



## Readers' Letters

### Earwigs in ears

I was told by an officer on Sir George Luck's staff, that when they had manoeuvres on Salisbury Plain in 1898, 50 or 60 men sleeping in tents on the ground had earwigs in their ears. I was told this in 1898 when it happened!

R. S. NEWALL,  
SALISBURY, WILTS.

### In praise of the poetic

As a scientist, I found John Fowles's 'presentation of the poetic view' of the natural world (January issue) most refreshing and offer my thanks.

I hope, though, that his statement 'we are evolving much more rapidly than any other species on our planet' is meant as poetic licence and not as scientific truth.

In fact we are not evolving at all. Nature's method is to weed out the least fit (for the environment at the time) before they reach breeding age. Apart from infant mortality, which strikes mostly in under-nourished populations with a high breeding rate and merely eliminates a section of the physically weak, nothing like this has happened to us for a long time, perhaps 200,000 years. Man is therefore in a biological backwater. This is perhaps why we have failed to adapt ourselves to the growth of our power over the earth.

JOHN HARDING,  
BOOKHAM, SURREY.

I should like to express my enormous pleasure at the article by John Fowles - a creed for civilisation. Beautifully written, full of sense, and unashamedly personal and emotional.

J. H. HATCH,  
CAMBRIDGE.

### Badger sense

Having read the article on badger watching by Wildlife Reporter Graham Leick (January issue), I feel bound to write and correct the impression he has

regarding badgers' sight. It has been extremely poor sight, in fact it has been proved by various authorities that the animals are half-blind.

Photographs have been taken of badgers emerging from their setts straight into the full glare of powerful torches held within 10 feet, and showing no sign of fear, simply because they are unable to see the full impact.

These animals rely on their powerful senses of hearing and smell, and I feel sure that the reason why the watchers were so unlucky watching their first sett, was because they were in the wrong place and the animals could sense their presence, and they may also have heard the slightest movement.

I have been badger watching and deer watching, and also know the thrill of seeing a fox in its wild state for the first time.

MRS F. B. BISHOP,  
POOLE, DORSET.

### Pledge census

Having read, and thoroughly agreed with your article on the preservation of cats and other rare fur-bearing animals, I decided to conduct my own small research survey. I asked round the local houses for opinions on the fur question, and the answers were as follows:

33 per cent didn't know;

50 per cent were against killing;

Of the remainder, one person said 'I'll ban it when I've got my leopard';

And another said 'It's alright on Raquel Welch!'

LINDEN COUTS (AGED 12),  
PINNER, MIDDXX.

### Rhino and radio

I must protest about the photo of a poor rhino being fitted with a radio transmitter (October 1970). I think this drug-darting has gone too far. There are other ways to observe and study wildlife without knocking them out with a dart gun and opening their mouths to check their teeth. The rhino has so many marks on his body that a telephoto study with a good camera or binoculars could easily provide identification of each animal. I recently saw rhinos being darted at Ngorongoro (on television) and after the poor animal was knocked out, the scientist pried open its mouth with a steel rod! It was admitted on the programme that one large rhino nearly died from an overdose of drugs.

We very rarely hear of the animals killed from drugs while trying to save them. One expert said that he would like to shoot every polar bear in the Arctic with a dart tag so that he could insert an ear tag and/or a radio transmitter in them. One of their teeth was to be pulled out as part of the experiment.

I believe that drugging animals is necessary when moving them to a new area, but the general darting for ear-

tagging or insertion of markers should be severely curtailed, perhaps allowing one animal of a species per game reserve. Let the scientists study animals with binoculars and patience. They are only disturbing wildlife when they knock out an animal with drugs. A little of this should go a long way. I feel that the money spent on this type of animal study would be better spent on purchasing more land. It is the habitat of the animal which must be protected as well as preventing the poaching. By spending the thousands of dollars now spent in drug darting, for the purchasing of and fencing of more wild areas, we will be saving the animals instead of just studying them. Let the scientist who wishes to look inside an animal's mouth, go out with hunters and check the game they shoot. Then he can examine the animal's stomach if he wishes. But let us put a damper on wholesale darting of our animals. There is just too much of it and the money could be better spent elsewhere.

ROBERT P. L. STRAUGHAN,  
EDITOR, SALT WATER  
AQUARIUM MAGAZINE,  
MIAMI, FLORIDA.

### Polar bear

I have just finished reading a report issued by IUCN on a meeting held early in 1970 on the polar bear.

Although all the resolutions taken were no doubt excellent, it seems to me that no concrete effort is being made (except in the USSR) to remove the main danger to the survival of the polar bear - hunting. Why is it so difficult for governments to put a ban, temporary or otherwise, on hunting? Hunting as a sport is *not* an economic necessity for western man, nor is it performed or enjoyed by the greater part of the human population. It is certainly a lucrative business for a small minority, and to a certain extent for the state, but the bulk of the population derives no benefit from it whatsoever. Yet this feudal minority - the hunter and the arms manufacturer - seem to be in a position to dictate arbitrary laws and regulations to the detriment of the great majority of tax-payers and voters, and to generations to come.

Are we to understand, therefore, that it is still the small armed groups which control a situation even in democratic countries, and if this *is* so, should we not retaliate in the same manner? Perhaps our governments would take more notice of our wishes and rights then.

TINA FOERSTER,  
TRIESTE, ITALY.

### Hovering gulls

I only recently came across the letter from Ivor Montagu in Orkney (December 1970) about the 'hovering' of gulls. I was most interested, because during my holiday last summer in Fetlar in Shetland, we noticed the same behaviour in both

ANIMALS 13 (12) April 1971

5323

## SMALL ADS

Price 15p per word. Box numbers 25p extra. Small advertisements to be prepaid and sent to ANIMALS, Dennis W. Mayes Ltd, 69 Fleet Street, London E.C.4.

SWANS Big Game and Bird Safaris to East Africa - see page 563

YOUNG married ex city gent who saw the light in time and now warden woodman for National Trust seeks interesting position in conservation. Keen and hard working. Box No. 2013.

ARTIST requires help and advice to obtain zoological illustration work. Any suggestions welcome. London: would travel. Box No. 2014.

BINOCULARS - Telescopes. 25% discount on SWIFT range. 20% on Zeiss, Leitz, Ross, Pentax, etc. Send for price list. Seven days approval service. 36 models to choose from. Heron Optical Co., 15 Short Croft, Doddinghurst, Brentwood, Essex. Nave-stock 3498.

ICELAND waterfowl eggs for hatching. Many species. Booking orders for 1971 season. S. Palsson, Halldorsstadir, Laxardal, S. Píngeyjarfyllu, Iceland.

KERNOW Cats. Siamese, Burmese, Abyssinian, Rex. All colours. Kittens for sale. Studs available. Dobermann Puppies. Mrs. P. Evely, 1 Church Path, Old Coulsdon, Surrey. Downland 52594.

MAGNIFICENT Pyrenean Mountain Dogs. Ideal family companions and guards. Puppies and young stock ready now. S.A.E. for illustrated particulars. Mr. & Mrs. Prince, Penn House, Bramshaw, Lyndhurst, Hants. Tel: Earldoms 252.

REPTILES, Amphibians. List FREE, J. D. Naturalists, 51 Sandy Road, Seaforth, Liverpool 21.

ASSORTED back numbers of ANIMALS, all different. Price £1 (\$2.40) for each selection of 12 different back numbers, all prior to 1966. Please specify Selection A, C, D, or E when ordering. Enclose payment with order to ANIMALS, 21 & 22 Great Castle Street, London W.1.

POETRY wanted for co-operative book. Free criticism. Send poems to Regency Press (B9), 43 New Oxford Street, London, W.C.1.

JANE SCOTT for genuine friends. Introductions opposite sex with thoughtfulness and sincerity. Details free. 5d stamp to Jane Scott, 50/A1 Maddox Street, London, W.1.

KEEP your copies of ANIMALS tidy and handy for future reference in a hard-wearing, attractive easibinder. Each binder holds 12 copies of the magazine and costs £1 (\$2.40). Payment with order to ANIMALS, 21 & 22 Great Castle Street, London W.1.

common and black-headed gulls. They were hovering over - if I recall rightly - cow-parsley more than 7 feet tall, in the wind-cover of a large stone wall. As the air was thick with insects we rather supposed that the gulls were after them; they never attempted to settle. I wonder whether shortage of insects in the isles is the reason - I have never seen it done elsewhere.

ERNEST C. STERNE,  
LEEDS, YORKS.

### Communists on Aldabra

For some years a mysterious Norwegian colonisation of the island of Aldabra has been mentioned in various publications. In his book *Aldabra Alone* (London 1970), Tony Beamish has even written:

'In 1879 a party of 40 Norwegian communists, including a number of children, arrived on the island to found a fishing settlement. They seem to have vanished leaving no trace behind. What happened to their scheme is unknown.'

Earlier, in the *Seychelles Bulletin* of 29 March 1967, the following information was published by Guy Lionnet, the Director of Agriculture:

'The first attempted settlement of Aldabra seems to have taken place in the 1870's when a group of Norwegians occupied the previously uninhabited atoll. A group of 27 adults and 13 children is reported to have sailed from Bergen in July 1879 to establish a colony on Aldabra. They were to be joined by another party of Norwegians at Nosy-Bé off Madagascar. But the fate of these colonists is unknown.'

During my stay in the Seychelles in 1968, Mr Lionnet kindly told me that his source was *The Green Turtle and Man* by James J. Parsons (Gainesville, Florida, 1962). The author in turn got his information from an old German journal, the *Petermanns Mitteilungen* which, however, does not give the whole story.

During the course of writing a book about the history, natural history, and so on, of the Seychelles and other Indian Ocean islands - which is scheduled for publication soon in Sweden, under the title *Fragments of a Continent* (that is, Godwanaland) - I have obtained facts about those settlers.

It is true that a ship, *Deborá*, sailed from Bergen on 17 July 1879 with the said number of colonists. (They were certainly not communists but on the contrary they were very religious people, connected with Norwegian missionaries already stationed in Madagascar.) The background to this expedition was that during the 1860's to 1880's in Norway, there was a great interest in Madagascar, and rumours had been circulated about Aldabra being a rich island with valuable forests, and prospects for plantation agriculture.

The emigrants, who had sold their property in Norway to obtain funds for

their venture, therefore believed that they were heading for a tropical paradise where they would be able to start a prosperous colony of the (then) united kingdom of Sweden and Norway, exporting timber and other products from Aldabra to South Africa.

Having arrived at Tulear, Madagascar, on 17 October 1879, however, they learned that they had been the victims of misleading information, and that conditions on Aldabra made settling there impossible. After two weeks of discussions, the disappointed and rather desperate emigrants decided *not to proceed to Aldabra at all*. Some of them remained in Madagascar, while the majority left for Durban, still on the *Deborá*. Most of these settled in Natal, but some eventually returned to Norway, where one of them was finally appointed harbour missionary in Bergen. In the meantime, much was written in the Bergen newspapers about their expedition, and a detailed report was published as late as 1965 in the *Norwegian Yearbook of Maritime History*.

I hope that this letter will serve to prevent further circulation of the myth of Norwegian 'commies' or other colonists, who mysteriously disappeared on the atoll of the last wild giant tortoises.

BENGT SJÖGREN,  
VEBERÖD, SWEDEN.

### Butterflies of the Pyrenees

Michael Tweedie's interesting article in the December issue of your magazine, put me in mind of an occasion when I was trying to photograph two swallowtails in Yugoslavia. They were a European swallowtail and a scarce swallowtail, and were fluttering over a piece of waste ground by the roadside.

My attempts at photography were continually frustrated, for almost as soon as one butterfly settled, the other flew down and disturbed it, usually at the moment when I had it placed nicely at the centre of my viewfinder. This interplay between the two butterflies and myself went on for about half an hour, and though I hardly dare say so it seemed to me that the butterflies were engaged in a kind of game; the scarce swallowtail would sail gracefully to and fro above the area with a characteristic flutter and glide, then, when the European swallowtail settled, usually on the ground, it would flutter gently down and start it flying again. Then, when the scarce swallowtail settled, usually on a twig or stem, the European swallowtail, with its faster flight, would swoop down and set it off again.

I lingered to watch the two butterflies at their 'play' and saw a second scarce swallowtail come flying overhead, some 15 or 20 feet up. My scarce swallowtail saw it too, and shot straight up in pursuit at a high speed; the two butterflies