



## Native Wild Mice

BY JOHN F. BREEN

It is reasonable to suppose that most readers of this article have, at one time or other, kept mice as pets. Even as this is read, you may recall with fond memories your childhood and that first pair of charming, pink-eyed white mice you were able to call your very own. It is not possible to say with certainty when the practice of keeping pet mice started, nor how it started. A matter of common knowledge, however, is the fact that there exists hardly a species of mammal in the world that has not been tamed and kept as a pet by Man.

As animals go, the wild house mouse (*Mus musculus*), from which have evolved our fancy mice, is not particularly susceptible of domestication. Indeed, it is tamed only with difficulty and usually retains a very nervous temperament. It is only after years of selective breeding that the present numerous varieties of fancy mice have been developed. Interesting as these pet fancy mice are, they do have several disadvantages as pets. Perhaps the most important of these is the strong, musky odor which continually permeates the atmosphere where they are kept. There have been ingenious methods of reducing this odor, one of which is the use of pine-scented sawdust in the cages, but this method, like the others, is seldom really effective where a number of the rodents are kept. Native mice have no such characteristic odor.

Then too, fancy mice are susceptible to certain diseases, chief among which is the cold, which are rarely if ever found in captive specimens of our native wild mice. But—enough about the disadvantages of pet fancy mice. They have long been, and will

doubtless long continue to be, favorite pets of child and adult alike. Even more interesting as pets than these domestic mice, however, are several species of our native woodland mice. These may be easily caught in the commercial live traps, or in simple home-made contrivances of the box variety. Traps may be set in the runways of the small rodents or along old stone walls bordering meadows. They should always, however, be placed in a sheltered position or covered well with leaves, twigs, etc., so that they will not be exposed to the direct rays of the sun. If not so protected another hazard lies in the possibility of a sudden rainfall, which will often drown the occupants of a trap. For bait, almost any edible substance will do, though a mixture of finely-ground bacon, raisins, and peanut butter has been found by the writer to be most effective. Such traps should be visited frequently—twice a day is not too often—for mice and other small mammals are quick to perish in the absence of food.

The most interesting of the wild mice which may find their way into one's traps is the dainty white-footed mouse (*Peromyscus*). These elegant little mammals are various shades of brown and fawn above, with immaculate, snowy-white stomach and feet, from which they receive their name. White-footed mice possess enormous eyes and ears, which give them a very quaint appearance. Among the most docile of our countryside denizens, white-footed mice may be handled with impunity from the moment of capture. Mice of this group breed freely in cages and once in a while an albino

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By D. D. Livingston

Costs of raw color film recently were increased, and now most one-reel subjects in color sell for about \$80-\$90, or rent for between \$3 and \$5 per day. One reel is approximately 10 minutes if sound; 15 minutes, if silent.

This is about double the prices for black-and-white film, but the extra attention value and tripled beauty make it well worth while.

A number of excellent nature study films are available in full color. One series, produced by David Schneider and edited by Wm. F. Kruse, is called "WHAT BIRD IS THAT?" These teacher-made silent films of American bird life are arranged in novel form to encourage student participation. Each bird is pictured in typical habitat. Size, feeding and nesting habits, and other distinguishing features are shown—then there is a pause for discussion, and answers are given. A quick review concludes each reel.

"BRIGHTLY COLORED BIRDS", the first reel, covers the robin, wood thrush, Eastern bluebird, blue jay, white-breasted nuthatch, Baltimore oriole, cardinal, rose-breasted grosbeak, starling, and purple grackle.

"BIRDS OF NEUTRAL COLOR" shows sparrows (song, white-throated and English), the towhee, flicker, downy woodpecker, brown thrasher, catbird, black-capped chickadee, house wren, and two black-birds: the red-winged, and the rusty.

"WATER BIRDS" completes the series with ducks (mallard, canvas-back, wood), the pelican, flamingo, swan, ring-necked stilt, blue and Canada geese, and herring gull.

In the animal line, there is among others, "FUR COUNTRY," 22 minutes, produced by the National Film Board of Canada. We go along with an Indian trapper on one of his periodic visits via dog-sled to his trap-line in the region of James Bay. Mink, fox, and beaver are taken, skins dried, traded. The best way to dry a pelt is shown.

(Subjects mentioned may be rented from Films of the Arts and Sciences, 39 East 35th St., New York 16, N.Y.)



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occurs in a litter of young. One breeder succeeded in developing a strain of albino white-footed mice.

Possibly one or more of the reader's traps will contain specimens of the field mouse (*Microtus*.) Field mice are unattractive creatures, their small eyes half hidden in agouti-brown fur. The tail is very short. These mice are quick to bite so should be handled only with heavy gloves. They are difficult to tame and do not readily adjust themselves to confinement. Unless one wishes to seriously study mice of this group, it is best that they be avoided.

Next to the white-footed mice in suitability as pets are the jumping mice (*Zapus* and *Naozapus*.) Jumping mice are less common than either white-footed or field mice and are erratic in their occurrence, tending to form isolated colonies. As their name indicates, jumping progresses by a series of hops when alarmed. Though hardly larger than an ordinary house mouse, the distance one of these mice can cover in a single leap is truly remarkable. It is not at all unusual for a mouse of this kind to cover a distance of ten feet in a single jump! The long tail apparently acts as a balancer in these jumps, for it has been noticed that bob-tailed mice seem unable to maintain their equilibrium, with the result that attempts are clumsy and unsuccessful. Jumping mice are our only native mice that hibernate during the winter. Captive individuals should, therefore, either be released in early fall or kept in a cool place and provided with a suitable nest-box for the winter sleep.

In the foregoing paragraphs of this article, but three kinds of native mice have been discussed. There are many other species, less common, which are equally suitable for confinement. Examples of these are the pine mice (*Pitmys*), pocket mice (*Perognathus*), and others. The care of all these native mice in captivity is very similar to that required by fancy mice. So much has been written about the care of the latter that it would be superfluous to repeat it here. For the benefit of the novice mouse enthusiast, suffice it to say that a wealth of such information may be obtained by consulting past issues of All-Pets, as well as books on the subject. In one respect the care of native mice differs somewhat from that of the fancy varieties. This concerns meat. The including of

meat in the diet of fancy mice is not generally advocated, while native mice are practically dependent upon small quantities for their well-being. By "small quantities" is meant, perhaps, a teaspoonful of scraped raw beef or hamburger per mouse each week. Persons who look with disfavor on the trouble (or fun!) of going out into the field and trapping mice may sometimes procure them from dealers very reasonably.

## No Customers Unwanted

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tapping on the glass, fiddling with the equipment, and in general, disrupting the whole concern. At last he stopped before the largest aquarium in the place, a bathtub-like structure that was maintained more for convenience than beauty; in fact, it was a catch-all for surplus plants and overgrown fish.

"What's the price of this one?" he asked.

The dealer took the opportunity to squelch him and named an exorbitant figure.

"I'll take it. When can you deliver it?" The answer came without delay.

Then it was up to the dealer to explain that the tank was old and poorly built, apt to leak, difficult to maintain, full of odds and ends, and just plain impossible to move. Rather hesitantly, he suggested that instead, he could construct a modernized version, properly planted and stocked. Inwardly, he was very worried. The man had stated that he wanted it for his children; few persons, even the

experienced hobbyist, would want so huge a display; then too, from all appearances it might be difficult to collect the price. Nevertheless, the suggestion met with instant approval and detailed plans were made. As the stranger left the shop, he tossed a card upon the desk. He was a prominent physician in the city!

Since that time he has spent over a thousand dollars on tanks, fish, and equipment; and he has become one of the finest customers the dealer has. Naturally, such cases happen rarely; but without conscientious treatment, this contact would have resulted in complete failure to both.

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