

receptions sent by lay readers, most of them amateurs like myself and as dependent on their recollection of two or three cases—no sooner done than a scientific lion rose up in my path whom I can't so easily side-step.

OCTOBER 19

A very polite, very respectful, but very insistent member of the Animal Ecology Section of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research has written to say that from evidence accumulated by the Department "it seems likely that most hedgehogs round Wellington hibernate from late May till early September," and that all hedgehogs throughout New Zealand probably take the same course for at least three months every year, the time depending on local conditions. That is precisely what I had said hedgehogs in New Zealand do not do, and before I read any more I began to think of all the stray animals I had encountered in broad daylight at times when, if they had been hibernators, they would have been in a death-like sleep. But the letter continued:

The difference between your claim and mine is, I think, one of definition. In current zoological parlance a hibernating hedgehog is one which is either very inactive or rolled tightly in a ball, with a low body temperature, slow heart beat and breathing rate, and with a number of physiological changes in the composition of the blood. When the surrounding temperature is raised the hedgehog returns to normal, the change taking at least an hour and a half and being accompanied by violent rocking of the body from side to side. Hedgehog hibernation is often a fitful business. The few to be seen abroad on winter nights (sometimes even when frost or snow lies on the ground) are either those which have broken their torpid state or those which have not laid up enough fat to set the hibernating mechanisms in motion.

When the blanket is spread as wide as that I can, I think, creep under and lie down with science. I don't suppose I have ever seen a hedgehog at large on a frosty night, and although I have met them on a winter's day following such a night I would probably find, if I had kept careful notes, that it has been on a warm slope some hours after the arrival of the sun. I have neither the knowledge nor the facilities for testing temperatures, breathing rates, or heart beats, and would therefore not know, if I found a hedgehog asleep in a nest of leaves, whether it had been sleeping for hours or for days. If I could not wake it up I would conclude that it was hibernating. If it was clearly aware of me I would conclude that it was not hibernating even though it refused to uncoil. My reason for deciding that hedgehogs do not hibernate in New Zealand was that I had never found one in the first condition and often found them in the second—or moving about and feeding—in the middle of winter.

In the meantime, I scent some danger nearer home. Canterbury University is advertising for hedgehogs for research, but as the price offered per animal is one shilling, I am not alarmed. To disprove my observations it will be necessary to examine some hundreds of animals alive and dead, and if there are hundreds of boys still left in Canterbury who can be hired at "a bob a job," I don't know where they live.

(To be continued)

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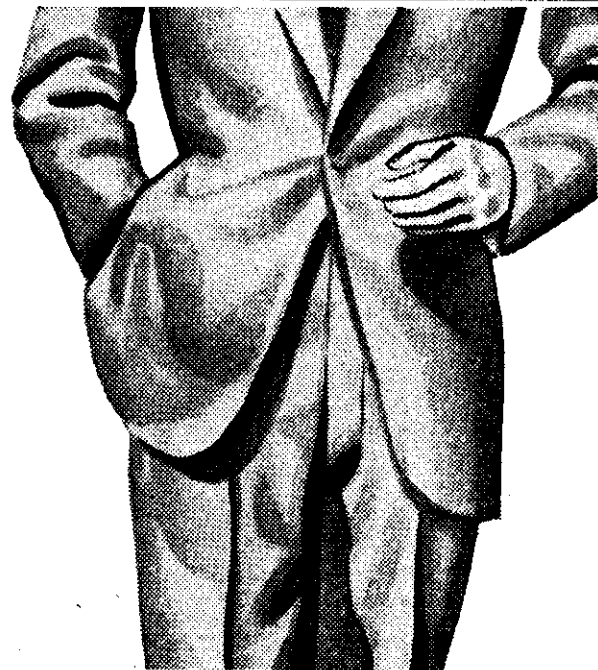
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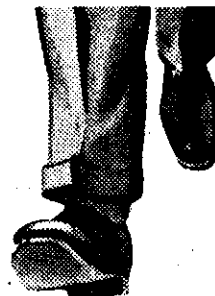
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