoors man was an old boy who was leaving the next morning for an extended fishing trip down on the coast.

A lot of wool sacks are going to go unsold next spring, and the feedlots are going to be missing a lot of lambs unless we regain control of these wasteful varmints. I know of several outfits that are spending enough on predator control to keep an extra family hired at the ranch. I'd always thought imports from the Southern Hemisphere and poison bitterweed were going to be our downfall, but now it looks like that would have been the slow way to go.