

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor welcomes letters from readers for these columns but they must be brief. Photographs, to accompany letters, are invited which illustrate points of interest, or deal with curiosities of nature and of matters concerned with the countryside.

STEEL GINS

SIR,—A great service has again been done by *The Field* (Jan. 10th)—as so often in the past—in drawing attention to the steel or gin trap. The promiscuous misuse of this instrument of torture could be virtually stopped or reduced to a minimum, if the Ministry of Agriculture would make up their minds whether the rabbit is "stock or pest." They cannot have it both ways. In Pembrokeshire last season the weight of rabbit flesh produced in that county exceeded the combined weight of beef and mutton by some 25 per cent. No wonder there was a great shortage of hay and other produce last spring.

Many years ago cheap traps and rail transport created a profitable market in rabbits which was then mostly confined to recognised warrens on land not much use for anything else. High prices in 1914-18 and the breaking up of estates then encouraged commercial trapping to spread still further.

To-day it has spread—and rabbits with it—all over West Wales. A farm near here, trapped for the first time in 1915, produced only some 200-300 rabbits, 13 foxes, some 30 weasels and stoats, and an odd cat or two. Every year since, 2,000-5,000 rabbits have been caught. Pheasants, hares, and partridges have been exterminated. In spite of all efforts by the W.A.E.C., that farm will continue to produce large numbers of rabbits, fed on valuable dairy or corn land, until the Ministry makes up its mind whether the rabbit is stock or pest.

The Forestry Commission also largely hinder the efforts of the W.A.E.C. to clear rabbits. Under the management of the old estates, the valleys and dingles of West Wales produced good timber. Much was cut in the 1914-18 war and was not re-planted owing to the break up of estates. The small owner farmer was not in a position to clear or re-plant. The remaining timber was commandeered and cut in the last war, and the "lop and top" left. These dingles now harbour millions of rabbits and spread every kind of weed. Yet, valuable and profitable "sheep runs" inland are being taken to grow trees, where trees have never grown before. If the dingles and valleys could produce good timber under private management surely the Forestry Commission can do so—and leave the sheep runs to the sheep.

I have just re-planted two such steep coverts which, 45 years ago, before commercial trapping started, were planted with *no wire round them*. Now the whole district swarms with rabbits and wiring them out has been a costly business.

If the Ministry of Agriculture have the courage to deal with the production and marketing of an agricultural pest which now fetches up to 8/- on the black market and 3/6 on the white, they can solve the problem of rabbit damage and the cruelty of open trapping. Trappers and dealers are not in the business for the good of their health. The trapper is not going to cut his own throat by clearing rabbits completely. He traps in winter and earns very good money at a very rough job. In summer, when rabbits are not marketed, he often works on the roads under the County Council.

If the trapper were paid a good wage all the year round (particularly in spring and summer, when rabbits are breeding), to clear rabbits off by every available means under the supervision of the W.A.E.C., and above all was told that he could not market rabbits from that land the following season, there is every reason to believe that little would be heard of traps or rabbit damage. The Government could well undertake (and finance) rabbit clearance as they do drainage and other schemes.

W. H. BUCKLEY

Castell Gorfod, St. Clears, Carmarthen.

SIR,—I was pleased to see in the issue of January 10th a very excellent article headed "Cruelty to Animals," dealing in the main with the use of the steel "gin." I was equally gratified that this should have appeared in such an authority as *The Field* with its close connection with sport in the country.

My opinion of the steel trap is that it is loathsome and detestable. It is difficult to imagine a more painful or prolonged death than that of a rabbit or other animal with its foot caught in such a trap, and in all probability lying and slowly dying in torture for hours or even days. It is time that a country with its fine, clean record of sport like England, outlawed this detestable practice.

R. H. C. TOWNSON

163, High Street, Guildford.

HEATHER RENEWAL

SIR,—In your issue of January 10th, Mr. Dugal Macintyre states that "when heather is burned, renewal must be, and in fact is, entirely from the old roots."

The "must be" is difficult to understand, and the fact is usually not so, but from buried and dormant seed. Proof can at once be got by plucking up the young green shoots in the autumn or the year after a burning. All come up readily, each with its tiny root system spreading downward from the green rosette.

They are young plants, typical seedlings and entirely unconnected with the old roots. If sheep are feeding, many such plantlets may be found lying clear, having been pulled up and dropped, probably from a large mouthful.

Regeneration from roots of old imperfectly burned heather may occur on wet ground or at the edge of a burned strip, but seed is the normal source of recovery. It is, therefore, better to avoid burning when the ground is very dry.

Regeneration that starts in the second year after a burning will, of course, be aided by wind-blown seed; and that is another reason for burning in strips which leaves blossoming old heather close to the denuded ground.

T. R. ELLIOTT

Broughton Place, Peeblesshire.

KERRY BEAGLES IN ENGLAND

SIR,—With reference to the interesting article on the Scarteen Black and Tan

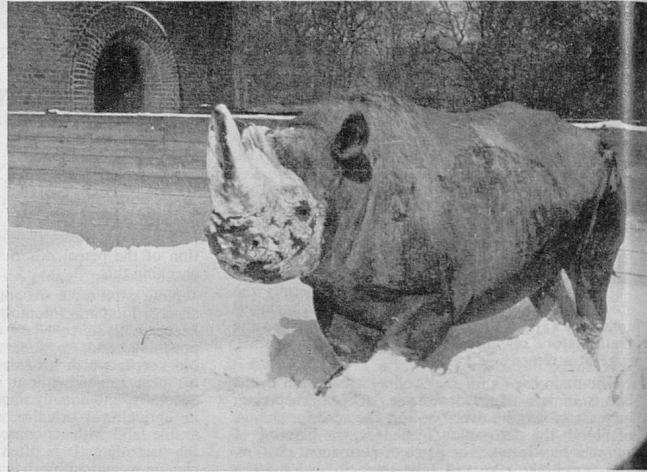
Kerry Beagles in your issue of January 3rd. I remember, round about 1900, I think, bicycling to see the pack of Kerry Beagles which then hunted the Woodland Pytchley country.

I do not recollect where the meet was, but I remember seeing them draw a small wood near the Northampton-Market Harborough road. They were rather tall, lightly built hounds. I remember they struck me as being particularly active at getting over fences.

It would be interesting if any of your readers could give any reminiscences of this pack, whether in praise or criticism, and information as to what happened to them

stories of previous kills. After two hours' wait, the dogs and beaters approached and the result was a blank. More beaters seemed to have joined the party and we counted a total of 13, all with guns as seen in the photograph.

The second drive meant a long walk, only relieved by lunch. This was also a failure and for the lack of success we were given a string of excuses on the day, the dogs and the effects of the war. We decided to leave the deer until another day and went after the kiji (pheasant) instead, but after having walked almost round the island the



FARU, A RHINO IN THE COPENHAGEN ZOO, ENJOYS A SNOW BATH

(See letter "A Whitefaced Rhino")

when they ceased to hunt the Woodland Pytchley country. I have been living in this country until lately for a short time, and asked several people whether they remembered these hounds, but none of those I asked had any recollection of them.

M. W. SMITH

Much Climbing, Church Stretton.

JAPANESE DEER SHOOT

SIR,—Some readers may be interested to hear of an amusing deer shoot in which a friend and myself took part during October, 1946.

The place was South Honshu, where, by means of an interpreter, we contacted the local "hunters" and arranged to arrive by boat in the early morning. The island was said to abound in deer and also some wild pig. It had been the favourite hunting ground of royal princes and in order to prove its worth we were shown photographs depicting the prince standing gun in hand, surrounded by bearded hunters, with four fine stags at his feet.

We arrived at 5.30 a.m., and were duly met by the chief hunter and taken to his house where other hunters, dogs and boys were coming in one by one. Although we had come armed with rifles as well as shot guns, we were given

only bag we could claim was a brace of pheasants and a dove.

D. V. MORGAN (Lieutenant R.N.)

P. A. B. WICKHAM (Captain R.A.)

A WHITEFACED RHINO

SIR,—Perhaps some readers of your paper will be surprised to see my photograph of our rhino in deep snow? "Faru" was born in East-Africa at the beginning of 1937 and arrived at Copenhagen in July, 1938. He was then 95 cm. high at the shoulder. Now he is 170 cm. high, and is a wonderful animal. He creates much interest and we hope to keep him for many years. Every day he comes outside in the snow, and you can be sure he likes it!

AXEL REVENTLOW
(Managing Director).

Zoological Gardens, Copenhagen.

HARES IN GERMANY

SIR,—On Christmas-eve while out shooting at one of the leave centres here in Germany, I was walking over the cultivated fields when I saw five hares indulging in their courtship rituals. Each hare chased another in turn, then a series of "boxing" matches took place whilst the other three hares would roll over and over on the earth.

The field was bounded on one side by a small stream and I was very surprised to see one of the hares that was being chased dash into the water, head held high, shake

