

THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN SHEEP (*Ovis canadensis*) IN BRITISH COLUMBIABy **ALLAN BROOKS**

THE range of the Rocky Mountain Sheep or "bighorn" in British Columbia as given in the recently published book, *The Conservation of the Wild Life of Canada* (Hewitt, 1921, pp. 78-81), is found, according to the observations of the writer, to need considerable revision.

PRESENT RANGE (Brooks, 1922)¹

1. Bridge river north to Chilcote plateau, east to Fraser river, west to Chilco Lake.
2. Mountains south of Similkameen river, at one point north of Similkameen river near Hedley.
3. Mountains east of Vaseaux lake, north to Penticton, south to McIntyre (Sawmill) creek.
4. Shorts' creek (Biche river) west of Okanagan Lake.
5. Various points in Rocky Mountains north to 55°, probably 56°, or even further north. Very local, and absent from long stretches of this range.

FORMER RANGE

Forty years ago ranges 1, 2, 3, and 4 were more or less confluent wherever conditions suitable to sheep occurred. Sheep also extended along both sides of Okanagan lake and east of the Fraser river to near Clinton. It will be seen that the range of sheep in British Columbia was always very restricted. Most of the mountains of British Columbia are quite unsuitable for sheep, and none were ever found at any point in the Selkirk or Cariboo Mountains.²

HABITAT

An altogether mistaken idea persists that mountain sheep are confined to high altitudes. Even at the present day in British Columbia they may be found in the foothills down to 1000 feet where the ground is rugged enough, especially in late winter and spring. In the present year (1922) sheep, especially old rams, were seen as late as June regularly down to 1000 feet just east of Vaseaux lake.

VARIATION

The sheep of British Columbia have been split up into several subspecies. It is doubtful if any of these are warrantable. Even in such isolated colonies as that of Shorts' creek I have seen a large variation in horn pattern in both sexes, and the colour of adult animals ranges in this confined district from very dark (normal) to extremely light

individuals. Of course in no part of its range in British Columbia is there any intergradation towards the very distinct sheep of the *Ovis dalli* type represented by the white *dalli* and the very dark *stonei* with all the intergradations between them.

ENEMIES AND DISEASES

The mountain sheep of the greater part of the dry interior were wiped out forty or fifty years ago by the introduction of rifles to the Indians and the introduction of domestic sheep to their range. Scab decimated the sheep of the region east of the Fraser river about 1870. A virulent disease that affects the heart and liver is now being introduced into the mountain sheep ranges Nos. 2 and 3 by domestic sheep that are brought over to graze from the state of Washington by sheep-herders. The government veterinary at Osoyoos is unable to determine this disease. Lumpy-jaw was very prevalent in the range of *Ovis dalli* and its subspecies (north side of Stikine river) up to 1908, but is now apparently stamped out. This disease never occurred in the ranges of *Ovis canadensis*(?). Ticks were very bad in 1897 and 1898. The ears of rams killed were packed to the drum with larval ticks, pale blue with sulphur-yellow legs. None were found in the ears of rams killed in 1902 and 1905.

Enemies other than man are principally cougars (mountain lions), coyotes, and golden eagles. These exist in large numbers on all the ranges, especially those on which no hunting is done. Coyotes, the large northern species, *Canis lestes* (Merriam), and Golden Eagles get, between them, at least seventy-five per cent. of all the lambs on two of the ranges on which I have had an opportunity to observe. This prohibits all possibility of any increase. The making of a sanctuary or the enactment of a perpetual close season must be accompanied by the appointment of a capable guardian to achieve any result.³

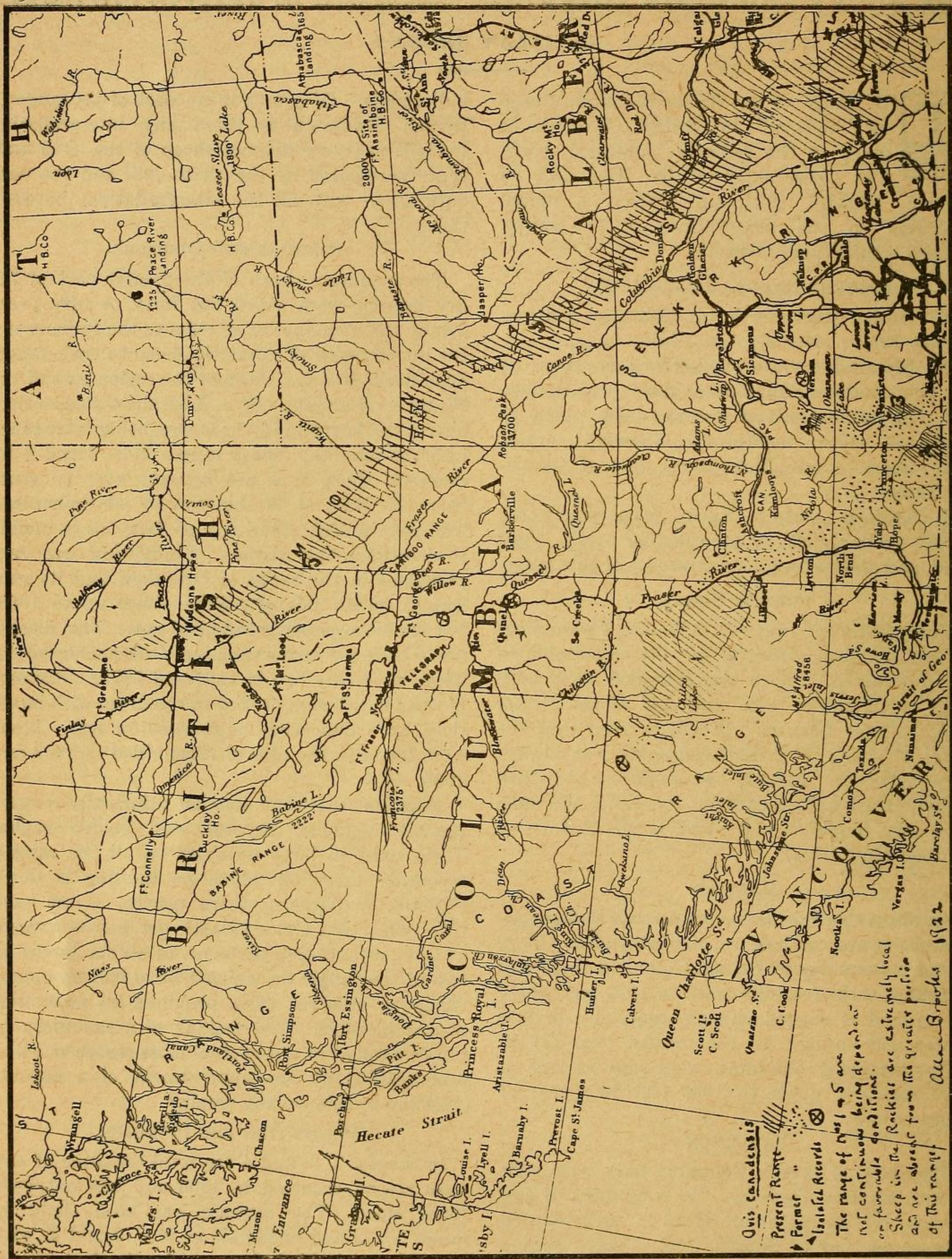
PROTECTION AND INCREASE

In ranges, 2, 3, and 4 the total cessation of any open season occurred in 1906 and has not been lifted since. The increase has been slight in range No. 2 and negligible in Nos. 3 and 4, with probably a decided decrease in the last range. The following suggestions for the protection of the

¹See accompanying map.

²The often quoted record ram (now in the possession of W. F. Sheard of Tacoma) was killed in the Rockies and not in the Selkirks as everywhere quoted.—A. B.

³Vernon Bailey in his *Wild Animals of Glacier National Park, of northwestern Montana* (Washington, 1918) notes a similar destruction of mountain sheep, mountain goats, mule deer, and western white-tail deer in the park by coyotes and mountain lions, and repeatedly emphasizes the need of control of predatory species if the game animals are to increase in any park or sanctuary.—A. B.



Rocky mountain sheep in British Columbia are submitted:

1. The total prohibition of grazing permits for domestic sheep on any range inhabited by mountain sheep is imperative.
2. The appointment of a warden on each of

the ranges 2, 3, and 4, and several wardens on ranges 1 and 5.

Such men must be good trappers and be resident on the range all the year. They must not be local stockmen or ranchers, but men whose entire time is devoted to the extermination of predatory

animals and birds as well as the enforcement of existing laws, especially as regards poaching by Indians. A salary of about \$1200 or \$1500 per year would be sufficient to induce the right sort

of man to take the job, especially if he be allowed to trap fur-bearing animals and also to collect bounties on the animals and birds he kills.

THE AMERICAN MAGPIE IN MANITOBA

By *NORMAN CRIDDLE*

PREVIOUS to 1920 the Magpie was considered a rare resident in Manitoba, being more casual in its appearance than otherwise; it had, however, been observed in fair numbers in southern districts from time to time by early settlers and on a few occasions nests were discovered.

In the fall of 1921 Magpies invaded the province in much larger numbers than usual and as a result they were met with at least as far north as Dauphin and east beyond Winnipeg. At my home near Treesbank the birds were in daily attendance around the farm yard, where they picked up any article of diet available, the dust heaps being especially attractive to them. A similar bunch of visitants was present at most of the farms where trees afforded shelter and many found their way into the hands of taxidermists.

Judging from the personal evidence available I should say that Magpie's prefer the semi-wooded or broken lands for breeding places. River flats surrounded by prairie, or valleys bordered by high hills, seem to afford them the situations they desire most. The birds, for instance, seldom if ever, breed in the woods near my home, yet I found them to be nesting freely at Estevan, Sask., amid the fringe of mixed woods bordering the Souris river. In a similar way they were common summer residents in the foothills south-west of Calgary in Alberta, where I found several nests in low willow bushes.

As known to me the Magpie is a bird of shyness when man is concerned but one of great audacity in relation to other animals. They have a suspicion of man just as the Crow has, but may be tamed with patience. They move about among cattle, on the other hand, with absolute fearlessness, at one time hopping among them, at others resting upon the animals' backs. It is interesting to see their freedom in making themselves at home among the live stock and it leads one to suspect that the same antics were performed amid the buffalo in former days and possibly among the deer too. They have all the dislike of their relations, the Crow and Jays, for Hawks and Owls, which they mob with similar persistency. Naturally cats come in for their share of abuse,

while coyotes are sometimes followed for a considerable distance, possibly with the idea of securing the leavings from the wolf's feast. My observations on most of these points, however, are of a casual nature and might doubtless be greatly enlarged upon by observers who have lived where the bird is a more permanent resident.

The Magpie appears to be almost omnivorous in its food habits. Nearly any thing from vegetable to animal matter is eaten. Berries, grain, meat, insects, eggs and young birds are among the food known to be consumed and the birds have been condemned severely for their bird-destroying activities. I am not prepared to discuss this question. It may be over-rated, as similar ones have been through prejudice; on the other hand, the destruction done may be all that is claimed. An interesting point in the birds' food habits that has recently come to the fore is the injury to live stock. We have very few records of this in Canada but one that has been related to me by my brother, Stuart, seems well worthy of note. He wrote under date of February 24, 1922, as follows:

"We have a fine lot of Magpies here (Treesbank, Man.) this winter, six or seven of them have used the cattle shed as a sleeping place, resting on the animals' backs over night. They have also been seen constantly skipping about on the cattle during the day time. I have kept a very close watch on their movements and last week noticed that one of the cows had a sore near the base of her tail, originated, I think, by the skin having been knocked off by accident. The Magpies had also noted the injury, and within two days enlarged the wound until it was fully two inches across and half an inch deep, besides which the surrounding flesh and skin were much swollen. I at once begun to treat the sore and filled it with cotton wool, which the Magpies promptly pulled out as soon as my back was turned. They then proceeded to further enlarge the wound. Curiously enough the birds seemed to be so gentle that the cow took no notice of them, indeed she seemed to rather like their attention than otherwise.

"As the Magpies are handsome birds and interesting I had devoted considerable time to an



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The Canadian field-naturalist.

Ottawa, Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club.

<http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/39970>

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