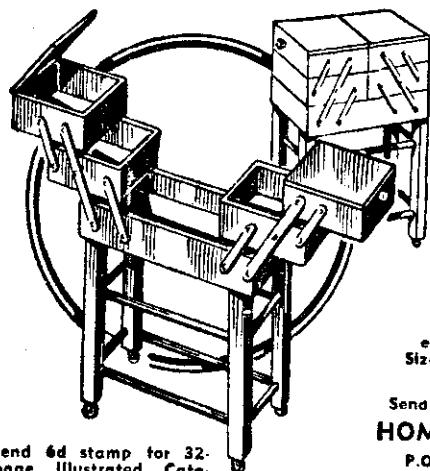


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SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR

Lower Mathematics

by "SUNDOWNER"

ORNITHOLOGISTS, I believe, allow some awareness of number to birds. They don't say that birds can count, but they seem to say that there are limits beyond which we must not go in shutting numbers out of the feathered world. If a bird lays five eggs and you take one she will not miss it. If you take two, she will be vaguely uneasy. If you

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take one more. she will know—if

she is one of the birds ornithologists have in their minds when they make the claim. I don't think they would say that Joanna, our Rhode Island Red, has mathematical possibilities, or that Martha, who sneaked off and hatched two eggs in five when her seven sisters were moulting, would have been upset if the three infertile eggs had been taken away after a week.

Whatever the facts are, birds, if they count at all, do it with their eyes. Sheep do it with their ears. Twice during the last few days I have seen a twin lamb rejected by its mother and given temporary hospitality by another mother of twins. In both cases I have failed in my attempts to get the outcasts back in their own domestic circle—first because the rightful mothers had passed through a psychological crisis between the first lamb and the second, and could not adjust themselves again; and in the second place because the obliging mothers could not count. There did seem in one case to be a slight awareness of irregularity, a little embarrassment at being followed by three lambs instead of by two, and some mental as well as physical confusion at mealtimes. I watched closely for signs that the eye was confused as well as the nose and the ears, but could never feel that I had seen these signs. The nose was, of course the chief witness when the subjects were close enough for contact: but when there was some distance between them the ears did all the work. The eyes, as far as I could judge, reported nothing accurately, even when one animal was black.

* * *

WHEN I suspected ferrets and not cats of dragging a lamb into a burrow a few days ago, I did not suspect them of killing the lamb. I supposed, and still suppose, that the lamb was dead before they began on it. But something happened today that makes me reopen the question. A footsore ewe that had not climbed the hill for 48 hours lambed in the gully last night among rocks and gorse. When I found her she was lying a few feet away from the spot on which

she had given birth to twins, and one live lamb was lying beside her. The other had the back of its head eaten out and had been dragged about ten feet uphill into

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gorse. I went home for a trap, set it uncovered on the lamb's neck, and an hour or two later had an old ferret. Tomorrow I shall probably get the mate. The question is: Was the lamb dead or alive when the ferret or ferrets laid hold of it?

In the ferrets' favour are the fact that one lamb in 20 or 30 never gets up; that the ewe had moved away a little and perhaps left one lamb lying dead; that ferrets have been in New Zealand for 80 years, and in Britain for perhaps 800 years, without getting themselves labelled as lamb-killers. Against them are the fact that the victim had bled freely; that it had been cleaned by its mother; that the mother is lame, heavy, and inactive; that there are no dead lambs in this gully to provide an alternative source of food; that newborn lambs must be tempting and easy game.

I HAVE not escaped or tried to escape from sheep for a week, or from baaings and bleatings and ticks and wool and grease. In spite of my decision to keep no pets this year, we have two in hand already which we are unlikely to be able to return to the flock. In spite of what I

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thought was a successful hand-dipping a month ago, I went over one of (continued on next page)



GODFREY BOWEN IN ACTION
"Nothing happens to annoy either man or beast"

N.Z. LISTENER, SEPTEMBER 25, 1953.