

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

## THE TIMID OCTOPUS

Sir,—The pathway of science is said to be paved with broken theories, and in my opinion the one about the timidity of the octopus will be another broken-theory paving-stone. The timidity theory arose when a professor in a diving-bell saw a conger eel chasing an octopus.

In a large pool in a reef near Timaru, at low tide, I saw an 18-inch octopus swimming around with a four-foot shark in its tentacles. In another pool there was a six-foot octopus. Instead of being timid, it made an unintelligent attempt to grab the legs of a lady who was standing at the edge, no doubt angered because we had taken what appeared to be its four-inch baby. When prodded, it shammed death, turning a bleached colour. Then it manipulated itself into a very realistic imitation of waving seaweed, even to the colour, while part of its body took on the appearance of a cut-off stump of seaweed.

Six-foot Frank Hooper used to tell that when he and five other Timaru Rowing Club men were walking in the water up to their waists alongside a ledge of rocks near the boatshed, he (the last man) was grabbed above the ankle by an octopus. His mates, standing on the reef (now covered with sand) had to pull very hard to free him. The

octopus clung on until its tentacles were out of the water, when, after having stretched nearly four feet, they uncoiled and disappeared. Frank said the grip was excruciating. He had the marks on his leg for six weeks. The octopus had been shrewd enough to wait for the last man before attacking. Frank never entered the sea again!

The *Timaru Herald* reported that a man paddling alongside some rocks down the coast was seized by an octopus concealed in a crevice. He could not break away until he prodded it hard and repeatedly with a stick. The octopus obviously intended to hang on until the tide rose and drowned its victim. Again, the *Timaru Post* reported that an eight-foot octopus wrapped itself round the Harbour Board diver and hung on while he climbed the ladder and reached the wharf, where it had to be cut off.

A Sydney diver had a similar experience, at the Heads. In this instance the diver saw an eight-foot horror coming at him and pulled the alarm cord. He felt strong electric shocks when encircled by the tentacles. The octopus made determined attempts to twist his helmet. The diver was able to use his knife on it.

A New Zealander tells how, when a Chatham Islander named Rua (three-quarter Maori and one part Irish) saw an octopus on rocks about twelve feet under water he jumped in at a safe dis-

tance from the rocks and allowed it to wrap itself round him. When he swam out and gripped it by the head, it uncoiled itself. "Good kai," said Rua laconically. He laughed quietly when his horrified friend suggested that he was foolishly risking his life. The local residents said he frequently caught octopus that way. Obviously the octopus is fearless and will attack anything. And when it makes itself resemble the ocean bottom it will gladly welcome somebody treading on its face. That is its way of "fishing."

The theory that the correct way to handle an octopus is to turn it inside out is like the one about catching a bird by putting salt on its tail. Can you imagine an octopus obligingly turning on its back to allow the trick to be performed? A.D.M. (Point Chevalier).

## THE BANNED LIST

Sir,—The letter from "E.B." concerning records banned from radio broadcasting prompts a further inquiry into the basis of this censorship. Does this country have its own committee of judges deciding what is not fit for its radio public, or does the NZBS blindly follow its Australian counterpart, shaking its woolly head and bleating "Too darn' hot, too darn' hot"?

Disregarding for the moment the obvious argument that British and American audiences accept many of these records without shock or shame, this is a matter for some concern when it is

realised that local listeners are being deprived of certain music of considerable value. Consider the case of the Benjamin Britten-Peter Pears transcription of "Foggy Foggy Dew." In this we have a charming English folk-song, delicately arranged and beautifully rendered, here condemned to the murky space under the counter, to consort with Ronald Frankau, Max Miller, Cole Porter and other purveyors of "immoral" listening.

Surely this is unjust to many worthy people. Mr. Britten's remarks alone would be interesting.

It's an ill wind that blows nobody good. Perhaps the Banned List should be made public, then at least the sales of records for private collections would benefit.

CHRISTOPHER JONATHAN  
(Wellington).

(The Broadcasting Service relies on its own auditioning officers, responsible to the Director.—Ed.)

## ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

E.D.G. (Tauranga).—Scripts not available for overseas transcriptions.

R.M.L.S. (Hastings).—(1) The tour was organised by the Commercial Division of the Broadcasting Service and could not be extended. Two talks recorded by Miss Schain are available. (2) The Campbell Island talks were not recorded for circulation.

Mrs. A. S. Jones (Feilding).—The expert who gave the talk says that two things could have been wrong—the compost or the timing. If the compost was taken straight out of the bin, it would not be suitable. The potatoes could have been lifted too soon. The broadcast was given in December. Potatoes laid down in hot weather should not be expected to produce early results. They should still be growing.

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