

# Army Begins War on Ground Squirrels

Ground squirrels on military installations in California are victims of the Army's planned attack using 1080, a deadly poison.

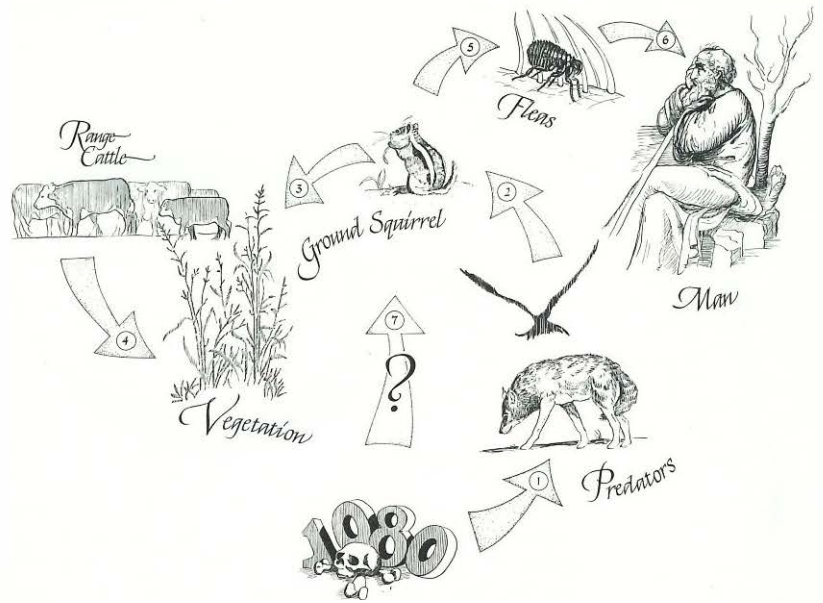
The Army claims the ground squirrels carry fleas that could transmit bubonic plague to the human population. As HSUS views the situation, there are no grounds for poisoning the squirrels to get at the fleas. Inquiries into the planned war on ground squirrels suggest the over-magnified fear of bubonic plague may not be the only reason the Army is intent on ridding the military installations of these rodents. It is suspected the Army is using California installations including Fort Ord, Fort Hunter Liggett and Camp Roberts as a "proving ground". If approved in this contrived "emergency" situation, there is little doubt it will ultimately lead to the use of the 1080 (sodium fluoracetate) poison on all government and public lands.

The poison 1080 was banned in a Presidential Executive Order in 1972 since it is not only highly effective in killing ground squirrels but is violently toxic to a wide spectrum of other wildlife as well. There is no antidote to this drastic toxicant which is highly poisonous to man and domestic animals and whose secondary effects have devastated much of the ranch land in California. "Secondary effects" mean an animal eating one already poisoned is itself poisoned as a result of ingesting the carcass. In California areas being proposed for use, it would threaten federally protected endangered species such as the San Joaquin Kit Fox, Peregrine Falcon, Southern Bald Eagle and possibly the California Condor.

Until 1080 is approved, the Army is placing grain poisoned with *warfarin* in bait boxes near the squirrel's burrows. This poison causes internal bleeding and considerable suffering: the animal literally drowns in its own blood.

What is the basis for this terrible suffering already taking place and the more widespread suffering to be initiated with the use of 1080? There is no justifiable basis for the Army's claims that the human population in the areas where ground squirrels are abundant might contract bubonic plague. Further, the Army claims the ground squirrels are doing much "damage to road embankments, radar emplacements, airfield shoulders, building foundations, training devices . . . trees . . . ballfields, front lawns and landscaping."!

HSUS does not dispute the fact there are too many squirrels in the California test area. But, they do ask the question why? Previous use of 1080 before its ban eliminated natural predators



such as the fox and coyote. Also, range mismanagement has been compounded by overgrazing. According to Dr. Michael Fox, Director, Institute for the Study of Animal Problems, "It is quite conceivable the selective grazing habits of cattle combined with overgrazing help create a habitat ideal for ground squirrels. Thus another aspect of natural squirrel control, before resorting to poisons, would be to exercise controls upon the number of cattle being grazed on the range land. This, however, may not be acceptable since it is in opposition to the short-range goals of ranchers who seem to be myopic in their understanding that they are creating a scrub-desert with their outmoded methods of range management."

Little thought has been given to reintroducing natural predators by the Army. Natural biological controls are essential. Already the Army plans to use *carbaryl*, dusted around the burrows, to control fleas. This alone should suffice to limit the possible flea transmission of bubonic plague to man.

If left alone, the squirrel population which has been allowed to go unchecked for so long (one may well wonder why) may ultimately peak and crash: self-regulation of animal populations is a well recognized socio-ecological fact. Even burning the grass land around vital installations and road embankments may suffice to biologically regulate burrowing colonies in specific problem areas: they would have less food then.

HSUS plans to continue following this issue and demanding humane treatment and a more sensible ecologically responsible approach to these ground squirrels.

## Vicious Circle

- ① Poison 1080 reduced squirrel predators such as coyote;
- ② Squirrel population increases;
- ③ Competition with livestock for vegetation increased;
- ④ Overgrazing by cattle may further increase squirrel population;
- ⑤ Fleas from ground squirrels may transmit disease to man;
- ⑥ Possible future use of 1080 poison on squirrels will ultimately devastate the range land and insure the extinction of many 'non-target' species;