

Letters to the Editor

Letters—with photographs, when possible (packed flat, not rolled)—for insertion in *THE "FIELD,"* from any part of the world, are welcomed. They should deal with topics and incidents of general interest to the Sportsman (and Sportswoman), Traveller, Student of Wild Life and Nature Lover. Title, rank and full name and address of writer must be given, but letters can be signed by a nom de plume if preferred. Letters should be as short as possible, and in any case not more than 500 words.

SWIMMING WITH WINGS

SIR.—Lord Rothschild's letter in your issue of July 15th raises a very interesting question. Until last autumn, when I published my *Book of King Penguins*, I was under the impression that the cormorants, when swimming under water, used their feet only and held their wings close to the body, and that only two families of birds living in the world to-day, the penguins and the auks, used their wings in swimming beneath the surface. I could find little definite guidance on the point in existing books, and my own observation, so far as it went, confirmed me in the opinion I have mentioned. I have watched several of the auks—guillemot, puffin, razor-bill and little auk—and all of them swim with the wings and hold the feet straight behind them, as the penguins do, when swimming under water. I have also watched cormorants, albatrosses, gannets, divers, and grebes under the water, and could never detect any sign of the wings being used in this way. In my book, therefore, I made the guarded statement that, so far as I was aware, the auks were the only existing birds, besides the penguins, which used their wings in this way. Among some interesting correspondence which that book brought me, however, I received a letter from Dr. R. Cushman Murphy, of the American Museum of Natural History, New York, who informed me that the use of the wing in swimming beneath the surface is not confined to the two groups I mentioned, but occurs in several other families of aquatic birds. In particular he mentioned that many cormorants in a wild state literally "fly" under the water (as the penguins do) in quest of their prey, and that the same is now known to be true of certain ducks; also, that the shearwaters and other species of petrels do the same thing. It seems, therefore, that the swimming wing has a wider use than one had supposed.

Yours faithfully,
T. H. GILLESPIE.

The Zoological Park,
Edinburgh.

AN UNCOMMON SNAKE ?

SIR.—Walking along the bank of the River Frome, near Wool, Dorset, a day or so ago, I disturbed a species of snake which I cannot recall to mind during the many years I have lived in these parts. The reptile was lying coiled on the bank within five feet of the water, and upon feeling the vibration of my feet, slithered off into the stream and swam across to a tuft of weed, and waited until I should retreat.

Anxious to watch the movements of my quarry, I waited, and in a short time it returned to the bank; but whereas I thought it might prove to be an adder, distinguished by the diamond marking down its spine, I noticed that it had alternate rings of brown and buff round the body from head to tail. Moreover, the head was partly encompassed by a clear white ring of about one half-inch width and the nose was of a bluish tinge.

The snake was perfectly at ease in the water and swam with amazing strength against a two-mile-an-hour flow. Its overall length was not more than 2ft., and in no part was it thicker than a man's forefinger. Had I a fishing net I would have captured him alive; but loth to kill him, especially as I suspected the presence of young ones, I contented myself with throwing a missile, whereupon he again took to the water, and, after making much play with his little tongue, withdrew himself from my reach and swam across to a willow tree and drew himself up into its branches, which were just topping the water.

Should any of your readers be able to enlighten me as to the species of my "find," I should be extremely grateful.

Yours truly,
Richard Cardell.

Bournemouth.

SPORT, GAMES AND PASTIMES

SIR.—What a funny thing is language! To-day the wrong use of words seems increasingly common. Anybody who picks up a daily paper will find in the index "Sport, pp. 6-10," or something like that. If he were very young, he might take the pennyworth of advice to back Bumblepuppy each way in the 3.30. But this, with the usual exceptions, will be as near any information or news about sport as anybody can get that way. So much has been written about sport that here it is intended only to differentiate between sport and other affairs.

Sport, plain, without an article, is as different from "a sport" or "sports" as is chalk from cheese. To take an absurd instance, killing rats in a barn with a ferret and a terrier is sport; while polo between Jaipur and Oamaston, however sporting the play may be, is a game. Again, riding a drag may be jolly good fun, but no argument can alter the fact that it is no nearer being sport than is trap-shooting.

A list of those pursuits truly called sport is not very long, and as this letter is intended for the young, it may be a good plan to name them, more or less at random.

Hog-hunting or pig-sticking, big game shooting, fishing, hunting with hounds (or cheetah), hawking, and small game shooting—these, and these alone, are sport with a capital "S."

Sport, in one sentence, is the fair pursuit of some quarry, animal, bird or fish. There is a corollary, danger. This may be only the risk of being drowned in a salmon pool or peppered by a fool with a gun, but it is always there.

Now we come to racing. The danger is there; but racing is "a sport," not "sport." Mr. Jorrocks called fox-hunting, not racing, "the sport of kings, the image of war without its guilt and only five-and-twenty per cent. of the danger."

Boxing is, or should be, a sport. Then there are many athletic tests of which the kernel is competition. Games have been dealt with so exhaustively that all we need say here is that for it to be said of a man that his game is sporting is the finest compliment.

Last, but not least, come pastimes, among which, without seeming invidious, mountaineering may be placed first.

Yours faithfully,
J. A. H.

London, S.W.

A "COCK" LAYING EGGS

SIR.—At a shepherd's house at Stukfield, Broughton, Peebleshire, there is a White Wyandotte cock, which has recently laid four eggs. The shepherd's wife saw this cock enter a shelter in which she had just looked for eggs, and two hours later she discovered a peculiar long-shaped egg. This happened four times. The eggs were all long in shape but quite up to the 2oz. standard weight. The above cock has charge of 40 hens, and their eggs have proved very unfertile, only 30 per cent. having been fertile. The cock is a very handsome bird, out of a pedigree stock.

Yours truly,
G. D. R.
[Similar cases have been recorded of animals changing sex. Usually, however, it is in the other direction and the hen changes into a cock. We think that Professor F. A. E. Crew, Animal Breeding Research Station, West Mains Road, Edinburgh, would be interested in this case, and might like an opportunity of examining the bird.—Ed.]

ELEPHANTS AND RHINOS

SIR.—I had a very exciting time last night, and should say almost unique. I went up to the Tree Tops Hotel by myself, having carefully chosen the night of a full moon. This is what happened; you can believe or not.

At about 6.30 p.m. I heard an elephant trumpet, and soon afterwards two elephants went past, but did not come out into the open. These were quickly followed by a third, which started to dig for salt; however, it got tired of the place, as the water there is dried up and the ground is terribly hard. It was then 7.30 p.m., so I went in and had some dinner.

When I came out on to the balcony again, I found that a rhino had turned up, and so I watched him for about a quarter of an hour, after which another one came along. No sooner did it approach the salt-licks than the one already there (which was the bigger of the two) gave a loud snort which evidently caused the smaller one to stop. They then looked at each other for some time and the smaller one advanced, whereupon the larger also advanced until they were within about five yards of each other. The smaller one then turned and ran round the salt-lick with the other galloping after it. Halfway round it turned and charged, and they met head-on with quite a loud report.

They pushed each other again and again, manoeuvring all the time like professional boxers, each trying to get the better position. This went on for about a quarter of an hour, when suddenly from the other side out charged four elephants,

bellowing for all they were worth. The smaller rhino, which was getting the worst of the fight, ran away, but the other was furious and turned and gave a terrific snort and charged the elephants, who incidentally had their young ones with them. They were not in the least perturbed by the rhino and simply stood and watched it coming. Within ten yards of the elephants, the rhino decided that it was a bit too dangerous, and so turned round and walked away to the far corner.

The elephants were really quite amusing, and there was one baby no bigger than a large dog. After a short time another elephant appeared from a different direction, and was immediately attacked by one of the others.

The rhino again thought it would join in and started to charge; but one of the elephants gave the most terrifying bellow, which was enough to frighten the life out of anybody, and the rhino was so frightened that it turned and fled into the forest.

After this the elephants remained for about an hour and then went off one by one, at about four minutes interval. As the last one went off it gave a bellow, which was taken up by all the elephants in turn; the one in front bellowed about a mile away in the forest.

No sooner had the last elephant disappeared than the little rhino came back, but as it saw the large one also coming it rushed off into the forest.

It was then 11 p.m., so I went to bed, but I was woken up again at 3 a.m. by elephants, which remained till 5 a.m.

Yours faithfully,
H. JEFFREYS.

Kenya.

FIGHTING GULLS

SIR.—On July 17th I went for a run across Breydon Water in a Breydon punt with its owner, a little before sunset. With the exception of many scores of greater black-backed gulls resting after the day's feed and several hundred black-headed gulls on the edges of the flats, few birds of any interest claimed our attention. Some terns, holidaying from North Norfolk, and a parcel of small shore birds, not forgetting a dozen or more herons, with a half-score of very sizeable young shelducks of the year thrown in, paddled and picked up floating trifles, as well as hydrobia shells.

When about to turn into the 5-stake drain, we observed a queer commotion among a score or more grey and black-backed gulls. A great old saddle-back was disputing with as large a grey-plumaged bird over a handful of pork sausages, which had in all probability been thrown out of a yachtman's cabin. The tugging quickly developed into a lively scrimmage, whilst the other birds became exceedingly agitated. Presently the older bird dropped his prize and seized the grey gull by the throat; and then the scrimmage became a relentless combat. The blackback suddenly grabbed the other by the neck and threw it, amid much ruffling of the water, and actually tried to hold it under water. This lasted some minutes, when the winner left his hold to shake his plumage, the other to pull himself together, like a bundle of wet rags, and shake himself dry. The blackback followed the floating sausages and captured them, and picked them up and swallowed them, almost at a bolt.

The oddest thing about this combat was the evident enjoyment, as well as amazement, that held the others more or less spellbound. In my 60-odd years of Breydonian observance, I have never seen a sparring match like it.

Yours truly,
A. H. PATTERSON.
Houseboat Moorhen III., St. Olaves.

MOVING A TIT'S NEST

SIR.—At Easter this year, while at my cottage in Morden Park, Dorset, I was informed by my children that a marsh tit had built its nest and laid some eggs in the boat which they hoped to use on the lake during their holidays.

I investigated and found two eggs in a nest built in the bottom of the boat in the angle formed by the back board and the side. During the course of the next three or four days the children took short trips in the boat, but were careful not to disturb the nest. Each day another egg was added; and realising that the mother would shortly begin to sit in earnest, I had to decide whether the children should have no more rowing or whether the marsh tit should be foiled in her efforts to rear her family in the boat.

While deliberating this problem I noticed that the corner of the boat-house floor would hold the nest exactly in its best shape, and that the nest would only be moved 6ft. to this new position, and that it must easily be seen by the bird on its return. That evening I proceeded to the boat-house with a flat spade and, with gloves on, moved the nest with six eggs in it.

Later on I returned and saw the tit sitting tight on the nest in the new position. In due course she hatched out her brood, and the children got their rowing—so everyone was happy!

Yours, etc.,
United Services Club, Grey D'Oyly-Huwsa
Pall Mall, S.W. 1. (Capt. R.N.)