

in the man, except in his ability to evade capture. Another thing, he never fired into a large flock. No pig in the poke for Joe. He preferred to pick his bird with the same deliberation that Mrs McGinty chooses her Sunday roast at the butcher's. He usually selected a pair or trio.

In a sense Joe didn't cause as much harm as some hunters who enjoy the protection of the law. But a poacher is a poacher. And the law is law. Besides, Joe's disease was catching. Shooting out of season was becoming too common in the St Peter Lake district. I, in my line of duty, was the only effective serum capable of checking the spreading malady.

Another dawn, Sept. 10, 1940, came. While making my early morning rounds I visited my friend who had lost the quackers.

"Joe is still at it," he told me. "I hear shots coming from the direction of his place, and then ducks fly."

"Guess I'd better look him over," I nodded.

"You won't find any feathers," my informant offered. "Joe is too darn cute to leave any signs around. He's like a fox, Joe is."

"True," I admitted, "but even an old fox often falls for a very simple trick. Joe cooks the ducks before he eats them, doesn't he?"

Sudden interest flickered in his eyes. "I see," he said thoughtfully.

I took no risk in tipping my hand so early. For Joe had no phone; my quacker friend had no car. There was no way my intentions could be communicated to the crafty Joe.

I drove off reflecting that Section II of the Migratory Birds Convention Act grants wide powers in the right to search. A game or peace officer may enter a suspect's premises to examine the pantry shelves or the cook-stove oven.

During my eleven years as game officer I have rarely exercised my full powers, and then only as a last resort when the trail was hot.

As I sped down the highway I decided to play my trump card. I turned in at Joe's gateway, slowed down to avoid running over some hens that cluttered the road. My consuming interest at the moment involved the evasive poacher's bill-of-fare for dinner. Lady Luck was to favour me.

I stopped the car close to the house. Three horses had just been unhitched from a binder and were standing by the pump near the barn. The same number of men narrowly eyed my approach. I had never met any of them before, but recognized them from descriptions I had acquired.

The short, oldish, hump-backed man would be Joe's uncle. The father, a tall, elderly man with a shrewd face, flashed a glance towards his son, then looked at me again. Joe, himself, was also tall. He had a hatchet face, shifty light blue eyes and a sandy-coloured mop of hair. A typical poacher.

"Hello, Joe," I greeted easily. "Mind if I look around?" I showed my authority to search the premises for migratory game birds, or parts thereof.

"Go ahead," he answered. "Search your head off. You'll find nothin' here."

A slight breathlessness in his speech belied his bold words. I grinned. Even at this early stage he was obviously worried. I walked toward the chip pile and chopping-block, a favourite starting-place of mine. Joe and his father trailed along behind, while the uncle took charge of the horses. Out of the corner of my eye I saw that Joe's hands were twitching; several times he wet his lips with his tongue. Nervous? He was like a hen with her chicks before a thunder-storm. But there was no sign of blood on the chopping-block, no short neck feathers.