

west of the prairie teaching center, is a mountainside tract and an interpretive teaching program which is the envy of school districts throughout the Nation. Each week throughout the school year four classes of sixth graders and their own classroom teachers arrive by schoolbus, laden with sleeping bags—some reluctantly, but most ready for 5 fun-filled days of learning they never forget. In the week the children get to know their teachers better than ever before, and their teachers get to know them too.

Eugene Herrington, conservation consultant for the Colorado Department of Education, and a teacher pointed out to me a boy who had been among the lowest in reading skills before the land-learning adventure. At the end of the year, he was reading everything he could find about “bugs that eat up forest wood.”

Dr. L. B. Sharp told me of a similar experience in Illinois with a failing high

school boy who went on to be a prominent biologist. His motivation: Discovering fish in a favorite creek were full of worms—a fact Dr. Sharp had known and had waited months to guide the boy to discover.

Herrington learned about the importance of outdoor experience quite by accident. Each week during his 11-year stint as principal of an urban elementary school, he walked with a class from the blighted neighborhood to a park a mile or more distant. The route that he chose was a suitable cross section of city life. Hundreds of times children called him to see a discovery they had made. When he responded a youngster would say, “Look, Mr. Herrington, people here have flowers in their yard.”

Later he would learn that the child’s family was moving from the blighted district to the neighborhood of better opportunity and better housing.

## Signs of Good Hunting

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**Y**OUR hunting may be easier and your success greater if you know some of the signs that mean good game land.

Like other American sportsmen, you very likely direct most of your hunting efforts toward small game like rabbits, squirrels, and quail. Sure, you would like to bag a deer or an elk if you can get away for a long hunt; but each year the bulk of your hunting time is spent on the nearby farms or ranches where you try to make out your limit of pheasants or rabbits or some other kind of farm game.

The wildlife you want to harvest is an agricultural crop. It is called “farm game” because it is grown on privately owned farms and ranches that are being used to

produce the more conventional agricultural crops like corn, cotton, and timber which feed, clothe, and house us. While producing these essentials of our human existence, agricultural lands—if they are properly handled—also grow a crop of wildlife. Not all farms and ranches, however, are good producers of game—and for very good reasons.

The amount and the kind of game that an area of land can support depend upon the kind, the condition, and the arrangement of the plants growing upon it. Some



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*(above) The alternate bands of vegetation in stripcropped fields attract wildlife—and knowledgeable hunters. (below, left) Over 2 million farm and ranch ponds provide habitat for wild ducks and geese, and are important watering places for mourning doves and many other kinds of wildlife. (right) Pheasants find food and protection on a stubble mulched field, but they still have to take their chances with nimrods.*



kinds of game require water, too. There must be food plants, there must be other plants for shelter, and the shelter plants must be close enough to food or water so that game can use either with safety. These are the essentials of wildlife habitat. Their presence upon agricultural lands is determined by the way the land operator decides to use his land.

Destructive methods of farming and ranching cause game to disappear. Overgrazing, up and down hill plowing, and unnecessary destruction of the vegetation in fence rows, field corners, and stream bottoms reduce and sometimes completely eliminate the food, cover, and water essential to the welfare of wildlife. Fields and rangelands that are gullied, windblown, and eroded are signs of poor game land as well as improper land use.

### Good Game Habitat

Conservation farming, by comparison, results in greater numbers and variety of wildlife. Conservation farming means that the land operator is using the kind of agricultural practices that avoid erosion, restore and maintain the soil's fertility, and reduce rapid runoff of water. Among the more common of these soil and water conservation practices are contour farming, cover crops, field borders, grassed waterways, the hedgerows, stripcropping, stubble mulching, and windbreaks. These and many more such practices establish recognizable patterns of vegetation that are good game habitat.

Other types of conservation practices are mechanical in operation. These include ponds, terraces, water spreading, spring development, and others.

Soil and water conservation practices are the backbone of modern farming and ranching. And it is hard to find better game management practices or ones that are as acceptable to land operators. Let's take a look at a few of them to see why:

Fields stripcropped on the contour are so striking in appearance that they are almost the badge of conservation farming. These fields have wide strips or bands of crops planted on the contour to reduce water erosion. The crops are arranged so that a strip of a close growing crop like

grass is alternated with a strip of clean-tilled crop like corn. Stripcropped fields have an enormous amount of "edge" where food and cover for farm wildlife are close together. In pheasant country these fields are especially good places to hunt. A farm with stripcropped fields is almost certain to have other conservation practices including a farm pond.

Ponds have spectacular benefits to wildlife. For the past 30 years, farmers and ranchers have been so busily constructing them that now there are more than 2 million ponds in our country, scattered from coast to coast.

Most of these ponds were installed for strictly agricultural purposes such as water for livestock. Regardless of their major purposes, they brought permanent water to places where such water did not exist or where it was available in only small quantities. The effect of this addition to wildlife habitat has been increased production of many kinds of game, but especially of ducks and mourning doves. Bobwhite, prairie chickens, and antelope are among the others also benefited by the additional watering places which are provided by the ponds.

A study of 91 farm ponds in Missouri revealed that every one was used by some species of game or furbearer.

### Windbreaks a Boon

Windbreaks provide food and protection to many kinds of game including pheasants, mourning doves, squirrels, and deer. Windbreaks are used in the Great Plains and other parts of the country to provide protection to crops, livestock, and farmsteads. They consist of one to several rows of trees and shrubs planted at the edges of fields or around homesteads. The range of tree squirrels has actually been extended into our prairies by the planting of these bands of woody vegetation.

From these examples it is easy to see why wildlife is a natural byproduct of conservation farms. Stripcropping, hedgerows, field borders, and the many other practices which make up conservation farming have become the signs of good game land and good hunting.

Look for them.