

## FOXES AND MYXOMATOSIS IN KENT

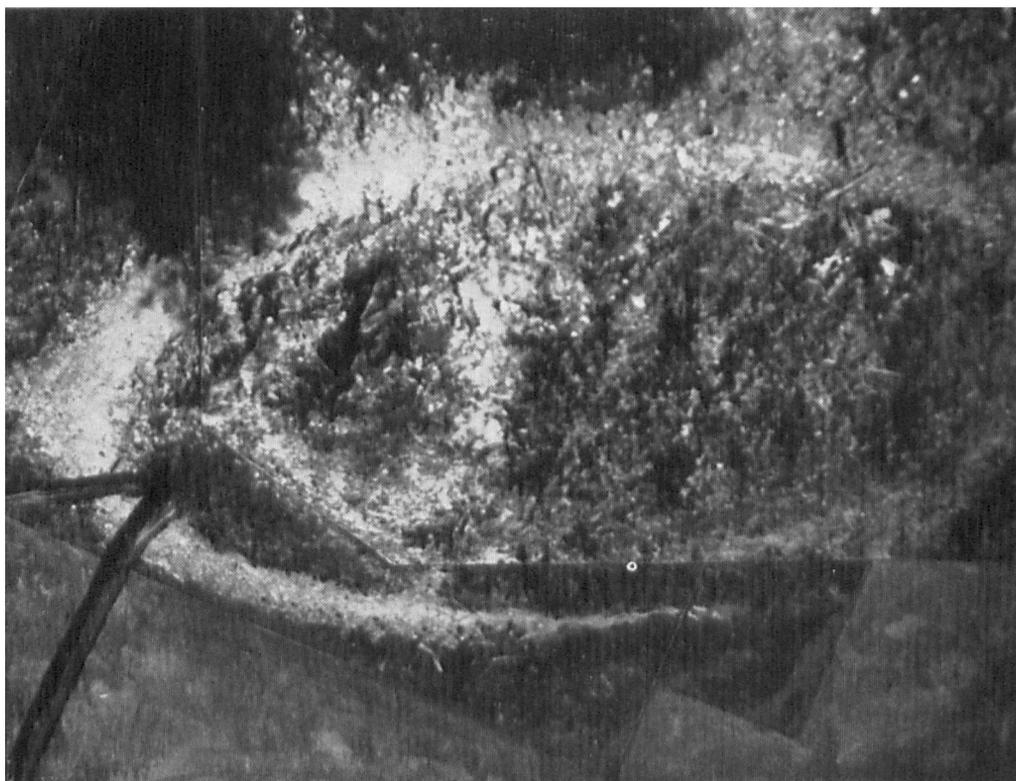
By G. COBNUY.

We shot or otherwise took over 100 foxes in this area during the spring. I opened a great many of them and, apart from a few odd ones, the diet appeared to have gone over to the same as the badger, omnivorous. There is no doubt that foxes are eating quite a lot of vegetable matter where the rabbits have disappeared due to disease, but I have never seen better and healthier foxes than of late, with two exceptions, which, of course, one normally expects, for there are always odd wasters in all species of animals and birds. Those which had full stomachs have invariably contained poultry and/or game, and once a coot, but by far the greater number had empty stomachs with intestines usually full of faeces, mostly vegetable matter. From this I deduce that their varied diet goes through them quickly but is ample to keep them in first-class order. The one exceptional stomach, of a vixen, was full of grass! There has been no case of malnutrition or food-crazy foxes, they are behaving quite normally.

\*A story in the Press recently of a boy being attacked by a fox can be dismissed as due to the fertile imagination of the boy. In a lifetime's experience I have never known a fox to show any inclination to attack unless in a trap. It is their nature to slip off in front of danger and of man in particular, hence the ease with which a party of guns, who know their job, can drive and shoot them.

In mid-Kent fox cubs are usually dropped in the last week in March, but some quite a time sooner, and in March I predicted that if there was going to be trouble with lambs and game, it would be when the cubs were about fourteen days old and began to want something besides milk. February-born lambs would be too big to tackle, but late March and early April ones would have to be watched. In the event my prediction was fulfilled; losses of lambs in some parts have been appreciable. A friend of mine farming in Devon lost eleven; a neighbour, who is on the County Agricultural Committee and farms on high ground, lost three and a near neighbour of his lost eight. These lambs were usually taken from twins in their first few days of life; a ewe with one lamb is very well able to look after it.

My observations on foxes and game were limited to one litter which took some time to locate, being about three-quarters of a mile off the estate. Losses on the nearest beat were rather extensive. From the time the cubs began to want meat—late



**Flint Pit.**

**ROE DEER RING, LING HEATH, BRANDON.**

April to 14th May—over thirty sitting hen pheasants and a few early sitting partridges were known to have been killed. When the litter was found the earth was a shambles of pheasants' wings, remnants of domestic fowl and one hare. The landowner told me that the vixen was on the hunt at all hours of the day and was very bold in face of danger.

The seven cubs were big, strong specimens when I found them. Whilst watching the litter one evening I saw an enterprising tawny owl visit the earth and search for remnants. It came three times during my watch and was quite annoyed at my presence.

Quite as many stoats and weasels have been with us as ever. Though they are mostly living on wood mice and house mice, they have been troublesome with the game chicks. A family of weasels—dog, bitch and five young—suddenly found paradise in one corner of the rearing field *via* a mole-run and accounted for twenty-seven chicks two to four weeks old before we caught the last of them. This was a tricky job with so much tall grass about. Both stoats and weasels have normally raided birds' nests so there is nothing new in that, except that they may have done a bit more of it.

There has been no lessening of the rat population through myxomatosis for neither foxes nor stoats like the larger adult rats, though they will take the very young if they can get at them. It may disappoint many people but it is a fact that foxes do not relish either adult rat-meat or moles any more than humans like dog.

One thing in conclusion—poaching cats in the game-chick season are a menace which requires removing, or your game crop will soon go down. Dogs, on the other hand, have given no trouble since their favourite quarry, the rabbit, went.

## NOTES ON ROE DEER

By F. J. TAYLOR PAGE

### AN UNUSUAL ROE DEER RING

The ring shown in the accompanying photograph was made in mid-July by a roe doe and her twin fawns. The site chosen for their play was an old flint excavation near Brandon in Suffolk. During the early nineteenth century individual miners extracted flint by digging vertical shafts which were later filled in. A large number of crater-like pits and mounds of excavated