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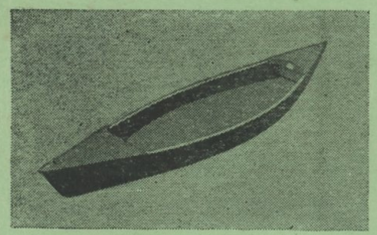
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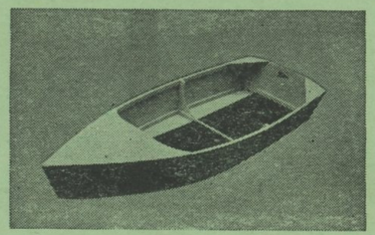
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NATAL WILD LIFE



NATAL BRANCH OF THE WILD LIFE PROTECTION SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA

Vol. 3 February 1962 No. 1

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NATAL WILD LIFE

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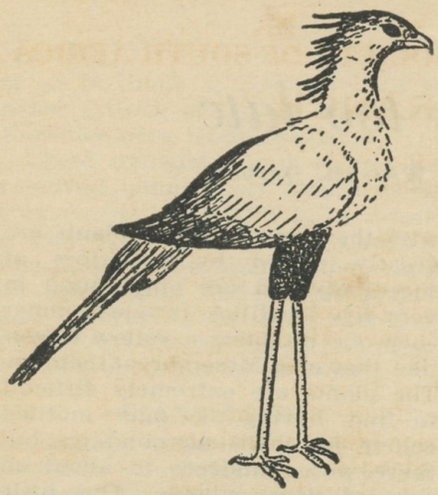
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Editorial

THERE are ordinances to protect our Flora and Fauna. You, as an individual, may not pick certain wild flowers, nor may you kill, capture, or keep in captivity certain wild creatures. Quite right, too: the laws could be even more stringent and better enforced.

Yet wholesale destruction of plants or animals may take place, and is not punished by law but praised as "progress". Thus any farmer or landowner may root up a piece of bushland or lovely virgin forest to make way for crops, and by doing so may destroy a priceless growth of rare plants, and indirectly, by removing their habitat, kill off the birds and creatures that constitute the natural community of any given area.

Likewise, Capitalists, or Urban Authorities might start a new housing scheme, township or suburb. Provincial or Government Departments might construct new National Roads, aerodromes or dams, or convert enormous parts of the country into exotic forests—all causing wholesale destruction.

This is an age of progress, and more and more land is required for our rapidly increasing population. Nevertheless, something should at least be salvaged from this waste of life. One or more vigilante officials should be appointed by Provincial or Government Conservation Departments to keep a finger on the pulse of "progress", to discern when and where all such schemes are taking place. These officials should be empowered to visit and traverse each new project and study carefully its flora and fauna. Could any trees or shrubs withstand transplanting? What Cycads, Aloes, Lilies, Orchids and other interesting plants could be collected and saved. There must be a constant demand for such plants to beautify railway stations, parks and highways.

Some road builder with a sense of beauty planted Aloes on both sides of a new stretch that I once traversed in the Eastern Transvaal. What a glorious picture it was when they were all in full bloom. Surely, all roads in South Africa could be beautified with plants of our land.

And then there are the succulents that could be transplanted to rockeries in town gardens or to our Nature Reserves. Succulent collecting has become a world-wide hobby and enthusiasts would welcome such plants. The vigilante official should notify all the interested parties in the neighbourhood of "projected operations" and collect all available plant material for distribution.

The fleet-footed animals and birds would escape but those such as tortoises, hedgehogs, porcupines, scaly anteaters, chameleons and snakes could be removed to Wild Life Sanctuaries.

Museums frequently send out expeditions to collect specimens—perhaps they could be asked to collect extensively in a doomed area.

All bodies such as Government and Provincial Conservation Departments, the Railways, Urban Parks and Gardens, Museums and Zoos should co-operate to save and use as much as possible the Flora and Fauna that is due for destruction in the advance of mankind. ●

insatiable curiosity gets the better of him and he comes down to investigate, whereupon he is bundled into the cage. Fortunately this is not often as he is worn out after the night's romp.

Early Snack

Shortly before sunrise every morning he creeps quietly onto the bed and gently licks the face until the slepeer is awake, or makes a soft coughing noise. This cough is to let one know he wants something to eat, and a titbit is regularly kept under the pillow for this occasion. At this early hour he is really awake. Now he wants to play. He begins with the sleeper's fingers. He will wrestle with them, and nip them with needle-sharp teeth for as long as the slumberer allows him to. Nor can he easily be discouraged from doing so, he simply locks his fingers round the thumb and hangs on for dear life.

This game is so regular that we no longer have need of an alarm clock, but it is a little wearisome on a Sunday morning when one wants a long lie in bed.

Although naturally timid, this little ball of fluff has a great deal of courage. One evening he was lying on his back playing with my hands. A visitor made some remark about him and leaned over to stroke him. From this movement, I am sure he got the impression that she was about to touch me. Quick as a flash, he leapt at her, nipped her hand, looked to me for approval, then returned, rolled over on his back and stretched out his arm for me to scratch under the armpit, as though demanding a reward for my protection—the whole incident forgotten.

From the above account and other little incidents, we have come to the conclusion that he has a jealous streak in him.

Peter's trust in us is as remarkable as it is rewarding. If we call "Peter" and cup the hand, he will dive into it and snuggle down patiently waiting for a scratch behind the ear or under the chin. He will twist his head around until he gets the right spot.

Sweet Tooth

He loves anything sweet, especially chocolates. Ever so daintily he will take small pieces of sweet from the mouth. Another favourite titbit is sugarcane. This is cut into small slivers, for we have found that Peter likes food this way.

One of his more amusing eccentricities is a dislike of wet or sticky hands. It is priceless to watch him eating something sticky which he enjoys, while wiping his hands at the same time.

We try him on practically every kind of food possible, and have noted those for which he shows a marked preference. Calcium he gets from his staple food, bread and milk, sprinkled with sugar. He is very partial to beverages, such as milo, malted milk, etc. He enjoys a little greens, lettuce, cabbage, cauliflower and such like, including peas, string beans, and occasionally—grass.

He will eat a thing one day and ignore it the next. Included in his diet is a tablet of glucose every other day, although he prefers this in sweet form.

He is very fastidious in his choice of food and can give the most disdainful look at anything he disapproves of.

His favourite food is, of course, insects—his natural food. He dexterously catches any moths which get through the screened windows. (This necessary precaution of screening all the windows was taken shortly after Peter's arrival). We supplement this diet with grasshoppers, moths and flying ants when we can get



them, but draw the line at cockroaches, beetles and butterflies.

Peter has the most insatiable curiosity of any thing or person I know of. He will explore any box, paperbag, open cupboard or drawer.

He is very clean in his habits. He likes to get out of his cage about midday when nature calls. Furthermore, he considerately gives warning by wiping the soles of his hind feet. This has earned him the nick-name of "Piddlefoot".

Special Room

Because of his simian habit of climbing on or around everything that offers the slightest handhold, we were forced to redecorate the room, as his endless journeys around the room via the picture rail, left an unsightly trail. After painting the walls, a 6 inch plate rack was installed right around the room. Now he keeps us awake at night as he kangaroos along his personal race track.

One of his most lovable traits is to be near one, as he is now, sitting beside me on the chair as I type these pages. Now and again he will climb onto my hands or pull at the typewriter ribbon. He is very persistent, but then how can one get cross at such a tiny lovable creature?

One thing is certain. He can get very upset when familiar things are tampered with.

One Sunday morning I decided to paint his cage. He was sleeping in his flowerpot house at the time. (This is a plastic flowerpot fitted with a lid and a hole cut in the side for access). I lifted this out and got on with the job.

By evening the roof was still sticky, and it was decided to leave the roof off for a while longer.

He studied the cage for a long time, instinctively sensing that something was amiss. A thorough tour of inspection was made. Each corner investigated, and each wall sniffed at. Then, not being able to understand it (perhaps it was the pungent smell of fresh paint) he set up a high pitched squeal. This was kept up for some time, and finally I had to get out of bed and console him by cuddling him (he's very fond of that) and talking quietly to him, until he was quiet once more.

The offending box was removed for the night, whereupon he settled down. Mary, a friend of ours, has one ambition in life. That is to be friends with Peter and cuddle him. Unfortunately, Peter has other ideas. He will let only two people fondle him—his love is divided between his mistress and myself.

Who says you can't buy love. After all, Peter was paid for. ●

RHINO SCRATCH

Ranger N. N. DEANE, Hluhluwe (per Parks Board) writes:

A Black Rhino was watched for some time enjoying a good scratch on a large rubbing stone. To begin with, he was straddled over the top of the stone, rocking himself backwards and forwards and effectively rubbing his stomach. He then moved his position and rubbed the side of his body on the stone. Changing position yet again he stood with his head over the rock and with a rocking movement massaged the whole of his neck and chin. Finally, standing with his hind legs over the stone, he lowered and raised his left hind leg in rapid movement so as to rub all its inner side. His expression, if a black rhino can rightly be said to have expressions, was one of complete and utter pleasure. ●