

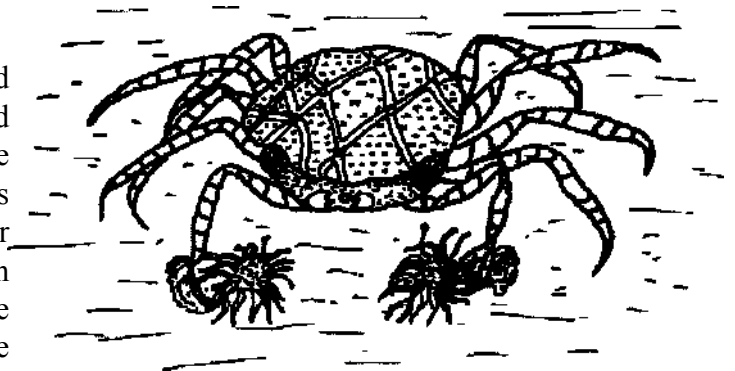
The Sheep-Killing Parrot

Wild creatures do not usually change their food habits easily. The Kea Parrot, a native of New Zealand is an interesting exception. It is a hawk like green parrot which used to live on fruits like all other parrots. When the people, who went to settle in New Zealand, brought sheep to the Island, the Kea gave up its fruit-eating habits and started feeding on sheep. It kills sheep by attacking them with its powerful beak and feeds on the fat that surrounds the kidneys. It has become a serious danger to sheep farms. Its cry resembles that of a cat.



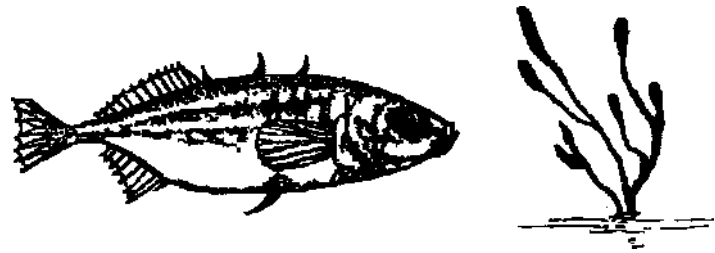
He has bodyguards

In the Indian Ocean is a crab too feeble to defend himself against the many dangers there. But he has devised a novel method of protection. Like the heads of States, he has his own bodyguards. In each of his pincer-like forelegs he carries a sea-anemone. No one dare attack him, for the anemones, true to their master will defend him with their powerful stinging tentacles. It is a nice life for these anemones also, for not all of them have the good fortune of a wandering life, going places.



Fond Father

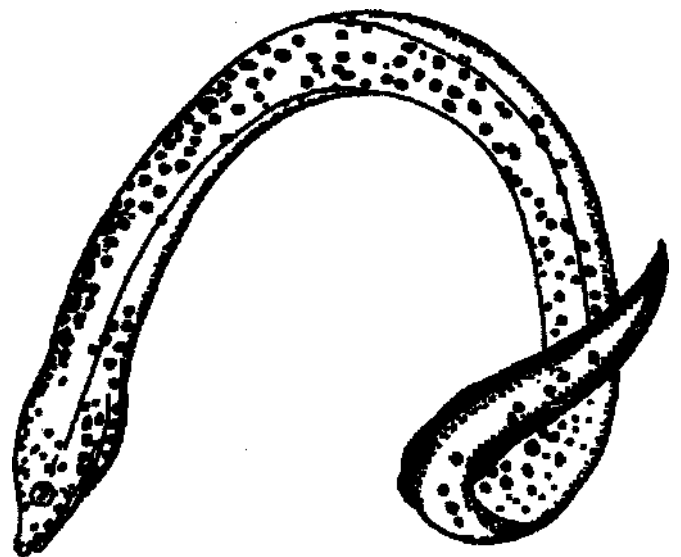
Many fish are devoted fathers, but papa stickleback is more devoted than most. He builds the nest—a neat, little affair of stems and leaves of water-plants. He then leads mama stickle-back, to the nest. Her responsibility is over once she lays the eggs and now papa mounts guard over the nest. But for his care both eggs and young would be devoured by the hungry mother herself or by other fish. When the young ones hatch out and try to explore he promptly puts them back to the “nursery”. Very soon the youngsters become uncontrollable, and there ends papa’s duty for now they can take care of themselves.



Shocking Fellow

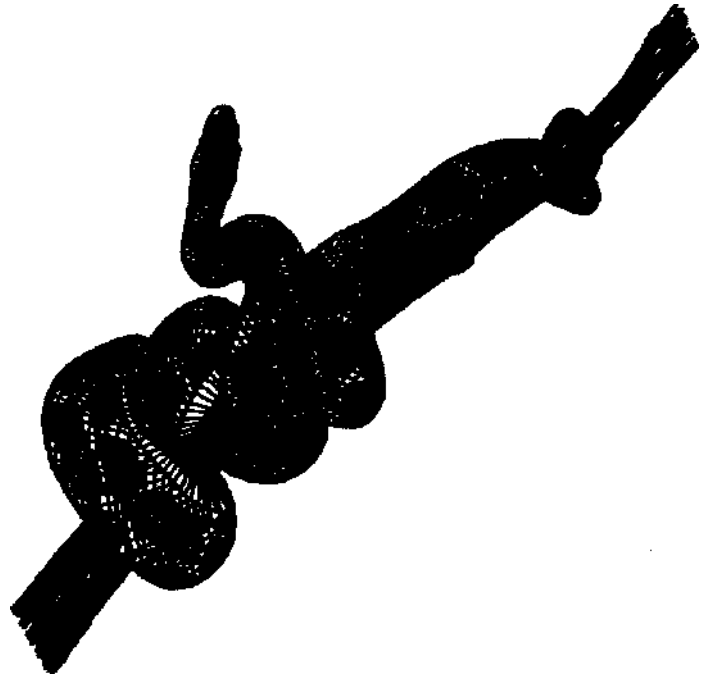
Here is a real livewire! Such a shocker is he that he is known as the Electric “Eel”. No doubt he is electric, but he is not an eel. He only looks like one. He belongs to the cat-fish family.

Fortunately for us he is found only in the rivers of South America. A four-foot moving generator capable of giving shocks that can stun or even kill a horse, he is a formidable adversary . He can produce enough electricity from a row of special glands all along the sides of his body, to light a flat—and would do well for an electric supply! He keeps his enemies away with the electric fence and when hungry he just stuns other fishes around him for his meal.



He's an actor

The best actor among snakes is the hog-nosed snake or the puff-adder of North America. With its stout body, rattler-like markings, and wicked looking head, it is a terrifying sight. But it is a completely harmless animal and knows it too! When cornered, it will put up a great show. Puffing out his neck to twice its normal size and hissing with a noise like a steam engine which can be heard some distance away. It will rear up and strike. A very alarming performance but pure bluff, for it strikes with its mouth closed! If this trick doesn't work, it will try another. Suddenly it starts writhing with mouth gaping and tongue lolling out as though having an attack of convulsions. After a few minutes, it rolls over, on its back and 'dies'—that is, it will lie absolutely motionless. If one remains nearby, it will continue this for even ten minutes. Even if picked up, it will remain limp without showing any sign of life. It is a very fine piece of acting, but the puff-adder spoils it, if you turn it over. For it seems to think that a dead snake should lie only on its back and if turned over, it will turn right back again! If we hide, the 'dead' snake will cautiously raise its head, look round and if no one about, will crawl away with great speed!

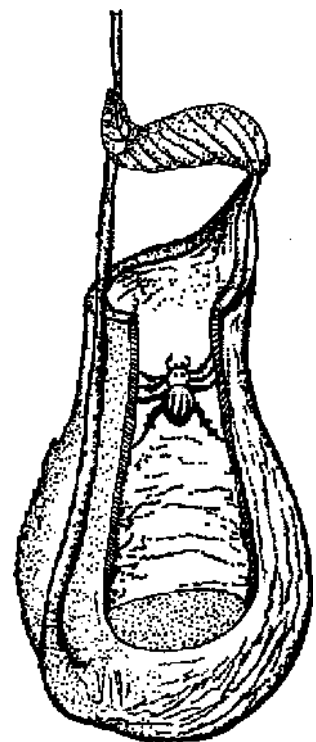


Partners in Gastronomy

A positive deathtrap for insects is the carnivorous Pitcher Plant. It has odd pitcher or jar shaped leaves brightly coloured. Sweet-smelling and with nectar glands to act as bait, they prove irresistible to insects. The bottom of the "pitcher" contains a pool of digestive juice. This soon kills off the victims, digests their soft parts and absorbs them.

An added danger for insects is the plant's partnership with the crab spider. This crafty-creature makes the "pitcher" his permanent abode—though it keeps well away from the digestive juice, as you may note from the sketch—there to live in a sort of peaceful coexistence.

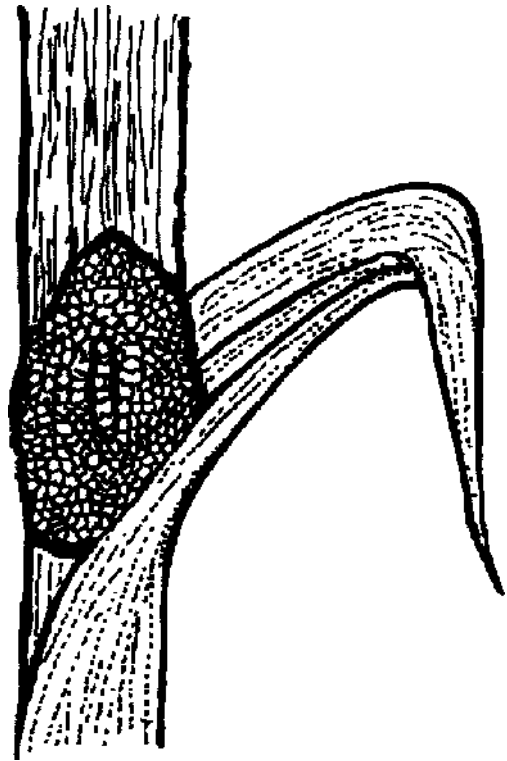
Inside the pitcher the table is set for the spider, who feeds on the insects attracted by the plant. He is, however, considerate to his landlord—it would not do if the latter died of starvation—and sees to it that enough goes into the digestive juice for the plant's maintenance. Though he keeps well away from the dangerous stuff beneath him, he really has no great fear, since he has developed a hard protective coat to neutralise the effects of the juice. In fact when danger threatens, he actually submerges himself in it until the threat is past, when he comes out once again unscathed. *(In the sketch the plant is cut open to expose the position of the spider.)*



Froth Blower

Insects have developed ingenious ways of defending themselves from their innumerable enemies, who are ever ready to make a meal of them. The Frog-hopper is a tiny bug less than a quarter of an inch long living on trees and plants hopping from place to place like a tiny frog. When it is young, the Frog-hopper has no wings or legs to help it to escape from enemies. So, it has developed a remarkable method of protecting itself. It builds a 'bubble fortress' around itself and remains safe inside.

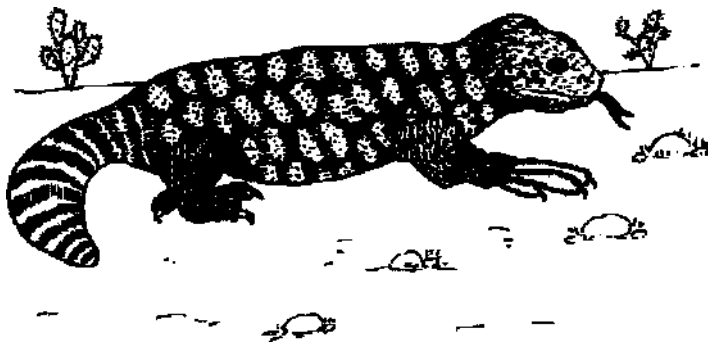
The young Frog-hopper secretes a liquid from its body and the air from its numerous breathing holes blows the liquid into bubbles. It goes on blowing numerous bubbles till they completely cover it. This bubble fortress looks like a bit of beaten egg white. These bubbles do not dry up or burst and protects the soft body of the young Frog-hopper from its enemies and also from the rays of the sun. It grows inside the 'fortress' and develops wings and leaping legs before emerging.



Little "Monster" of the Desert

In the arid desert regions of Mexico and Southern U.S.A. are to be found the 'beaded lizards' or the Gila Monsters as they are called. The Gila Monster is no monster in the true sense, as it scarcely grows more than two feet in length, but among lizards it is one with a poisonous bite more potent than that of many snakes. That accounts for its bad name.

Another peculiar feature of the Gila Monster is that its tail acts as its larder. Although it lives in deserts, it cannot remain exposed to the sun for more than a few minutes nor can it be active when it is too cold. So during the favourable periods, when food is also plentiful, it hunts and eats voraciously. The excess food is stored in the form of fat in its tail, which becomes plump as it eats more and more. When it is too hot or too cold to move about, the lizard remains quiet in its burrow drawing upon its reserves till favourable conditions return. Then it emerges with a tail that has become thin and emaciated.

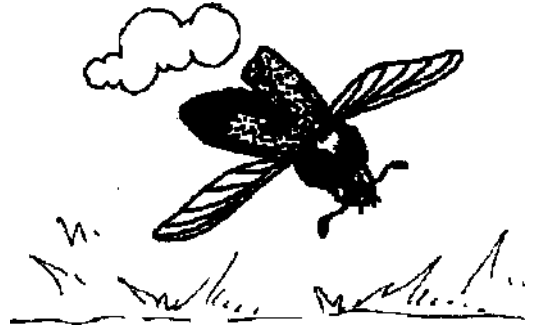


Burying Beetles

The Burying Beetles are so called because of their habit of burying the dead bodies of rats, moles, birds and other small animals. They are large and stout insects with red marks on their head and thorax. These undertakers are remarkable for their ingenuity and skill. In burying a body, they crawl under it and using their front legs to dig and the other legs to scrape aside the soil, they first dig out a cone-shaped cavity. They pull the carcass into this space and then enlarge the hole till the body is fully buried.

If the body is found in sod, they will cut the grass, roots etc., and clear the area. If the place where the body is found is stony, they will drag it to more favourable soil and then bury it. Usually only a couple do the burying, but sometimes there are two or more helpers.

The beetles do not eat the buried animal. It is meant for the use of their young ones. But for these insects and many other smaller organisms, the world would be littered with the dead bodies of a large number of birds and small animals.



Here's a Collector

Of all the bewildering types of rats and mice in the world, the pack rat of America is among the most interesting. He lives in arid desert regions, spending the day in his nest overlain with cactus pads, sticks and other movable litter. In the evenings he goes out to dine on cactus leaves, prickly pear and other desert plants and then starts his real occupation—that of collecting! This is an obsession with him and he isn't particularly on anything special. He will collect anything—stones, sticks and any rubbish he can get hold of. He is specially fond of bright things and will carry away coins, nails, glass pieces, even your watch, cartridges etc. But we can't call him a thief. He usually leaves some other object to replace whatever he takes away—even though the replacement be nothing more than a stone!

