

# Poison Laid for Pigs

IT was a little strange to read in a newspaper report a few days ago that the Wild Life Division of the Department of Internal Affairs is conducting an "experiment" in poisoning wild pigs. It is certainly experimental to kill a horse for baits when there were apparently old rams available, and to

**JULY 8** "crawl into gorse, broom and scrub" to lay the baits where the pigs would find them. But pigs have been poisoned, and have poisoned themselves, since the first bait was laid for rabbits. A very small quantity of phosphorus will kill them—even the small quantity remaining in the stomach of a dead rabbit. I know that there are exceptions in these cases, as there are with all poisons, but every rabbit who has laid poisoned pollard or oats in pig country knows what happens when the pigs find his line. Every farmer knows, too, what can happen if pollard and grain are laid where sheep can readily find them. But sheep are not fond of dead horse, dead opossums, or dead rams, and I can't think why the experimenters are going to such trouble to place their baits on tracks and beds that can only be treated as crawling. If it is done to avoid poisoning dogs, the danger is not on the placing of the bait but in allowing dogs to wander. If the purpose is to leave the bait where the pigs will find it, that is hate's labour lost. A dead horse will carry its own message to every pig within half a mile, and dead rams are only a little less eloquent. The nose of a pig is as efficient as the nose of a dog, and a pig's appetite is considerably less selective than a dog's.

Pigs will, in fact, provide their own bait where no other flesh is available. I am not sure how common it is for pigs to clean up their own dead, but I have been in pig country—not hungry scrub country, but country with abundance of flax, fern and swamp—where every pig, a month after it was shot, was a few big bones, and a snout inside a turned-out skin. When he shot a

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for example, are every bit as good as Dr. Crowley's needle-lifting specialist (though they work their miracles nowadays with tape), but things must be done on a more modest scale here; and every pound spent, whether in salaries, equipment or fees, has to be spread over a greater volume of programme than the BBC pound normally is.

"The saddest aspect of comparison is that good natural speakers seem to be much scarcer here than in the United Kingdom: this after full allowance has been made for the disparity in population. Many of the better broadcasters here—far too many for our peace of mind as New Zealanders—have come from the United Kingdom. This is so at all levels of education. New Zealanders as a whole are either naturally less articulate than Englishmen, Scotsmen and Welshmen—or Irishmen, or else the New Zealanders are more scared of their own voices and of trying to use their voices well. The exceptions are a joy to work with: New Zealanders from factory, field or study who have a sense of the beauty and power of words, and

by "SUNDOWNER"

pig the owner of that run made a deep cut from end to end on both sides and dusted in strychnine. This, I remember, was not effective immediately, since putrefaction was necessary before cannibalism began, but the result in a few weeks would be anything up to a dozen new carcasses within a hundred yards of the first. It was a great surprise to me to discover that the pigs there were cannibals, but the owner of the country, who had lived in Burma but nowhere else in New Zealand, found it just as difficult to believe that they were not cannibals everywhere.

"WHAT did you do," I was asked this morning when I refused to talk during the weather broadcast, "before the weather forecasting began?" What did I do? I suppose I read the newspaper forecasts, supplied by prophets who had their own methods of reading

**JULY 11** the skies, and if anyone I knew had a barometer I would ask him what "the glass" had to say. The glass—if you were well enough off to own one—occupied about the same position in the household as a stethoscope in the ears of a doctor or a tuning-fork in the hands of a tonic sol-fa singer. It could not be wrong, but you had to spend many years tapping it and gazing at it before you could be sure what it said. One of my uncles was the only glass owner near us when we were young, and he did not doubt any more than we did that it made him a weather oracle. It did not occur to me then that we could all have been oracles if we had saved five pounds, but we were never able to do that, and uncle's halo remained. Although the glass gave three signs only—that it was falling, that it was not falling, that it was rising; it and not the mercury or the pressure—the interpretation of these signs was in the last degree mysterious. First uncle looked at the sky to see what the weather would have been if he had not possessed a glass. Then he looked at the glass,

of the rich resources of the human voice properly trained. The pity is, the exceptions are relatively few."

Quality of programme, of course, was primarily a product of talent and painstaking care on the part of artist and producer; and the search for new talent, as well as effort to make the utmost possible use of it, was continuous. Yet the extent to which talent could be developed, in talks, by wiser selection of speakers, better briefing, more sympathetic and more intelligent editing, and protracted rehearsal before broadcast—the extent to which these aids could be practised did depend in some degree upon plant and money.

"We have been trying this year to be much more selective in choosing speakers, and somewhat more generous in recognising the quality of the better ones. We shall be yet more selective next year, and—as more studios become available for rehearsal—much more demanding of the talkers whom we commission. I hope we can continue, and perhaps extend, our present system of incentive payments. We'd even put Dr. Crowley through the hoops if he should return!"

tapped it, watched, put on his secret-up-the-sleeve look, and went outside again for the confirmation of sky, clouds, wind and temperature. Then, till the next day, his confidence remained unshaken. If rain came on a rising glass or failed when the glass fell, it was not the glass that was at fault or uncle. The sun or rain had been delayed a little, but would come; as, sooner or later, it always did.

But the day also came when one of my sisters read in *Handy Hints* that it was possible to make a barometer out of two jam jars, and she was irreverent enough to try. She had been a favourite with uncle before this lapse, but I don't think she quite regained her place afterwards. In any case, though he died rich, for those days very rich, there was nothing in his will that encouraged Janet to break her jam bottles.

I WAS shown today a very beautiful stole made out of six ferret skins. But they were not ferrets in the stole. They were fitches, and I have been wondering since when a ferret is a fitch and a fitch a ferret. The answer seems to be when neither is a polecat.

**JULY 13** I am too old to start using new names for animals I have known all my life under another name, but as I have never called any creature a fitch, I should like to know precisely what a fitch is now that the Wild Life Division has introduced the name. There are no fitches in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* or in Lydekker's *Wild Life*. In the Oxford Dictionary a fitch is not an animal but a fur. If it is now the animal that produces the fur—the ancient fitchew—which of our New Zealand animals is a fitch, which a ferret, and which a polecat? I am not going to be told that I should call a ferret a fitch unless I can also be told what a fitch is, and what the difference is between a ferret and a polecat. Is there a difference, or is a ferret in New Zealand a polecat, some of whose ancestors were reared in a box? I have been told that only white ferrets are true ferrets, but as there is no other difference between a white ferret and a brown, and thy interbreed, I suspect that they are the same animal. We believed, when we were boys, that white ferrets were lazy and brown ferrets lighter and livelier. I think the difference was one of sex. A white buck was less active than a brown doe, but colour made no difference in the same sex at the same age.

The nearest I have been able to get to the scientific differences between ferrets and polecats is a statement I have seen somewhere that polecats have broader skulls. This, it was explained, was due to the fact that polecats were wild animals, compelled to use their jaw and face muscles vigorously, while ferrets were domestic animals fed largely on pap (milk, liver, bread, meat scraps, etc.). That would not make them different animals any more than occupation makes a carpenter a different animal from a clerk. In any case, nine out of ten of the ferrets first sent to New Zealand must have been pap-fed, while 99 out of a hundred of those here now are wild and fend for themselves. I am not going to call them fitches for no other reason than because experts can't distinguish one animal from another. I hope, too, if a distinction is some day established, that it will be more convincing than the geographical distinction offered now—that ferrets belong to the Mediterranean countries, polecats to the countries farther north.

(To be continued)

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