

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**Foxes and lambs**

Sir, On the BBC *Nature* programme in February [your leading article, 15 March, and the *Nature* editor's reply, 5 April] Dr Stephen Harris, whose comments were accepted as accurate, said that 'lambs that foxes eat are mostly stillborn or ones that are not viable and are not going to make it anyway,' and also that foxhunting has 'no effect whatever' on fox populations. The experience of others – my own, for instance, of more than 20 years sheep-farming in the north-west Highlands – refutes this.

Before the Lochaber Foxhounds (a Fell pack followed on foot) were established in 1970 to offset the banning of the gin trap, we used to lose about five per cent of lambs regularly to the fox by the end of May, and many more thereafter. Despite leaving out still-born lambs, we never managed to persuade a marauder to touch them when hot-blooded lamb was available.

The introduction of the pack, which could be 'called out' at the first sign of lamb-worrying, cut losses to less than one per cent. This pack has reduced fox numbers by 50 per cent on the Sunart Peninsula (about half the size of Somerset). Furthermore, research by the Scottish Department of Agriculture during seven years established that 75 per cent of lambs killed by the fox were in good condition and therefore viable.

E. A. S. BAILEY
Kilve, Bridgwater, Somerset.

Zimbabwe's rhinos

Sir, In the issue of 5 April you carried an item concerning the plight of the Kenyan black rhino. (see also page 51).

Without in any way wishing to detract from the importance of the Kenyan situation, I must point out that in Zimbabwe we still have 1,500-2,000 black rhinos, which means we now have more than one-third of all black rhinos in Africa. Our largest single population, numbering 750-1,000, is in an area known as the Middle Zambezi Valley which lies on an international border.

Regrettably, this population has begun to suffer attacks

The Editor welcomes letters from readers, also photographs which illustrate points of interest or deal with curiosities of nature and the countryside. Photographs will be returned only if a stamped addressed envelope is provided. The Field, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London EC4Y 0JA.



An eight-foot high door frame 'advertising' the blacksmith's trade at Upsall, North Yorkshire. Photograph: Jack Downing, Garforth, Leeds.



The 18th-century Twp Bridge over the Striddle Burn, Loch Lomondside, has a ram's head carved in the stone. In 1749 near here sheep were first introduced to the area. Photograph: Valerie Bissland, Crarae Avenue, Bearsden, Glasgow.

by poachers. During the 1985 rainy season we lost about 70 rhinos. However, swiftness by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management, and the establishment of our own Rhino Survival Campaign enabled us to cut losses during the 1985/86 rains to about 10 per cent of the previous figure.

I bring this to your attention because, until now, the Rhino Survival Campaign concentrated on fund-raising within Zimbabwe. This is because we believe that we should make all-out efforts to help ourselves before making an international appeal.

We have successfully raised almost \$200,000 locally in Zimbabwe and in kind since the campaign was launched last October. Now we now feel justified in widening our scope internationally. We are currently establishing a Rhino Survival Campaign fund-raising committee in the UK and have set a global campaign target of one million.

R.G. PITMAN
Chairman, Rhino Survival Campaign
Sub-Committee, P.O. Box 8753
Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe.

Commons access

Sir, Kate Ashbrook of the Open Spaces Society can have it all her own way [Letter, 17 May]. 'People have roamed free over commons she writes, without mention – which is stated in *The Law of Commons and Village Green*, published by the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society – that the public have no common-law right to roam anywhere, whether over the commons or anywhere else'.

The 'studies' referred to by Miss Ashbrook as showing that public access does not encourage moorland from regeneration are no less tendentious. A recent survey has shown 20 per cent less flora and fauna on moorland with access agreements than ten others without. When heather is burnt inadvertently by walkers, the peat may be rendered sterile and the heather, if it regenerates at all, may take 40 years to revive.