

EUGENE CASEY

Views of a Changed Land

Eugene Casey is 58 years old and was born and raised in Adair County. When he was 17 years old he enlisted in the army and served during World War II. When he came back he married and started farming. He likes the outdoors, hunting and fishing. Eugene likes to joke around a lot and he's always ready to help when needed. He is always ready to give us hints on hunting.

In this interview we asked him to tell about the changes he has seen in the hunting and fishing through the years.

Q. Has the wildlife changed all that much since you were a child?

A. Well, yes. In a sense of wildlife fish, birds, it's all changed. For instance, back when I was a young boy I used to go on the river with my father fishing. None of the rivers at that time in this area were straightened and we would go over there and fish until night. Normally we would come home with a good mess of fish to eat, or more. The straightening of the rivers also straightened out the fish, too. You seldom can catch any more fish.

As far as game is concerned, there are only a couple of things that I know of that have gained ground, and that would be deer and turkey. I think the first season on that was something like ten or eleven years ago when they had the first deer season here in this area. Back up to the time I was 30 years old I never saw a deer in this area, or any turkeys.

Q. What about pheasants?

A. Pheasants? When I was about 14 years old, a man by the name of Grim Lowe hatched out a bunch of them and for about five years they prospered pretty good. That was back in hard times and I think the money shooters or the game shooters hunted them for profit. The pheasant kind of disappeared.

Q. Are there animals now that weren't here before?

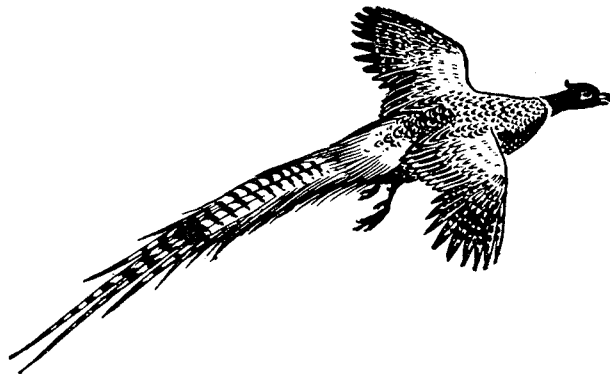
A. Well, for instance, back when I was a kid you seldom saw a ground hog in this area, which was an odd kind of situation, since there are a lot of ground hogs now. But they are on the decline since the coyotes have come in. Coyotes—back when I was young, about your age and younger, you seldom ever saw a coyote. I don't know what it was at that time, but anyway there weren't too many of them around then. But a coyote now is well, a little over plentiful as far as I'm concerned.

Foxes were numerous. Back when I was a young man about you guys' age, I know of one three-year period, for instance right here in this area. People used to make fox drives. There was 139 killed the first year, 150 killed the next, and 140 some, I think it was, the next year. Even then you could never tell you'd hunted them, there were so many of them. Often in the long run they got the mange, which

most often they would lose their hair and they simply died off of diseases. Well, I think people just killed enough of them that they did real good, and they actually overpopulated themselves. Then they died off—when they didn't have enough to eat.

Q. How would you go about a fox drive?

A. Well, almost the same way they do now-a-days, except we didn't have four-wheel drives back then, and all going was done on foot, or on good roads. They would simply quarter off a piece of land and a bunch of guys would go in and walk through it and the rest of them would stay on the outer perimeter. Sometimes they would have dogs turned loose to chase the fox, but if there were enough holes and enough brush around sometimes the fox would get away. In other words they were more than enough to re-populate, even after they got done shooting. The ones that were left simply did better.



Q. When did you get your first permit?

A. That is a good question. I honestly can't tell you. I was about 16 or 17 years old when I started trapping and you had to have a permit then to sell fur. I generally got a hunting/trapping permit and all that stuff about the same time. I think one of the first ones I ever bought only cost about a dollar and twenty-five cents something like that. It gradually went up to something like \$10.90, of course, everything else has gone up so they have to go up too.

Q. You say you did some trapping?

A. I did quite a little bit of trapping. My father trapped quite a bit. He had TB of the bone and he couldn't work at the mines at that time so he simply got out and walked trap lines. I started to walk with him, before I ever started to school, when I was about six years old. At the time, of course, we never had a kid sandbox then, I call it. In other words, a prestart school. I started out in first grade. My birthday came wrong for me to start out at seven years old, so I started when I was eight years old. So I walked traplines a lot with my father.

Q. What all did you trap?

A. Well, mostly muskrat, a few coon and mink. There were quite a few mink, a lot of muskrat, and several coon. However coon was not very plentiful. Then they brought seventy-five cents to a dollar apiece which was not much then, about forty years ago.

Q. They've gone up quite a bit since then?

A. Considering the fact that a lot of them brought \$40.00 to \$50.00 per hide!

Q. What kind of traps did you use?

A. Well, mostly the type they call the simple spring type. Some of them had a long spring. Some of them had a coil spring, which most of them were called leg hold trap. They hadn't come up with the bear or killer traps. My preference today is to use the single spring bear trap because very few animals get in ever gets out—simply kills them in no matter of seconds.

Q. Did you ever use horses when fox hunting?

A. No. No, I never saw anybody use a horse at that time. Those who couldn't walk very good would drive to the outer perimeter, where they could get out and have a shot at any fox that got out, some of the older men, for instance. Young guys that could walk good would take off through the field and flush them out.

Q. What kind of gun did they use?

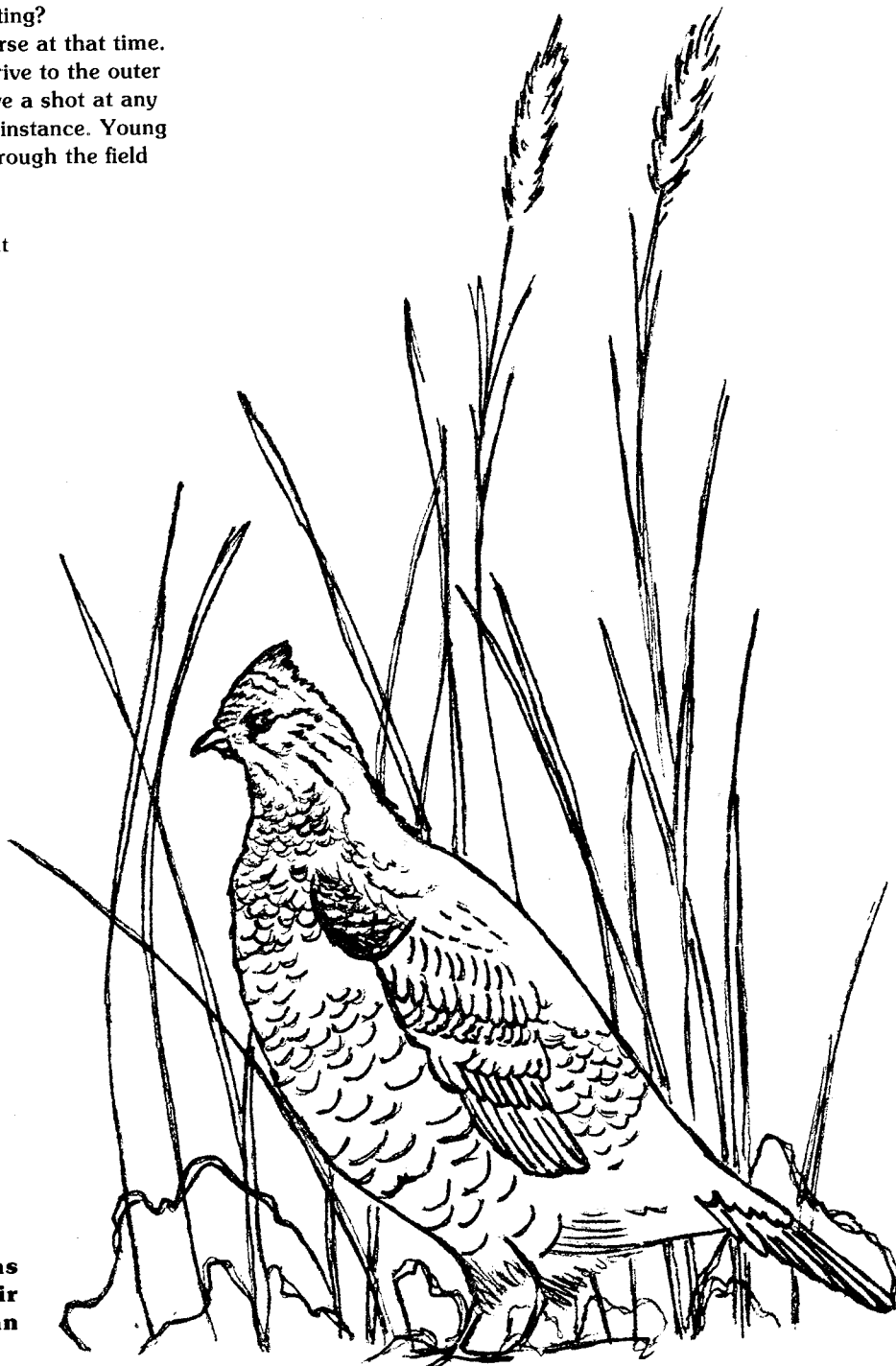
A. They used a little bit of everything. But most of your drives were organized by some leader. Shag Grossnickle was sheriff at that time, and in most cases specified nothing larger than No. 2 shot for a very good reason. They stray too far and might hurt somebody, if they had to shoot through the brush and some of the shot bounced off the ground. In a lot of cases they use rifles, and when I say rifles I mean rifles. Rifles of every description, every kind, shape, bore, and caliber, including shotguns.

Q. Have you seen very many changes in the conservation program?

A. Well, yes I have. I guess you could say they have dedicated themselves more thoroughly to get things done to help people plus themselves. This is a good thing in the long

run. Without the conservation program we wouldn't have turkey or deer. Even since we've had the conservation program around some of the things like the prairie chicken, and the grouse have disappeared. I think somewhere along about '52 or '53 was the last time I saw a prairie chicken. I was taking my kids to school one morning and I saw two of them. They were flying straight north and never did light. That's something out of the ordinary for a prairie chicken to do. In other words they were just passing through.

Story by Wayne Hubbard and Roger Lloyd



The Ruffed Grouse has disappeared from Adair County. (Sketch by John Thomas.)