

MAKING PETS OF WILDLIFE NOT THE kindest THING TO DO 7/08/97

Last week I commented on the abundance of wildlife young this year and reminisced on memorable encounters with wild young in past years.

Like most kids, I was fascinated with wildlife of all kinds. I made pets of about every species of wildlife that was not protected by law and that was fairly safe to handle.

Woodchucks make great pets and I started with them. A field near my home afforded me my first opportunity to capture one.

A noose of fish line circling the den and leading to my hiding place in the tall grass placed the first one in my hands. It required no taming and was soon a household pet.

His favorite pastime was riding the dust mop as Mom dusted under the beds and about the house.

Foxes were numerous and it did not take me long to graduate to them. I located a den and dug out a litter of four. They tamed easily and I sold all but one, which I raised.

She soon adjusted to a collar and leash to be led about the neighborhood. Naturally, she became popular with the other kids. After the novelty wore off and the reality of care set in, I succumbed to the lure of hard cash and sold her.

My most popular pet was a crow. My sentiments, however, were not shared by others. I guess I appreciated his sense of humor more than most. We called him "Jim" and a more intelligent or mischievous pet would be hard to find.

There were no dryers in those days, so every house had its clothesline. Jim loved to prance along the line pulling clothespins as he came to them. Failing, however, to dislodge a pin, he enacted his revenge by relieving himself on the clothes. In the case of a large sheet billowing conveniently in the wind, the results were quite dramatic.

Jim carried off any bright, shiny object he could manage. I was continually searching for people's keys, jewelry, etc.

Jim's favorite daily pastime was riding perched on friend Bill Murphy's shoulder as Bill made his way through the neighborhood on his bike delivering papers.

It was this habit that led to Jim's banishment to the hinterlands by my Mom. Jim would land on little sister Adelia's head and firmly bite her ear.

Hermit Hook, who lived up on Oneida River, gave him a good home until late that fall. Jim left with his wild brethren when they began to flock. Thus, he returned to the life nature planned for him all along.

I now realize that my appropriation of young wildings was not the kindest thing to do. Today, the law protects most wildlife from human interference for the benefit of both them and humans. Wild young should be left alone, unless they are obviously in danger of their lives. Wildlife officials should be consulted before acting unnecessarily and to their detriment.

Some wildlife mothers insure by their nature and attitude that they will tolerate no interference with their young. Some observations on that next week.