

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor welcomes letters from readers for these columns but they should be brief. Photographs, to accompany letters, are invited which illustrate points of interest, or deal with curiosities of nature and of matters concerned with the countryside.

SHEEP LOSSES

SIR,—A great deal has been written about the tragic losses in our livestock during the grimmest of winters in living memory. I doubt if the full significance of the misfortunes that have overtaken British Agriculture is fully appreciated, so a few lines on our livestock position may not be out of place at the present time.

During the war years, we were forced to live on our livestock capital and our sheep population fell by several millions during this period. This was particularly noticeable in young breeding sheep of which there was an acute shortage. Many of the flocks in England were over age and due for culling, the demand for young breeding sheep in the Autumn of 1946 was very keen and the prices very high. This would have been greater and prices higher if it had not been for the bad harvest in England and the doubtful outlook for roots in Scotland. This serious position has been made very much worse by the events of the past winter when losses were sustained that exceeded anything in anyone's experience. It is hard to see how the position could be worse than it is at the time of writing.

This creates a situation which will take many years to make up and will call for prompt, resolute and courageous action in making good our flocks which produce an important part of our very meagre meat ration.

It is of great importance that we should produce the greatest number of sheep possible in the shortest possible time at the lowest possible cost. This can be expedited by breeding from Cheviot ewes in England and crossing them with a Border Leicester ram. The progeny of this breed, the Leicester/Cheviot, is well-known in England as it combines the hardy character of the Cheviot with the feeding properties of the Leicester. The females are of great value as breeding stock and are most popular in England. The wether lambs can be fed very cheaply; on suitable land they will nearly all go fat off their mothers.

Cheviot ewes straight from high ground in Scotland do exceedingly well in England on moderate to good grass. They can be wintered without roots; they will give up to nearly 200 per cent. of lambs. If young grass (temporary leys) are available to put the ewes and lambs on after lambing, they will do exceedingly well and will require very little extra help, most of the lambs going fat off their mothers.

The ewe lambs should be kept for breeding purposes; the best of them should be put to the ram in their first season. Experience has shown that suitable lambs on suitable ground will give up to 100 per cent. of lambs as yearlings which saves a whole year's keep and is of special value at the present time.

The advantage of temporary leys for this purpose cannot be over-stressed and with great deference to our English friends,

I doubt if the carrying capacity and the feeding value is yet fully appreciated in England. Another matter which I feel cannot be over emphasised is the folly of grading ewe lambs and yearling ewes suitable for breeding purposes which is still going on in large numbers and many high-class young breeding sheep are going to the butcher. How long is this insane and suicidal folly to continue at a time of our greatest need?

T. A. MCARTHUR

Kinetas House, Strathpeffer, Ross-shire.



WHITE RHINO BULL SHOT NEAR ADIL ON THE SOUTH BANK OF THE JUR RIVER

(See letter "Rhino—Black or White?")

RHINO—BLACK OR WHITE?

SIR,—The Danish Central African Zoological Expedition got by great courtesy from the Sudan Government a permission to shoot a white rhino for the Royal Zoological Museum of the University of Copenhagen and was asked to shoot a certain rhino, which had killed 11 Dinkas and from which the Vice-Governor of Wau, Mr. Richard Owen, had a narrow escape. We were near Aweng, north of the Lol river in Bahr El Ghazal and we found the rhino all right in dense bush at a very short distance. Before we could realise anything, it was on top of us, so we had to shoot it in self-defence.

Great was our astonishment when we found instead of a white rhino a small black one. Nevertheless the animal was full grown, judging by the teeth, but of so small a size that the Curator of Mammals of the Zoological Museum of the University, Dr. phil. Magnus Degerboel, who was present, suspected that it was a sub-species or a local race. I suggested the name *Diceros bicornis palustris* because it was living in the swamps, but Dr. Degerboel said that it was impossible to establish a

sub-species or local race on one specimen, we needed a score.

We had no licence to shoot a black rhino for the reason that no one ever thought that there were any living in Bahr El Ghazal. We reported to the Governor in Wau, who was very interested in the new zoological discovery. Black rhinos are not rare in East Africa, in Kenya they must be extremely plentiful, as it was reported that 824 black rhinos had been shot in a game reserve when the Wacambas moved in.

On March 13th we were lucky to get a

tsetse, particularly in areas where game does not abound.

Sierra Leone is almost devoid of game due, I was told, to the depredations of the tsetse. During my tour of service I kept a pig farm on the banks of a creek in the Mangrove swamps above Freetown. Tsetse had been identified in the area and, on the advice of the Government entomologist, the area was cleared of bush. He was convinced that the fly only inhabited shade over water and though smears were taken regularly from the pigs, no trace of the trypanosomes was found. He maintained that the horse could be reintroduced into the country provided it was kept away from shade over water.

If the tsetse abounds in Sierra Leone where there is little game, surely this is evidence that the wholesale slaughter of game will have no effect beyond the extermination of the game itself.

FREDERICK BRITNELL

Lilac Cottage, Amberley, Stroud.

WORKING LABRADORS

SIR,—There has been quite a lot of criticism about the Labrador's working abilities. For the past eight years many Labradors have been bred for profit, with brains and work not considered, and the result is a lot of dogs that will never make good workers. On the other hand we have still got some of the finest working strains in the world.

We must get these good ones sorted out and put this fine working dog back on the right lines. To do this, Mr. Remmer and myself are starting a club for the working Labrador. We are fortunate in having Lt.-Col. Badcock as president. We hope to get the club registered with the Kennel Club and run our own Field Trials.

J. WOODWARD

Keeper's Cottage, Wanborough, Guildford.

POLO IN JAIPUR

SIR,—There have recently been stirring games in Jaipur which have not received the publicity they deserve. They were due to the generosity and keenness of H.H. the Maharaja of Jaipur who invited a team from Australia to come over and take on his old and famous side, happily survivors of the war.

The visiting ponies arrived, although too late in the short Indian winter to get properly acclimated, but the players were less fortunate. What with sickness and inability to make the trip one player and one only was present. But three very worthy stop-gaps made up the team which eventually lined up:

1. Lt.-Col. A. H. McConnell (2nd Royal Lancers).
2. Captain Bijay Singh (Jodhpur).
3. Captain Maharaj Prem Singh (Jodhpur).
4. Mr. A. H. King (Australia).

I feel it is quite unnecessary to name their opponents but it looks tidier, so here they are:—

1. Colonel Maharaj Prithi Singh.
2. Lt.-Col. Rao Raja Abhey Singh.
3. Colonel Rao Raja Hanut Singh.
4. H.H. the Maharaja of Jaipur.

I could not get down for the first game which took place on March 27th and which was won by Jaipur by 13—6, but I umpired the second and deciding match two days later.

The setting at Jaipur is delightful. The lovely ground was in perfect order—a big factor in the high scoring in both games. There was a pony parade before the match. We might have been back in Calcutta for the final of the Indian Polo Association Championship during any Christmas week from 1932 to 1938, and we should have seen the same side winning. What change had the eight years brought about? Very little. In the two forwards I noticed none. Hanut is perhaps a trifle heavier but still very fit. H.H., as the result of an aeroplane crash in which he badly broke his ankles, cannot put on polo boots but wears special ones and white trousers.

A particular attraction of the game was that Hanut, at 3 for Jaipur, had his son

very fine specimen of a white rhino bull, see photograph, near Adil on the south bank of Jur river. The length of its forehorn was 30in. and strangely enough the circumference was also 30in.

The presence of black rhino in Bahr El Ghazal has disturbed the census of the white rhino, so nobody knows how many of them really are black. The white rhino may be more rare than supposed. All the supposed white rhinos in Turalai area are black; the number is about 15 specimens.

The easiest way to decide whether the rhinos in a certain area are black or white is the dung. The black rhino is a browser and disposes its dung in big heaps and scatters them with its hindfeet. The dung consists of grass, twigs, leaves, thorns, small sticks and seeds. The dung of the white rhino, which is a grass eater, consists solely of grass and has got a glossy appearance like horse dung and the size is between elephant's dung and the dung of a shire horse, and it is never found in big heaps as is that of the black.

It would be very interesting if the Sudan Game Department would make investigations about the black rhinos in Bahr El Ghazal regarding their number and whereabouts outside the Turalai area.

BOJE BENZON

Stokkerup, Springforbi, Denmark.

CURIOUS FOSTER-MOTHER

SIR,—The story behind the photograph of a bantam brooding four kittens is interesting. Soon after the kittens were born in a loose-box, the bantam, who had no eggs, went broody in the same box. When the kittens could not be found one day a search was made, and eventually they were found still in the box, the banty, sitting on them!

I wondered what would happen when the mother came back and waited with much interest. On her arrival she merely pushed the hen aside, fed the kittens and left, the bird immediately resuming her appointed task of brooding them. The kittens are now too large for her to cover together, and usually one or two lie on her back or alongside her.

Newbury.

D. SKURRAY

TSETSE AND GAME

SIR,—May I support Mr. Forbes's appeal for an inquiry into the facts concerning the

RHODE ISLAND WITH A STRANGE BROOD

(See letter "Curious Foster-Mother")

