



Unfortunately for most of you, your first Quest may have reached you too late for you to enter our competitions. For this reason we have kept them all open until September 23rd, so dig out your old copy and have a go for the prizes.

We would also like to know just how many Quest readers there are out there, so we have included a slip for you to fill in and return to us, with room for your suggestions as to what you would like to see in your own magazine.

Piers Hayman, Editor

This hedgehog was painted by Dahlia Prokop, a student illustrator from Canada who is visiting New Zealand for six months to sketch and paint our wildlife.



# The Gardener's Friend

It is easy for us to be critical of the early European settlers who brought in all those 'foreign' animals and plants. Nowadays we are much more aware of how disastrously simple it is to upset the natural balance between one species and another, for we are able to look around us and see the results of past mistakes.

Perhaps if we ourselves had been among the pioneers struggling to build a new life in a rough land thousands of miles from home, we too would have been lonely and homesick. Perhaps we would have welcomed, as they did, the introduction of creatures that we knew so well, for it would all have helped to make a strange country feel like home. The lilting song of blackbird and skylark, the cheerful chirp of sparrows, the friendly snuffle of the hedgehog....? Well, perhaps not, but it *was* for chiefly sentimental reasons that the hedgehog was imported from Britain, the first pair arriving in Christchurch in 1869.

The hedgehog is an old and wily animal whose family dates back some 60 million years. That means that he has been around on this earth much longer than we have, for our first real ancestor, *Homo erectus*, lived only about 1 million years ago. The hedgehog, therefore, has successfully survived all the changes that have occurred over those millions of years, which must mean he is well able to adapt to different and varied circumstances.

Part of his success must be due to his excellent defence system. He carries more than 16,000 sharp spines on his body and is able to curl himself up when danger threatens into a very unfriendly ball of prickles. This is enough to deter just about every would-be predator that he might meet in his homelands of Europe and Asia, and it is only very recently in hedgehog history that something has arrived against which his prickles are no defence. Fortunately,

cars and trucks are not found everywhere, so he is only in danger when he is actually on a road himself.

New Zealand is the only country where hedgehogs have been successfully introduced. There are none in the Americas, nor Australia, nor any of the other places that have been colonised by Europeans. Most of the early New Zealand importations were to Christchurch and Dunedin, but the hedgehogs soon spread, and by 1910 they could be found all over the lowland areas in the South Island. Their rapid spread was not entirely due to their own efforts. There were many helping human hands, for the hedgehog was a welcome addition to the garden as he ate not only insects and spiders, but slugs and snails, those unwanted visitors that had arrived by mistake along with some of the imported plants.

Between 1907 and 1912 hedgehogs were liberated in the North Island as