

WildOhio

M A G A Z I N E

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THE WATERFOWL EFFECT

HUNTING LEDGER | GOLDEN EAGLE | OHIO FISH MYTHS

WildOhio

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MICHAL NINGER

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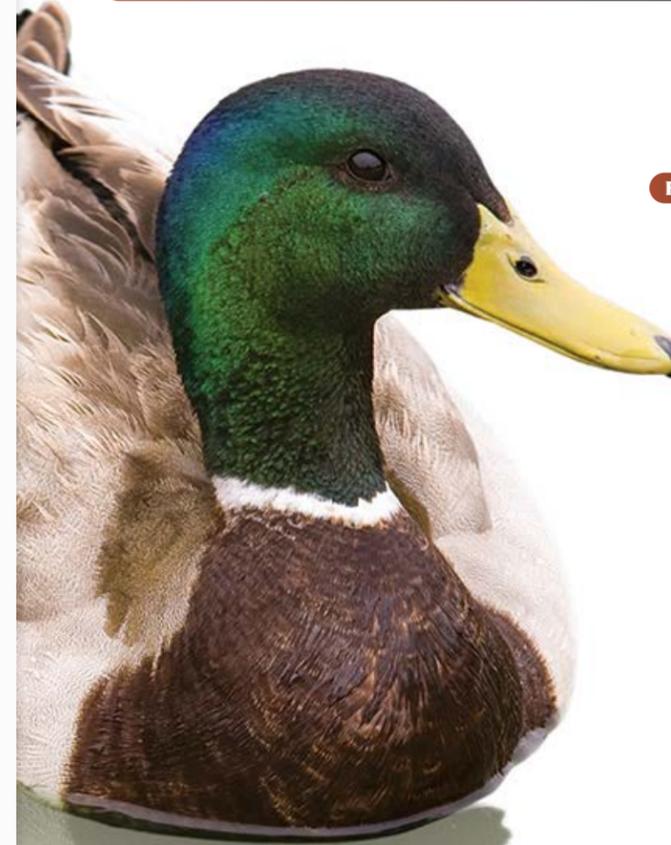
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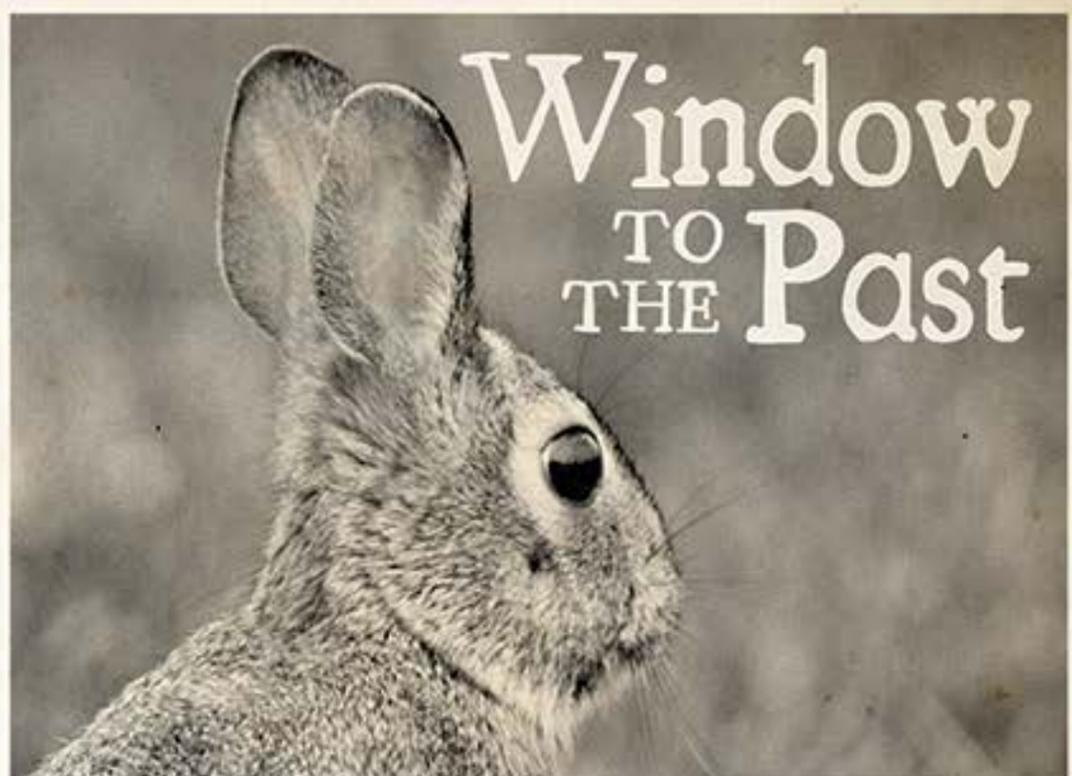
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COMMON MILKWEED
STEPHEN B. GOODWIN

by Mark Wiley
Wildlife Research Biologist, ODNR Division of Wildlife



GREAT-GREAT-GRANDFATHER SHOWS THE BENEFIT OF A HUNTING LEDGER

EASTERN COTTONTAIL RABBIT
CLS DESIGN

Call it what you want, a journal, a record, a ledger, or a diary, but if you are not keeping a written account of your hunting or fishing trips and wildlife observations, maybe this article will convince you it is something worth starting this fall. Make no mistake, keeping a record requires a commitment that some find difficult to maintain. I have struggled to keep a complete record of my own hunting effort, success, and wildlife observations despite frequent reminders of the value of this information. My most recent encounter came while sorting through clutter in my truck's glove compartment. I came across a few folded pieces of scrap paper that at first glance would have been thrown into the trash. Thankfully, I opened them and recognized my own handwriting. Roughly six years ago I scribbled a few dates and described some notable trips afield with my dog Ruby, an English setter.

It is quite a stretch to call these loose scraps of paper a journal, but most of the pertinent information was included (such as a date and location). One of the scraps



described Ruby's first point on a covey of wild quail. The date was Jan. 19, 2009, and we were on private property in Highland County. Although that event had not entirely faded from my memory, the scrap paper reminded me of details I had forgotten. The covey of eight birds was in a wide fencerow which separated a crop field from land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program. It was fantastic Ohio quail habitat. Ruby's point was extremely steady for such a young dog. It was amazing how a few little notes can stir up such vivid memories.

It wasn't long before my nostalgia gave way to regret that I had failed to keep a record of every outing with Ruby. I have made more than 100 trips afield during the course of several years, and Ruby had nearly as many points on quail. Looking back, scribbling a few notes on scrap paper was rather lazy, but at the time I thought flushing quail with Ruby was routine. I only took the time to write down a few notable events because I saw no value in documenting daily activities. Today, I recognize how informative a detailed journal could have been. Which farms had coveys? Just as important, which did not? How many coveys were there? How many birds were in the coveys? How long did I have to hunt to find a covey? These are all questions that I could have answered if I had kept better records.

The value of a detailed hunting journal increases with time. An excellent example of this is a 90-year-old ledger which belonged to my great-great-grandfather, Wilbert (Bert) Wiley. Though I never had the opportunity to meet Bert, I feel I have learned

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WILBERT (BERT) WILEY IN ATHENS COUNTY, 1910.

much about him through his ledger. Most notably, he shared my passion for hunting and fishing. Bert was a farmer and kept records of planting and harvesting dates, live-stock sales, as well as hunting and fishing trips with family and friends in west-central Ohio during the 1920s and 1930s.

Bert's hunting records fascinate me for several reasons. First and foremost, I am his great-great-grandson, and the farm Bert owned, worked, and hunted now belongs to his grandson John, my grandfather. I know the farm well. I have worked on it and have hunted it for many years, as did the three Wiley generations that separate Bert from me. Bert's ledger shows me that the farm was a different place for a hunter 90 years ago. For example, Bert and his hunting party's average harvest was 5.7 squirrels, 4.5 rabbits, and 2.5 pheasants per trip in 1926. In 1927, the hunting party's average harvest was 3.2 rabbits and 1.8 pheasants per trip, and they killed a handful of partridges, which were almost certainly gray (Hungarian) partridges. Although I can still find rabbits, pheasants, and squirrels on the farm, Bert and his buddies always found more.

Though priceless to me personally, the value of Bert's records extend well beyond my ties to him and his farm. As a wildlife bi-



GRAY PARTRIDGE
ERIC ISSELEE



Late 1920s or early 1930s, Ohio game wardens releasing cottontail rabbits.

ologist with the ODNR Division of Wildlife, I recognize that hunter records are an invaluable resource. My great-great-grandfather's ledger is among the oldest detailed records of daily small game harvest rates I can access, and it has helped me better understand the history of Ohio small game populations.

If Bert was still alive I believe he would be surprised by the relative scarcity of pheasants and rabbits on his farm compared to the 1920s and 1930s, as well as the absence of quail and gray partridge. However, I think he would quickly recognize why these changes occurred.

According to his ledger, Bert sowed oats or barley each spring and frequently planted grasses and clover. Bert kept cattle, hogs, and other livestock that required fences, pastures, and hayfields. These farming practices were common in the early 20th century and created excellent habitat for small game to safely nest, forage, and evade predators. Bert's small grain fields, pastures, and fences have been replaced by larger fields, as is the case for much of Ohio. During the past century, the landscape of forest and farmland had changed considerably, which has caused declines in popular game species such as pheasants, quail, and ruffed grouse.

Not all wildlife populations have responded negatively, though. Some species have flourished in the current Ohio landscape. White-tailed deer, wild turkey, and Canada geese are now common sights on what was once Bert's farm, but his ledger makes no mention of them because these species were rare or entirely absent then.

Bert had no way of knowing that his great-great-grandson would one day use his farm ledger to revisit great years of small game hunting in Ohio, and his diligent record-keeping has paid dividends. However, there

are a few missing bits of information that could have made his ledger more useful. For example, Bert did not record the location of his hunts. I presume he hunted locally or on his farm in Union County, but I can never confirm that. I would also be interested in the number of animals he encountered, rather than just the number harvested. For example, Bert's ledger is missing records of quail; though I am certain quail were present. I am told that Bert was a renowned quail hunter until 1917, when quail were listed as a songbird and no harvest was permitted. This protection carried on through the 1920s and 1930s.

Bert was also known locally as a skilled marksman, rumored to carry only enough shells for a daily limit. In fact, while hunting with Bert, my grandfather John was always allowed the first shot. If John missed, Bert was sure to finish the bird or rabbit. "Wiped your eye again," Bert would joke with his grandson.

Knowing what I do about Bert's skill with a shotgun, I'm left wondering if he harvested every animal he came across, or maybe he allowed several to pass before one presented a shot. If Bert had recorded the number of flushes, as well as the number of hours he hunted each day, I could more easily compare his 90-year-old encounter rates with those of modern hunters.

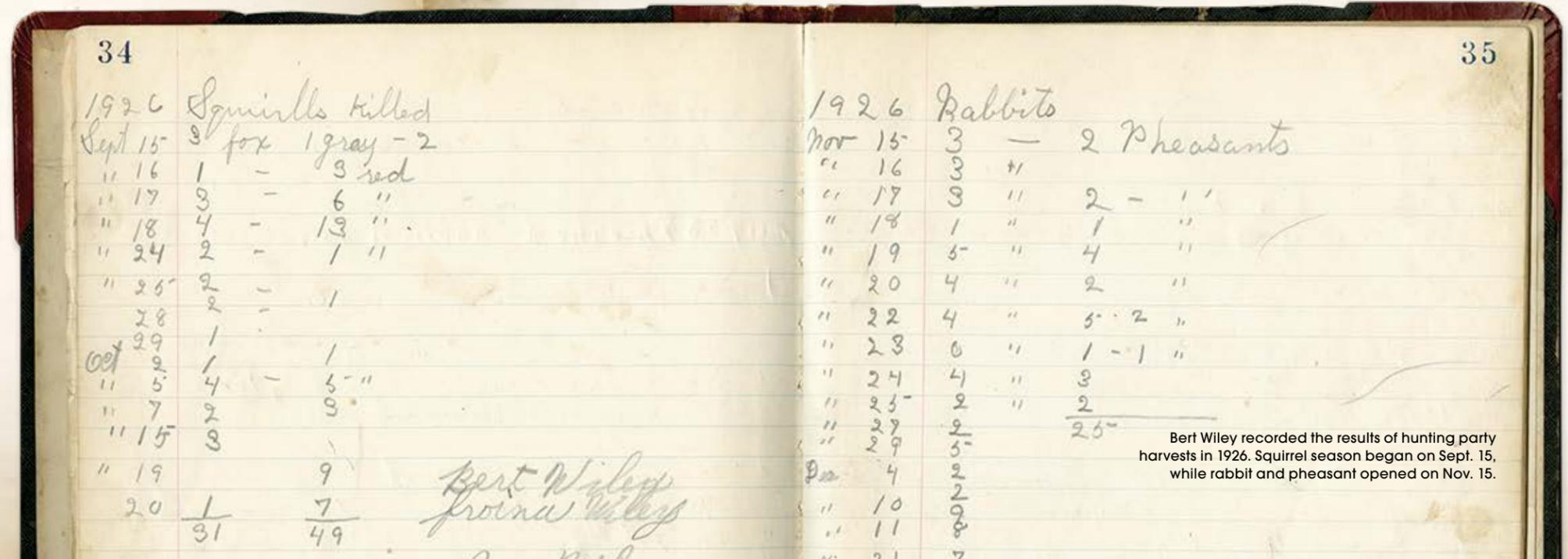
Encounter rates are useful in wildlife management, which is why it is important to quantify your flushes and observations, along with hunter effort, location, date, and harvest. Wildlife biologists commonly use this information to track patterns in wildlife abundance and hunter activity. In fact, the ODNR Division of Wildlife organizes several voluntary programs for Ohio hunters and trappers. For example, the division has distributed ledgers to ruffed grouse hunters since 1972. These dedicated volunteers record the details of each grouse hunt during the season and submit the information every spring. A few grouse hunters have participated in this program for more than 40 years. Similarly, the division has distributed observation forms to bowhunters since 1990. These volunteers use the forms to record the number of species (deer, coyote, fox, raccoon, and others) they encounter in the field, as well as pertinent details from their hunts (such as location and date). Many trappers keep their own records of effort and success. The Ohio fur taker survey has been mailed to licensed trappers annually since 2009 to gather this important information.

Online options are available as well and offer similar advantages. For example, many bird watchers report information to citizen science efforts such as eBird.

Whether you hunt, fish, trap, or watch wildlife, consider keeping records of these adventures. A journal is an excellent way to preserve memories, share your experience with future generations, and even assist biologists with wildlife population monitoring. If you have questions or are interested in participating in any ODNR Division of Wildlife hunting and trapping observation programs, please call 1-800-WILDLIFE (1-800-945-3543) or go to wildohio.gov.

INFORMATION TO INCLUDE IN WILDLIFE RECORD ENTRIES

- **DATE** Remember to include the year.
- **WEATHER** Include temperature and conditions, such as rain, snow, and wind.
- **LOCATION** Be specific and use landmarks that are unlikely to change.
- **EFFORT** Include time spent scouting, traveling, and party size.
- **ENCOUNTERS** List the species and numbers of animals observed.
- **HARVEST** You can also add information such as the bag limit and season dates.
- **PHOTOS** Print them out and use a staple or paper clip to attach them to the record.
- **ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANT TO ADD** List equipment, companions, or whatever seems important.



Bert Wiley recorded the results of hunting party harvests in 1926. Squirrel season began on Sept. 15, while rabbit and pheasant opened on Nov. 15.