

# Awake!

May 8, 1998



## Can Our Rain Forests Be Saved?





## **Can Our Rain Forests Be Saved?**

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The rain forests of the world, a fragile and vital resource, are being plundered. Many see this as a threat to the earth's ecology and to mankind's existence. Is there a solution?



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Wathana Meas was a Buddhist monk and later an officer in the Cambodian army. His story is a fascinating odyssey of survival.



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# The Rape of the Rain Forests

**O**NCE upon a time, a broad emerald belt girdled our planet. Trees of every kind made up its fabric, and broad rivers laced its surface.

Like a huge natural greenhouse, it was a realm of beauty and diversity. Half the world's species of animals, birds, and insects lived there. But although it was the most bounteous region on earth, it was also fragile—more fragile than anyone imagined.

The tropical rain forest, as we now call it, seemed immense—and almost indestructible. It was not. The rain forest first began to disappear from the Caribbean islands. As early as 1671—ten years before the dodo bird became extinct—sugar plantations swallowed up the forest on Barbados.\* Other islands in the region went through a similar experience, a foretaste of a global trend that has accelerated in the 20th century.

Today tropical rain forests carpet only 5 percent of the earth's surface, compared with 12 percent a century ago. And every year an area of forest greater than the size of England, or 50,000 square miles, is felled

or burned. This appalling rate of destruction threatens to condemn the rain forest—along with its inhabitants—to the same fate as the dodo. "It's dangerous to say the forest will disappear by a particular year, but unless things change, the forest will disappear," warns Philip Fearnside, a rain-forest researcher in Brazil. Diana Jean Schemo reported during October last year: "Data in recent weeks suggest that the burning going on in Brazil this year is greater than what has occurred in Indonesia, where major cities have been smothered under blankets of smoke that spread to other countries. . . . Burnings in the Amazon region are up 28 percent over last year, according to satellite data, and 1994 deforestation figures, the most recent available, show a 34 percent increase since 1991."

## "Trees Growing in a Desert"

Why are the rain forests, which were virtually intact a century ago, being wiped out so quickly? The temperate forests, which cover 20 percent of the earth's surface, have not been reduced significantly in the last 50 years. What makes the rain forests so vulnerable? The answer lies in their unique nature.

\* The dodo was a large, heavy, flightless bird that became extinct in 1681.

Arnold Newman, in his book *Tropical Rainforest*, says that the rain forest has been aptly described as "trees growing in a desert." He explains that in some parts of the Amazon basin and in Borneo, "great forests are, surprisingly, even supported on almost pure white sand." While most rain forests may not grow on sand, nearly all lie on very poor, and very little, topsoil. Although the topsoil in a temperate forest may be seven feet deep, in a rain forest, it rarely exceeds two inches. How can the most luxuriant vegetation on earth thrive in such a poor environment?

Scientists discovered the solution to this mystery in the 1960's and 1970's. They found that the forest literally feeds on itself. Most of the nutrients the plants need are supplied by the branch and leaf litter that covers the forest floor and that—thanks to the constant heat and humidity—is rapidly decomposed by termites, fungi, and other organisms. Nothing is wasted; everything is recycled. Through transpiration and evaporation from the forest canopy, the rain forest even recycles up to 75 percent of the rainfall it receives. Later, the clouds formed by this process water the forest again.

But this wonderful system has an Achilles' heel. If it is damaged too much, it cannot repair itself. Cut down a small area of rain forest, and within a few years, it will restore itself; but level a large area, and it may never recover. The heavy rain washes away the nutrients, and the hot sun bakes the thin layer

of topsoil until finally only coarse grass can grow.

### Land, Timber, and Hamburgers

To developing countries short of agricultural land, their huge tracts of virgin forest seemed ripe for exploitation. An "easy" solution was to encourage poor, landless peasants to clear portions of the forest and stake claims—somewhat like the settlement of the American West by European immigrants. The results, however, were traumatic for both the forest and the farmers.

The lush rain forest may give the impression that anything will grow there. But once the trees are felled, the illusion of boundless fertility soon evaporates. Victoria, an African woman who cultivates a small plot that her family has recently claimed from the forest, explains the problem.

"My father-in-law has just cut down and burned this patch of forest so that I can plant groundnuts, cassava, and some bananas. This year I should get a very good crop, but in two or three years' time, the soil will be exhausted, and we will have to clear another patch. It is hard work, but it is the only way we can survive."

There are at least 200 million slash-and-burn farmers like Victoria and her family! And they account for 60 percent of the rain forest's annual destruction. Although these itinerant cultivators would prefer an easier form of farming, they have no choice. Faced with a daily struggle to survive, they find

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conservation of the rain forest a luxury that they cannot afford.

While most farmers fell the forest for planting, others clear it for grazing. In the Central and South American rain forests, cattle ranching is another major cause of deforestation. The beef from these cattle usually ends up in North America, where fast-food chains have a huge appetite for cheap hamburger meat.

Ranchers, however, run into the same problem as the small-scale farmers. The pasture that springs up among the ashes of a rain forest can rarely support cattle for more than five years. Converting rain forest into hamburgers may be profitable for a few, but it must rank as one of the most wasteful ways of producing food that man has ever devised.\*

Another principal threat to the rain forest comes from logging. Not that logging necessarily destroys the rain forest. Some companies harvest a few commercial species in such a way that the forest soon recovers. But two thirds of the 17,000 square miles of forest that timber companies annually exploit are so heavily logged that only 1 in 5 of the forest's trees emerges unscathed.

"It appalls me when I see a wonderful forest ripped to pieces by uncontrolled logging," sighs botanist Manuel Fidalgo. "Although it is true that other plants and trees may take root in the cleared area, the new

\* In the face of widespread protest, some fast-food chains have stopped importing cheap beef from tropical countries.

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growth is secondary forest—which is much poorer in the number of species. It will take centuries or even millennia before the former forest can recover."

The logging companies also hasten the destruction of the forest by other means. Cattle grazers and itinerant farmers invade the forest mainly by the roads carved out by loggers. Sometimes the debris that loggers leave behind them feeds forest fires, which destroy even more forest than the loggers have cut. In Borneo, just one such fire consumed three million acres in 1983.

#### What Is Being Done to Protect the Forest?

In the face of these threats, some efforts are being made to conserve the forests that remain. But the task is gargantuan. National parks can protect pockets of rain forest, but hunting, logging, and slash-and-burn farming still continue inside the confines of many parks. Developing countries have little money to spend on park administration.

Cash-strapped governments are easily lured by international companies into selling logging rights—in some cases one of the few national assets available to pay off foreign debts. And the millions of itinerant farmers have nowhere to go but deeper and deeper into the rain forest.

In a world plagued by so many problems, is conservation of the rain forests that important? What do we stand to lose if they disappear?

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# The Benefits of the Rain Forests

In 1844, Greek scholar Konstantin von Tischendorf spotted 129 sheets of an ancient manuscript in a wastebasket in a monastery. Tischendorf walked away with the priceless leaves, and they now form part of the Codex Sinaiticus—one of the world's most famous Bible manuscripts.

That treasure was rescued in time. The rain forests—whose true worth is also frequently ignored—are rarely so fortunate. Every year during the dry season, thousands of fires set by ranchers and itinerant farmers light up the tropical sky. Al Gore, now U.S. vice president, who witnessed such a conflagration in the Amazon, said: "The devastation is just unbelievable. It's one of the great tragedies of all history."

Seldom do we burn something that we know is valuable. The tragedy of the rain forests is that they are being destroyed before we comprehend their worth, before we understand how they function, and even before we know what they contain. Putting a rain

forest to the torch is like burning a library to heat a home—without checking the contents of the books.

In recent years scientists have begun to study these "books," the vast store of information locked up in the rain forests. They make fascinating "reading."

## A Forest Like No Other

"The trees of these Indies are a thing that cannot be explained, for their multitude," exclaimed Spanish chronicler Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo in 1526. Five centuries later his appraisal is not far off the mark. "The rain forest," writes author Cynthia Russ Ramsay, is "the most diverse, the most complex, and the least understood ecosystem on earth."

Tropical biologist Seymour Sohmer states: "We should never lose sight of the fact that we know little or nothing about the way most humid tropical forests are structured and how they function, not to mention the

component species." The sheer numbers of species and the complexity of their interrelationships make the researchers' task a daunting one.

A temperate forest may contain only a handful of tree species per acre. An acre of rain forest, on the other hand, may support over 80 different species, even though the *total* number of trees per acre averages only about 300. Since the classifying of such diversity is an exhausting and painstaking task, few rain-forest plots

larger than a few acres have ever been analyzed. Those that have, however, yield surprising results.

The vast assortment of trees provides innumerable niches for a huge number of forest residents—far more than anyone had imagined. The U.S. National Academy of Sciences says that a typical four-square-mile area of pristine rain forest may harbor as many as 125 different species of mammals, 100 species of reptiles,

(Continued on page 10)



Rain forests produce (1) cacao, (2) rosy periwinkle, useful in treating leukemia, and (3) palm oil. (4) Deforestation leads to devastating landslides



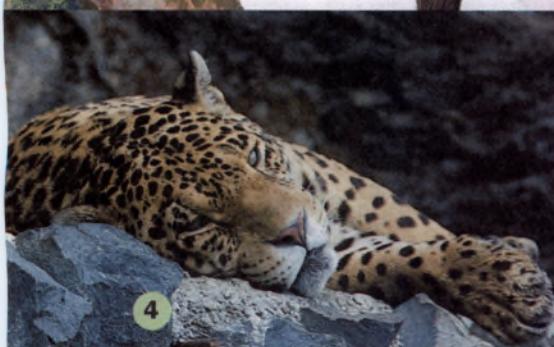


# Conserving the Creatures of the Forests

JESÚS ELÁ hunted gorillas and other animals of the African rain forest for about 15 years. But he doesn't hunt anymore. He has become a park guide in a nature reserve set aside to protect 750 lowland gorillas in Equatorial Guinea.

"I enjoy the rain forest more when I am not hunting," Jesús explains. "For me the forest is like my village because I feel at home here and it provides me with everything I need. We must do everything we can to conserve these forests for our children."

Jesús, who eagerly shares his love of the forest with others, is fortunate. He now earns more money protecting gorillas than he did hunting them. Since tourists are



▲ Foto: Zoo de Baños

## Creatures Great and Small

1. Many **grasshoppers** of the rain forest are painted with gaudy colors. Other insects have such effective camouflage that they are hard to pick out
2. **Butterflies** are the most noticeable and delicate creatures of the rain forest
3. A band of **monkeys** scampering from bough to bough is one of the most entertaining sights of the forest
4. Although the **jaguar** is the undisputed king of the American rain forests, few naturalists ever see one in the wild
5. Delicate **orchid** blooms adorn the moist cloud forests that carpet tropical mountains
6. There are fewer than 5,000 **tigers** left in the wild
7. The aptly named **rhinoceros beetle** of tropical America has fearsome horns but is quite harmless



Foto: Zoo de la Casa de Campo, Madrid ▶



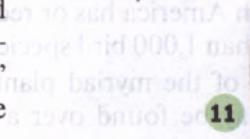


happy to pay for the privilege of seeing such animals in the wild, parks can provide income for local people and give visitors a memorable glimpse of a wealth of creatures. But conservation of this fascinating "web of life," explains the book *Tropical Rainforest*, requires "extensive preserves, which include, ideally, entire watersheds."\*

Why do parks need to be so big to provide adequate protection? John Terborgh, in his book *Diversity and the Tropical Rain Forest*, calculates that a viable population of jaguars (about 300 breeding adults) needs about 3,000 square miles. "By this criterion there are only a few parks on earth that contain enough space for jaguars," he concludes. Tigers may need even more space. A breeding pool of tigers (400 animals) may require an area as large as 15,000 square miles.

By setting aside large reserves for predators such as these, whole tracts of rain forest can likewise be protected. As an added bonus, these animals play a vital role in maintaining the overall health of the animal community.

\* A watershed is a region that drains into a river, a river system, or another body of water.



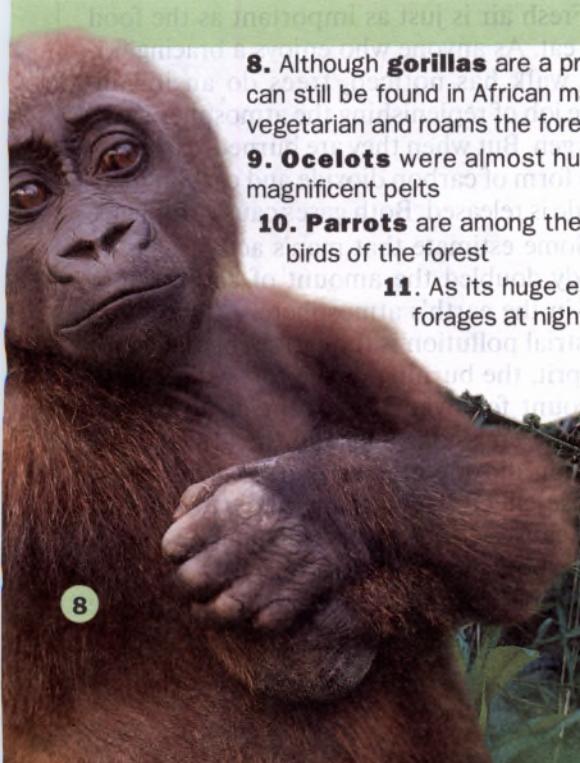
**8.** Although **gorillas** are a protected species, their meat can still be found in African markets. This gentle giant is a vegetarian and roams the forest in family groups

**9.** **Ocelots** were almost hunted to extinction for their magnificent pelts

**10.** **Parrots** are among the noisiest and most sociable birds of the forest

**11.** As its huge eyes suggest, the **galago** forages at night

Foto: Zoo de Baños ▶



(Continued from page 7)

400 species of birds, and 150 species of butterflies. By way of comparison, we note that the whole of North America has or receives visits from fewer than 1,000 bird species.

Although some of the myriad plant and animal species may be found over a wide area of rain forest, others are restricted to just one mountain range. That is what makes them so vulnerable. By the time loggers finished clear-cutting a mountain ridge in Ecuador a few years ago, 90 of the endemic plant species had become extinct.

In the face of such tragedies, the United States Interagency Task Force on Tropical Forests warns: "The community of nations must quickly launch an accelerated and coordinated attack on the problem if these greatly undervalued and probably irreplaceable resources are to be protected from virtual destruction by the early part of the next century."

But the questions may arise: Are these natural resources that valuable? Would the demise of the rain forest greatly affect our lives?

### Food, Fresh Air, and Medicine

Do you start off the day with a bowl of cornflakes, perhaps a boiled egg, and a cup of hot coffee? If you do, indirectly you are reaping the bounty of the tropical forests. The corn, the coffee beans, the hen that laid the egg, and even the cow that produced the milk—all had their origin in the fauna and flora of the tropical forest. Corn comes from South America, coffee comes from Ethiopia, domestic hens were bred from Asian jungle fowl, and dairy cattle descended from the endangered banteng of Southeast Asia. "Fully 80 percent of what we eat has its origins in the tropics," explains the book *Tropical Rainforest*.

Man cannot afford to turn his back on the origins of his food supply. Both crops and livestock can become weakened by too much inbreeding. The rain forest, with its vast collection of species, can supply the genetic variety needed to fortify these plants or animals. For example, Mexican botanist Rafael Guzmán discovered a new species of grass related to modern corn. His find excited farmers because this grass (*Zea diploperennis*) is resistant to five of the seven major diseases that ravage crops of corn. Scientists hope to use the new species to develop a disease-resistant variety of corn.

In 1987 the Mexican government protected the mountain range where this wild corn was found. But with so much forest being destroyed, invaluable species like this one are doubtless being lost, even before they are discovered. In the forests of Southeast Asia, there are several species of wild cattle that could strengthen the breeds of domestic herds. But all these species hover on the brink of extinction because of the destruction of their habitat.

Fresh air is just as important as the food we eat. As anyone who enjoys a bracing forest walk has noticed, trees do an invaluable job of replenishing the atmosphere with oxygen. But when they are burned, carbon in the form of carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide is released. Both gases cause problems.

Some estimate that man's activity has already doubled the amount of carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere. Although industrial pollution is thought to be the major culprit, the burning of the forests is said to account for over 35 percent of all carbon dioxide emissions. Once in the atmosphere, carbon dioxide creates the so-called greenhouse effect, which many scientists predict will cause serious global warming.

Carbon monoxide is even worse. It is a principal lethal ingredient found in the

smog that is the bane of city suburbs. But researcher James Greenberg was amazed to find "as much carbon monoxide over the Amazon jungles as over US suburbs." The thoughtless burning of the Amazon forests had fouled the very atmosphere that the trees were designed to cleanse!

Besides being a source of food and clean air, the rain forest can be a veritable medicine cabinet. A quarter of all the drugs doctors prescribe are derived from plants that grow in tropical forests. From the cloud forests of the Andes comes quinine, for fighting malaria; from the Amazon region, curare, used as a muscle relaxant in surgery; and from Madagascar, the rosy periwinkle, whose alkaloids dramatically increase the survival rate of many leukemia patients. Despite such impressive results, only about 7 percent of all tropical plants have been screened for possible medicinal properties. And time is running out. The United States Cancer Institute warns that "the widespread elimination of the tropical moist forests could represent a serious setback to the anti-cancer campaign."

There are other vital tasks that rain forests perform—although their importance is rarely appreciated until the forests are gone. Among these are the regulation of rainfall and temperature as well as protection against soil erosion. "The bounty of the

world's tropical forests far exceeds our present-day understanding of it," reports the book *The Emerald Realm: Earth's Precious Rain Forests*. "But we do know even now that its value is incalculable."

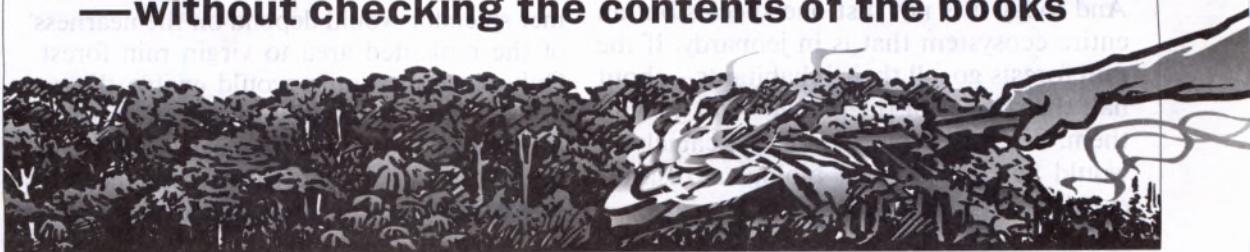
#### **"We Will Conserve Only What We Love"**

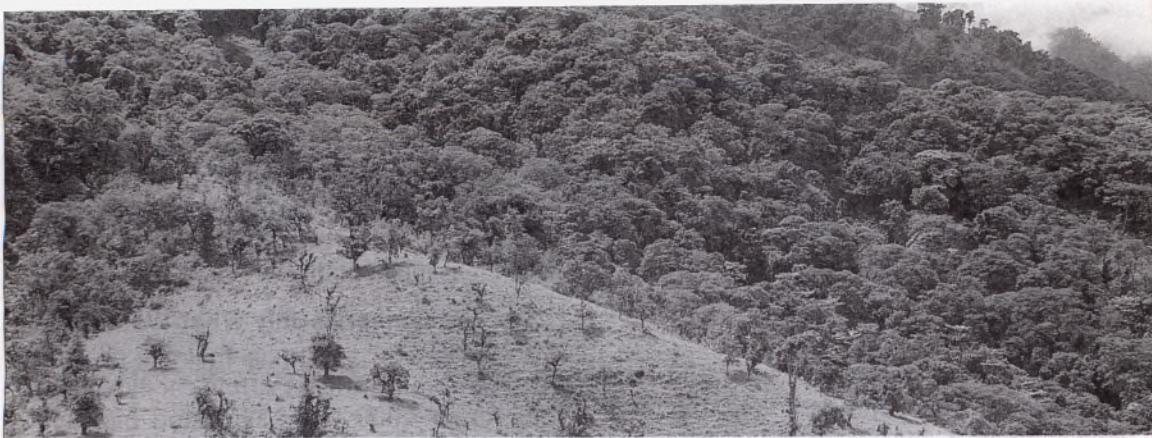
To destroy the resources that can provide for us so bountifully is surely the height of folly. Over 3,000 years ago, God instructed the Israelites to conserve the fruit trees when warring against an enemy city. The reason he gave them was simple: "They provide you with food." Furthermore, "the trees of the field are not men that you should besiege them." (Deuteronomy 20:19, 20, *The New English Bible*) The same can be said of the beleaguered rain forest.

Evidently, rain forests, like fruit trees, are worth much more when they are left standing than when they are cut down. But in this modern world, short-term benefits often override the long-term value. Education, however, can change attitudes. Senegalese ecologist Baba Dioum points out: "In the end we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we are taught."

Tischendorf stole those ancient leaves in the Sinai Desert because he loved antique manuscripts and he wanted to preserve them. Will enough people learn to love the rain forests in time to save them?

## **Putting a rain forest to the torch is like burning a library to heat a home —without checking the contents of the books**





# Will Our Rain Forests Survive?

**A**T THE beginning of this century, the passenger pigeon of North America became extinct. It was possibly the most numerous bird that had ever existed. Ornithologists calculate that two centuries ago its population numbered between five billion and ten billion!

However, within a hundred years, an apparently inexhaustible supply of inexpensive bird meat disappeared in what is described as "the most dramatic decline [of a species] of all time." The monument to the passenger pigeon in Wyalusing State Park, Wisconsin, U.S.A., reads: "This species became extinct through the avarice and thoughtlessness of man."

The fate of the passenger pigeon reminds us that even the most prolific of earth's creatures are vulnerable to man's assault. Avarice and thoughtlessness are still rampant. And today it is not just one species but an entire ecosystem that is in jeopardy. If the rain forests go, all their inhabitants—about half the species of the planet—will go with them. Scientists say that such a cataclysm would be "the greatest biological disaster ever [perpetrated] by man."

True, we have greater knowledge of the environment than we had a century ago. But this insight has not sufficed to stem the relentless tide of destruction. "We are destroying something that is priceless," laments botanist Manuel Fidalgo, "and we don't have much time left. I fear that in a few years' time, the only forests left intact will be those that are situated on mountain slopes inaccessible to the loggers."

Naturalists are alarmed because the rain forests are so difficult to restore. The book *The Emerald Realm: Earth's Precious Rain Forests* frankly describes reforestation as "slow and expensive, . . . a last-resort response to rain forest destruction." At best, replanting would probably involve only a few species of tropical trees, and the saplings would need constant attention to prevent weeds from choking them.

Whether a forest could ever regain its former splendor would depend on the nearness of the replanted area to virgin rain forest. Only close proximity would enable the reforested area eventually to be colonized by the tens of thousands of species that make up a true rain forest. Even then, the process would take centuries. Some areas aban-

doned a thousand years ago when the Mayan civilization collapsed have still not fully recovered.

### **"A New Internationalism"?**

One scientist at the Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, D.C., proposed that 10 percent of existing rain forests be set aside for posterity, to safeguard as many species as possible. At the moment about 8 percent are protected, but many of these reserves or national parks are parks in name only, since there are neither funds nor personnel to protect them. Clearly, something more must be done.

Peter Raven, a spokesman for rain-forest conservation, explains: "Efforts to save the rain forests call for a new internationalism, a realization that people everywhere share a role in the fate of the earth. Ways to alleviate poverty and hunger throughout the world must be found. New agreements between nations will need to be developed."

His recommendation makes sense to many people. Saving the rain forests requires a global solution—as do many other situations facing mankind. The problem lies in getting "agreements between nations" before a worldwide catastrophe occurs and before the damage done is irreparable. As Peter Raven implies, the destruction of the rain forests is closely related to other intractable problems of the developing world, such as hunger and poverty.

So far, international efforts to address such problems have met with limited success. Some people ask, Will nations one day rise above their narrow and conflicting national interests for the sake of the common good, or is the quest for "a new internationalism" just a dream?

History does not appear to give grounds for optimism. Nevertheless, one factor is often ignored—the viewpoint of the rain forest's Creator. "It should be borne in mind

that we are destroying part of the Creation," points out Harvard Professor Edward O. Wilson, "thereby depriving all future generations of what we ourselves were bequeathed."

Will the Creator of the earth allow mankind to destroy his handiwork completely? That would be inconceivable.\* Rather, the Bible predicts that God will "bring to ruin those ruining the earth." (Revelation 11:18) How will God impose his solution? He promises to establish a Kingdom—a supranational heavenly government—that will solve all earth's problems and that "will never be brought to ruin."—Daniel 2:44.

Not only will God's Kingdom bring an end to man's abuse of the planet but it will also supervise the restoration of earth's natural beauty. The whole earth will eventually become a global park, just as our Creator intended at the beginning. (Genesis 1:28; 2:15; Luke 23:42, 43) People everywhere will be "taught by Jehovah," and they will learn to love and appreciate all of his creation, including the rain forest.—Isaiah 54:13.

Describing that blessed time, the psalmist wrote: "Let all the trees of the forest break out joyfully before Jehovah. For he has come; for he has come to judge the earth. He will judge the productive land with righteousness and the peoples with his faithfulness." —Psalm 96:12, 13.

Happily, the future of the rain forest does not hinge on the concern—or the avarice—of man. The Bible gives us reason to be confident that the Creator himself will intervene to save our tropical forests. In God's promised new world, future generations will see the glory that is the rain forest.—Revelation 21:1-4.

\* Interestingly, conservationists who aim to save as many endangered species as possible describe their ethic as the "Noah principle," since Noah was instructed to admit into the ark "every living creature of every sort of flesh." (Genesis 6:19) "Longstanding existence [of species] in nature is deemed to carry with it the unimpeachable right to continued existence," argues biologist David Ehrenfeld.

# *“Love Never Fails”*

## DO YOU?

**W**HAT is love? The world over, there are proverbs that highlight the value of true love. A Zulu proverb says, “Love does not choose the blade of grass on which it falls.” In the Philippines people say, “Love is the salt of life.” A Lebanese proverb states, “Love overlooks defects and hated magnifies shortcomings.” Similar is the Irish saying, “Love conceals ugliness.” The Welsh say, “Love is stronger than a giant.” The Norwegians say, “That which is loved is always beautiful.” An English person might say, “A pennyweight of love is worth a pound of law.” In Spain, there is a saying, “True love lasts until death.”

Without a doubt, true love is appreciated wherever we go. The love that can make a real difference in life is that described by the Bible writer Paul: “Love is long-suffering and kind. Love is not jealous, it does not brag, does not get puffed up, does not behave indecently, does not look for its own interests, does not become provoked. It does not keep account of the injury. It does not rejoice over unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”—1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

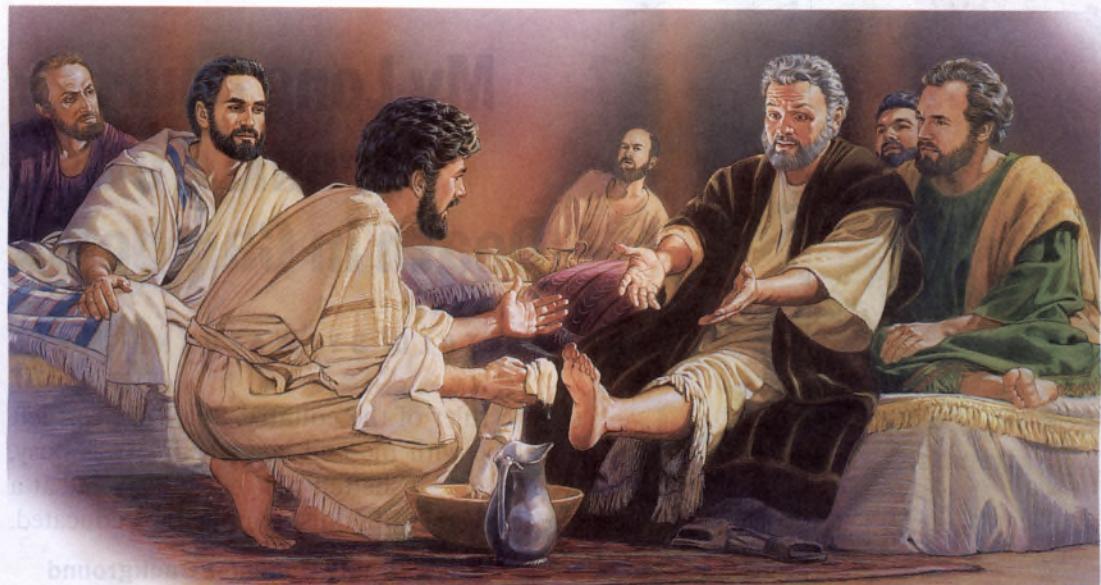
Yes, “love never fails.” Love heals. Love unites. Love is shown not just by words but by unselfish actions. Love has a pure mo-

tive. Thus, Paul also wrote: “If I give all my belongings to feed others, and if I hand over my body, that I may boast, but do not have love, I am not profited at all.” If we make sacrifices or give gifts just to be seen by others, then from God’s viewpoint it is in vain.—1 Corinthians 13:3.

Jesus put it this way: “When you go making gifts of mercy, do not blow a trumpet ahead of you, just as the hypocrites do . . . that they may be glorified by men. Truly I say to you, They are having their reward in full. But you, when making gifts of mercy, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing.” Yes, love does not boast or brag.—Matthew 6:2, 3.

Love without hypocrisy does not seek personal advantage. True love makes a person refreshing to be around. (Matthew 11:28-30) The following anonymous quotation may make us think about the kind of love we have for others: “Righteousness without love makes us hard. Faith without love makes us fanatical. Power without love makes us brutal. Duty without love makes us peevish. Orderliness without love makes us petty.”

People who live only for rules can fall into the trap of being loveless. How up-building all of us can be if we live by Paul’s counsel: “Clothe yourselves with the tender affections of compassion, kindness, lowli-



### True Christians practice love as Jesus taught it

ness of mind, mildness, and long-suffering. Continue putting up with one another and forgiving one another freely if anyone has a cause for complaint against another. Even

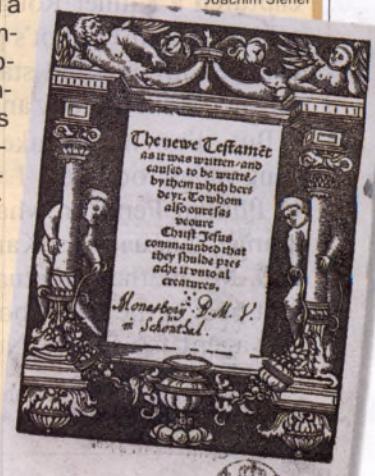
as Jehovah freely forgave you, so do you also. But, besides all these things, clothe yourselves with love, for it is a perfect bond of union.”—Colossians 3:12-14.

## EARLY BIBLE TRANSLATION SURVIVES



During 1994/95 the British Library exhibited a textually complete 1526 edition of William Tyndale's translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures printed during his exile in Worms, Germany. This book was purchased from England's Bristol Baptist College for almost \$1,600,000, as it was reckoned to be the only surviving complete copy—the bulk of the 3,000 or so smuggled into England were burned at the instigation of the bishop of London. However, another complete copy of this edition has come to light, in a library in Stuttgart, Germany. Mislabeled and overlooked for hundreds of years, it retains not only its original binding but also its precious title page.

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# My Long Journey From Life and Death in Cambodia

AS TOLD BY WATHANA MEAS



*During my years as  
a Buddhist monk*

**I**T WAS 1974, and I was fighting the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. I was an officer in the Cambodian army. In one battle we captured a Khmer Rouge soldier. What he told me about Pol Pot's plans for the future changed my life and started me on a long journey, both literally and spiritually.\*

But allow me to take you to the beginning of my odyssey. I was born in 1945, in Phnom Penh, in what is known in the Khmer language as Kampuchea (Cambodia). My mother eventually held an important post in the secret police. She was a special agent for Prince Norodom Sihanouk,

the ruler of the country. Since she was left alone with me and her schedule was busy, she felt obliged to leave me at a Buddhist temple to be educated.

## My Buddhist Background

I was eight years old when I went to live with the chief Buddhist monk. From that year until 1969, I divided my time between the temple and home. The monk I served was Chuon Nat, the highest Buddhist authority in Cambodia at that time. For a while, I worked as his secretary and assisted him in the translation of the Buddhist holy book "The Three Baskets" (*Tipitaka*, or Sanskrit *Tripitaka*) from an ancient Indian language into Cambodian.

I was inducted as a monk in 1964 and served as such until 1969. During this period there were many questions that bothered me, such as, Why is there so much suffering in the world, and how did it start? I saw people try in many ways to please their gods, but they did not know how their gods could solve their problems. I could not find a satisfactory answer in the Buddhist writings, and the other monks couldn't either. I became so disillusioned that I decided to quit the temple, and I gave up being a monk.

\* Pol Pot was then the Communist leader of the Khmer Rouge army, which won the war and took over Cambodia.

Finally, in 1971, I joined the Cambodian army. I was sent to Vietnam about 1971, and because of my educational background, I was promoted to the rank of second lieutenant and was assigned to special forces. We were fighting against the Communist Khmer Rouge and Vietcong forces.

### War and Changes in Cambodia

I became a war-hardened veteran. I got used to seeing death almost on a daily basis. I personally engaged in 157 battles. One time, deep in the jungle, we were surrounded for over a month by the Khmer Rouge. More than 700 men died. We were left with about 15 survivors—I was one of them, and I was wounded. But I got out alive.

On another occasion, in 1974, we captured a Khmer Rouge soldier. As I interrogated him, he told me that Pol Pot planned to exterminate all former government officials, including those in the army. He told me to drop everything and run away. He said: "Keep changing your name. Don't let anyone know who you are. Act ignorant and uneducated. Don't tell anyone about your previous life." After I let him go back to his home, that warning stuck in my mind.

We soldiers had been told that we were fighting for our country, and yet, we were killing Cambodians. The Khmer Rouge, a Communist faction seeking power, were from our own people. In fact, the majority of the nine million inhabitants of Cambodia are Khmer, although most of them do not belong to the Khmer Rouge. It didn't make any sense to me. We were killing innocent farmers who had no guns and had no interest in the war.

Returning from battle was always a heart-rending experience. Wives and children would be there, waiting anxiously to see if the husband or father had returned. I had to tell many of them that their family mem-

ber had been killed. In all of this, my understanding of Buddhism provided me with no comfort.

I think back now on how things changed in Cambodia. Before 1970, there was relative peace and security. Most people did not possess a gun; it was illegal unless you had a license. There was very little robbery or theft. But after the civil war started with the rebellion of Pol Pot and his forces, everything changed. Guns were everywhere. Even youngsters of 12 and 13 were being trained for military service, learning how to shoot and kill. Pol Pot's people convinced some children to kill their own parents. The soldiers would tell the children, "If you love your country, you have to hate your enemies. If your parents work for the government, they are our enemies and you must kill them—or be killed yourself."

### Pol Pot and the Purge

In 1975, Pol Pot won the war and Cambodia became a Communist nation. Pol Pot started a purge of all students, teachers, government officials, and anyone else with an education. If you wore glasses, you could be killed because it was assumed that you were educated! The Pol Pot regime forced most people out of the cities and towns and moved them to the countryside to work as farmers. Everybody had to dress in the same style. We had to work 15 hours a day, with insufficient food, no medicine, no clothes, and just 2 or 3 hours of sleep. I decided to leave my homeland before it was too late.

I remembered the advice of that Khmer Rouge soldier. I threw away all photos, papers, and anything that could incriminate me. I dug a hole and buried some of my documents. Then I traveled westward toward Thailand. It was dangerous. I had to avoid roadblocks and be really careful during curfew hours, since only Khmer Rouge soldiers could travel, with official permission.



**With my family, at the Kingdom Hall**

I went to one area and lived with a friend for a while. Then the Khmer Rouge moved everyone from that place to a new location. They started to kill off the teachers and the doctors. I escaped with three friends. We hid in the jungle and ate what fruit we could find on the trees. Eventually, I came to a small village in the province of Battambang, where a friend of mine lived. To my surprise, there I also found the former soldier who had advised me on how to escape! Since I had set him free, he hid me in a pit for three months. He directed a child to drop food to me but not to look in the pit.

In time, I was able to escape, and I found my mother, my aunt, and my sister, who were also fleeing toward the Thai border. It was a sad time for me. My mother was sick, and eventually she died from disease and lack of food, in a refugee camp. However, one ray of light and hope came into

my life. I met Sopheap Um, the woman who became my wife. We escaped, together with my aunt and my sister, across the Thai border and into a United Nations refugee camp. Our family paid a high price in Cambodia's civil war. We lost 18 family members, including my brother and my sister-in-law.

### **A New Life in the United States**

Our background was checked at the refugee camp, and the UN tried to find a sponsor for us so that we could go to the United States. Finally, success! In 1980, we arrived in St. Paul, Minnesota. I knew that I needed to learn English as soon as possible if I was going to progress in my new country. My sponsor sent me to school for only a few months, although I was supposed to study longer. Instead, he got me a job as a janitor in a hotel. But with my limited English, it became a comedy of errors. The owner would ask me to get a ladder, and I would bring back the trash!

### **A Scary Visit**

In 1984, I was working the night shift and sleeping during the day. We lived in an area where there was a lot of tension between Asians and blacks. Crime and drugs were common. One morning, my wife woke me up at ten o'clock to tell me that there was a black man at the door. She was scared because she thought he had come to rob us. I peeked through the door, and there stood a well-dressed black man with a briefcase, and a white man was with him. It seemed to me that nothing was amiss.

I asked him what he was selling. He showed me copies of the *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines. I did not understand anything. I tried to refuse them because a couple of months before, I had been deceived into paying \$165 for a set of five books from a Protestant salesman. However, the black man showed me the illustrations in the mag-

azines. The pictures were so pleasant and beautiful! And the man had a big, friendly smile. So I donated \$1 and took them.

About two weeks later, he came back and asked me if I had a Cambodian Bible. As it happened, I did have one that I had got at a Nazarene church, although I did not understand it. But I was impressed that two men of different races had come to my door. Then he asked me, "Do you want to learn English?" Of course I did, but I explained that I did not have money to pay for lessons. He told me that he would teach me without charge, using a Bible-based publication. Even though I did not know what religion he represented, I thought to myself, 'At least I don't have to pay, and I will learn to read and write English.'

### **Learning English and the Bible**

It was a slow process. He would show me the first book of the Bible, Genesis, and then I would say it in Cambodian, "*Lo ca bat.*" He would say, "Bible," and I would say, "*Compee.*" I began to make progress, and I was motivated. I used to take my English-Cambodian dictionary, a *Watchtower* magazine, the New World Translation of the Bible, and my Cambodian Bible to work. During my break, I studied and learned English, word by word, by comparing the publications. This slow process, along with weekly lessons, took over three years. But, at last, I could read English!

My wife was still attending the Buddhist temple, and she was leaving food out for the ancestors. Of course, the only ones who benefited were the flies! I had many deeply ingrained bad habits that went back to my days in the army and in Buddhism. When I was a monk, the people used to bring offerings, including cigarettes. They believed that if the monk smoked the cigarettes, it was as if their ancestors were smoking. Thus, I became a

victim of nicotine addiction. Then, too, in the army I drank very heavily and smoked opium to give me courage for the battles. Thus, when I started to study the Bible, I had to make a lot of changes. That is when I discovered that prayer is a great help. In a matter of a few months, I overcame my bad habits. How that pleased the rest of the family!

I got baptized as a Witness in 1989, in Minnesota. About that time I learned that there was a Cambodian-speaking group of Witnesses and also a large Cambodian population in Long Beach, California. After my wife and I discussed it, we decided to move to Long Beach. It was a change that made all the difference! My sister was baptized first, then my aunt (who is now 85 years old) and my wife. My three children followed. Eventually, my sister married a Witness, who now serves as an elder in the congregation.

Here in the United States, we have gone through many trials. We have experienced severe financial difficulties and some health problems, but by adhering to Bible principles, we have maintained our trust in Jehovah. He has blessed my efforts in the spiritual field. In 1992, I was appointed to serve as a ministerial servant in the congregation, and in 1995, I became an elder here in Long Beach.

For now, the long journey that started when I was a Buddhist monk and then an officer in the battlefields of war-torn Cambodia has ended with peace and happiness in our new home and country. And we have our newfound faith in Jehovah God and Christ Jesus. It pains me to know that people are still killing one another in Cambodia. All the more reason for my family and me to await and to announce the promised new world, where all wars will cease and all people will truly love their neighbors as themselves!—Isaiah 2:2-4; Matthew 22:37-39; Revelation 21:1-4.

# How Significant Is the Year 2000?

**M**OST people attach absolutely no religious significance to what in Western lands as well as in many others will be the year 2000. For example, Jews, Muslims, and Hindus all have their own religious calendars that do not coincide with the Western ones. For religious and traditional dates, the Chinese follow a lunar calendar. Hence, billions of people today, perhaps the majority of the world's population, ascribe no special meaning to the year 2000.\*

Still, especially in Western lands, many await with curiosity the approaching threshold of the next millennium as marked by the Gregorian calendar. For some it is more than just curiosity. They view the year 2000 as ushering in a new era, as a turning point in history. Many who profess belief in the Bible associate the fulfillment of prophecies with the year 2000. Some expect a spiritual manifestation of great proportions. Others fear a cataclysm—the end of the world. Does the Bible provide any basis for these expectations?

\* From a technical point of view, the so-called third millennium begins on January 1, 2001. The first millennium did not begin with a zero year but, rather, with the year 1. However, the public associate the term "third millennium" with the year 2000. This article focuses on popular expectations regarding the year 2000.

## Jehovah, the Timekeeper

The God of the Bible is described as "the Ancient of Days." (Daniel 7:9) He controls time with perfect precision, as is evident in the function of many of his creations, from the rotation of planets to the movement of subatomic particles. He has his own timetable to which he sticks with exactness. "He decreed the appointed times and the set limits of the dwelling of men," says the Bible. (Acts 17:26) Jehovah is an accurate Timekeeper.

Accordingly, the Bible gives specific attention to chronology. It provides a connected record that allows for a methodical count back to the beginning of human history. Such a calculation points to 4026 B.C.E. as the year in which God created Adam. Some 2,000 years later, Abraham was born. Another 2,000 years had elapsed by the time of Jesus' birth.

Some who study Bible chronology have formulated arbitrary equations that point to specific dates in the future. For example, using as a basis the consecutive periods of approximately 2,000 years that separated Adam, Abraham, and Jesus, some predict a portentous event at the end of the 2,000-year



period since Jesus' birth. This is just one example of several time formulas that are purportedly based on Bible chronology.

Granted, the Bible talks about the time when Jehovah God will intervene in human affairs by removing badness and ushering in a new world. Bible prophecy speaks of "the time of the end," "the conclusion of the system of things," "the last days," and "the day of Jehovah." (Daniel 8:17; Matthew 24:3; 2 Timothy 3:1; 2 Peter 3:12) However, the "end" prophesied in the Bible is not connected in any way to the year 2000. There is nothing in the Scriptures ascribing special significance to the end of the second millennium as calculated by the Gregorian calendar.

### "When Will These Things Be?"

Jesus' apostles manifested keen interest in God's timetable when they asked Jesus: "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?" (Matthew 24:3) Many today share a similar curiosity about the future. It is natural to be keenly interested in such significant Bible prophecies and the time of their fulfillment. However, it is wise to accept and respect God's position on the matter.

By means of his Son, Jehovah has revealed his mind and has given a straight answer on this issue. Shortly before Jesus' ascension to heaven, his disciples asked him again about the timing of the fulfillment of God's promises. Jesus answered: "It does not belong to you to get knowledge of the times or seasons which the Father has placed in his own jurisdiction." (Acts 1:7) On an earlier occasion, Jesus told his disciples: "Concerning that day and hour nobody knows, neither the angels of the heavens nor the Son, but only the Father." —Matthew 24:36.

Clearly, the "knowledge of the times or seasons," especially when it comes to the future fulfillment of Bible prophecies, is not

under human jurisdiction. God has chosen not to reveal such information to us. (Matthew 24:22-44) Could we affect in any way God's purpose by deciphering "that day and hour" on our own, against his wishes? Obviously, this would be impossible. (Numbers 23:19; Romans 11:33, 34) The Bible states: "To time indefinite the very counsel of Jehovah will stand." (Psalm 33:11) Being the almighty God, he is always successful.—Isaiah 55:8-11.

Notwithstanding God's power to keep the "knowledge of the times or seasons . . . in his own jurisdiction," many still like to speculate. Some become self-appointed prophets of doom. For this reason the apostle Paul gave specific instruction to the Thessalonians regarding the danger of listening to those who speculate about dates. He wrote: "We request of you not to be quickly shaken from your reason nor to be excited either through an inspired expression or through a verbal message or through a letter as though from us, to the effect that the day of Jehovah is here. Let no one seduce you in any manner."—2 Thessalonians 2:1-3.

Jehovah's Witnesses firmly believe that God's purposes for the future are certain of execution at his predetermined time, right down to the day and hour designated by him. (Habakkuk 2:3; 2 Peter 3:9, 10) And we believe that these events will take place in the not-too-distant future. (2 Timothy 3:1-5) However, we do not speculate on or support the theories proliferating today.\* Surely, neither the year 2000, nor 2001, nor any other time threshold set by humans has anything to do with Jehovah's timetable.

\* The September 1, 1997, issue of *The Watchtower*, pages 21-2, stated: "Jehovah's Witnesses have been eager to know when the day of Jehovah will occur. In their eagerness they have at times made attempts to estimate when it might come. But by so doing, they have failed, as did Jesus' early disciples, to heed their Master's caution that we 'do not know when the appointed time is.' (Mark 13:32, 33) Ridicilers have mocked faithful Christians for their premature expectations. (2 Peter 3:3, 4) Nevertheless, Jehovah's day will come, Peter affirms, according to His timetable."

# MAKING A SWEATER In Patagonia

BY AWAKE! CORRESPONDENT IN ARGENTINA

**I**'M FEELING cold!" In temperate regions, who has not at some time uttered those words? And the reaction may have been, 'Where is my sweater?

If you are one of millions who wear a sweater, have you ever wondered how it was made? How is the wool spun? How are the colors obtained? Here in Argentina we have native Indians who do all of this by hand. Let us visit them and see how they do it.

## Making a Sweater the Old-Fashioned Way

A number of Mapuche, an Indian tribe of the Araucanian people, live in the south of Patagonia, in Argentina. They use the traditional methods of spinning the wool and of coloring it. In the spring of the Southern Hemisphere, toward the end of November and the beginning of December, they shear the sheep, using special steel scissors. Sheepshearing is an art that has to be seen!



Obviously, the wool that comes off the sheep contains grasses, plants, and clotted soil. So it has to be thoroughly washed. This is done by submerging it in hot water and then putting it out to dry. Next, the remaining impurities are removed. This is known as *escardado*, or carding the wool. If this process is done properly, the wool will be

clean, dry, and very soft. This means that the fleece is ready to be turned into knitting wool, or yarn.

There are two traditional ways of making the yarn. In one, a spindle is used. (See photo 1.) The spinner turns the wool into yarn by winding it onto the spindle while rubbing the wool against her leg with one hand and twisting it. The yarn then accumulates on the spindle. The thickness of the yarn is controlled by the amount of wool that is wound onto the spindle.

In the other method of making yarn, a spinning wheel is used, which the spinner



- 1. Using a spindle to form the yarn**
- 2. The spinning wheel is a faster method for making the yarn**
- 3. Close-up of wool being fed into the spinning wheel**
- 4. Knitting the traditional way**
- 5. Front pieces of a sweater**
- 6. Modern, computer-controlled knitting machine**

operates by a foot pedal. The wool is fed into the wheel through a hole, and the spinner controls the thickness of the yarn. (See photo 2.) Once the yarn is formed, it can be made into the typical ball of wool that most women buy. But what about dyeing the wool different colors? How is that done?

The Mapuche make the colors from certain roots or plants by boiling them for about 30 minutes in water that is slightly salty. This is similar to the way that some

Navajo Indians in Arizona, U.S.A., make the colors for the blankets that they weave. In Argentina, for yellow coloring, the Mapuche boil the roots of the *michai* bush, an Indian name for the *Berberis darwinii* plant; for a brown color with white flecks, they use the leaves of the *radal* bush, or wild walnut; for red, they use beets. Although this method is laborious, the colors are very resistant to fading. Now, with





the yarns all colored, we can start knitting the sweater.

### Knitting—Various Styles

For centuries women have used needles to knit wool into flat fabric that can then be stitched to form a garment. Four needles can be used to knit socks, sleeves, and tubular shapes. One source says that knitting probably began in Arabia about 200 C.E. This skill then spread into Europe, and the Spanish brought knitting to South and Central America in the 16th century, although the art may have been practiced earlier by some local peasants.

Our friendly knitter now asks, "How thick do you want the sweater to be?" That decision will determine the width of the needles and the thickness of the wool she will use. Then, "What colors do you want?" With that decided, she can now start knitting.

What surprises the uninitiated is that the art of knitting can be reduced to two basic stitches—knit, or plain, as some call it, and purl. Purl is an inverted plain stitch and serves to give a ribbed effect. Used in combination, these two stitches can produce a variety of patterns.

Our knitter makes the sweater in parts, and these are then stitched together—the front, the back, the sleeves, and the neck—to make the finished product. Of course, it takes hours, even days, to make the garment. So if you receive one as a gift, don't take it for granted! A lot of patient work went into it.



### The Modern Methods

Since the industrial revolution, machines have been invented that can knit thousands of sweaters in next to no time. Today these industrial knitting machines are often controlled by computers. Many women use a smaller machine at home, which saves a lot of time.

In Patagonia, knitting is still a family enterprise in which the mother does the knitting and the husband and children help to complete the finished article. Often, they use a home knitting machine and then sell their extra production to a knitwear factory. This helps out with the family budget.

### Are You Going to Buy a Sweater?

What should you consider if you are going to buy a sweater? If you want a handmade sweater, you will probably pay more, so you might as well get the best you can for the price. Choose your sweater carefully, according to your needs, and check the quality. How can you do that? Check how the

garment seams are finished and how the neck holds up. Look at the texture and composition of the yarn.

Is it 100-percent wool? A mixture? If stretched, does it give way easily and stay stretched, or does it return to its original form? Then, every time you wear your sweater, think of all the work that went into it, especially if it was handmade in Patagonia!



# The Mystery of the Dolmens

## WHY, WHEN, AND HOW?

BY AWAKE! CORRESPONDENT IN THE NETHERLANDS

**W**HAT is a dolmen?" you might ask. It is a prehistoric site made up of two or more heavy upright stones with a capstone, usually forming a chamber, that is generally used as a burial place. They are found mainly in western, northern, and southern Europe.

In the Dutch province of Drenthe, the dolmens are generally located in attractive, scenic areas. The famous painter Vincent van Gogh wrote in one of his letters: 'Drenthe is so beautiful that I would rather not have seen it if I were not able to remain here forever.' Lovers of nature as well as those interested in archaeology get all that they could wish for when they visit the dolmens in Drenthe.

But why should ancient collections of stones interest us?



A taula in  
Minorca, Spain

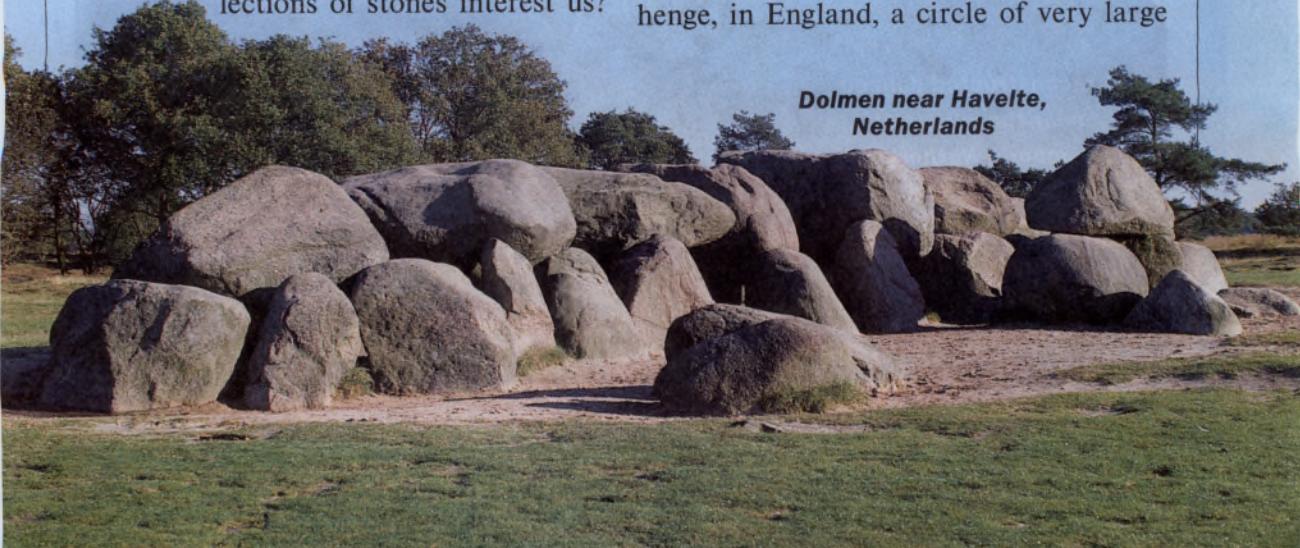
One answer is curiosity. Why would ancient peoples go to such enormous trouble to move and shape and lift these tremendous weights? Some stones weigh tons. And in those times, they did not have modern cranes to do the lifting! So, what can we find out about dolmens?

### Megalithic Monuments

Dolmens are classified as megalithic monuments ("megalith," from Greek, means "large stone"). Perhaps you are familiar with the menhirs of France, named after a Breton word meaning "long stone." The Balearic island of Minorca has megaliths known as taulas (tables), which consist of a heavy slab placed horizontally on a vertical stone, thus forming a massive T.

People continue to be intrigued by Stonehenge, in England, a circle of very large

Dolmen near Havelte,  
Netherlands



stones, some weighing as much as 50 tons. About 80 bluestone pillars were transported more than 240 miles from the Preseli Mountains in Wales. According to the National Geographic Society book *Mysteries of Mankind—Earth's Unexplained Landmarks*, "scholars surmise that the monument [Stonehenge] . . . was a temple that may have reflected the eternal, cyclical movements of the sun, moon, and stars across the heavens, but little else."

A dolmen today is just a skeleton of a burial monument, since the gigantic rocks were originally out of sight under a mound of sand or earth. Discoveries have revealed that the dolmen was a communal burial tomb. Some evidence indicates that more than a hundred people lay buried in one particular dolmen—it was a virtual cemetery!

In the Netherlands, 53 dolmens have been preserved to our day; 52 of these are situated in the province of Drenthe. Remarkably, they were not set up haphazardly, but most are aligned east-west, the entrance being on the south, which may have something to do with the seasonal positions of the sun.



**Stonehenge, Britain**

*Below: The Large Dolmen, near Borger, Netherlands*



The ancient builders used vertical supporting rocks and large capstones, while the apertures between the rocks were closed up with chunks of stone. The floor was paved with stone. The largest dolmen in the Netherlands, near the village of Borger, is 70 feet long and still consists of 47 rocks. One of the capstones is about ten feet long and weighs 20 tons! All of this gives rise to a number of questions.

#### **When Were They Built? By Whom, How, and Why?**

Answers to such questions are very vague because there is no written history from Eu-

**A reconstructed dolmen  
near the village of  
Schoonoord, Netherlands,  
showing the  
earthen mound  
and the  
exposed stones**



rope of that time. Thus, it is fitting to refer to dolmens as mysterious monuments. What, then, is known about them? At any rate, what claims are made?

In 1660, "Reverend" Picardt, of the small city of Coevorden, in Drenthe, concluded that they were built by giants. In time, local authorities showed interest in these graves. Because the stones were being used to reinforce dikes as well as to build churches and dwellings, the Drenthe Landscape Administration enacted a law on July 21, 1734, protecting the dolmens.

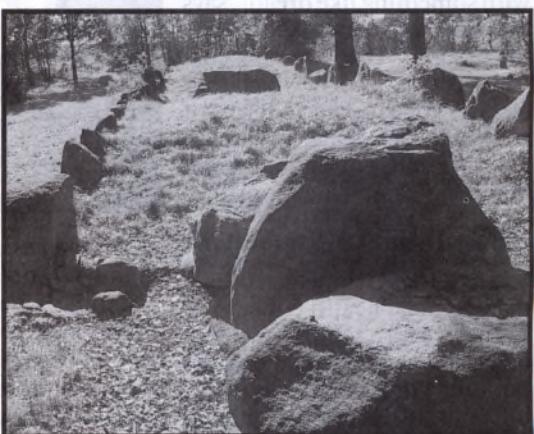
It was not until 1912 that several dolmens were thoroughly examined by experts. Potsherds (pottery fragments), tools (flint ax heads, arrowheads), and ornaments, such as amber beads, were found in dolmens but few skeletal remains, since these were poorly preserved in the sandy soil. At times, potsherds of as many as 600 vessels were found. Assuming that two or three vessels of food were assigned to each dead person, quite a number of people must have been buried in some tombs.

Scientists claim that the dolmens were built with erratic boulders from Scandinavia, which had been transported by glaciers during a primeval ice age. It is asserted that the builders were farmers of what is termed the "Funnel Beaker" culture, so named because of the characteristic funnel-shaped beakers that have been found.

One theory as to the building method states: "The heavy rocks were probably laid on wooden rollers and pulled with the aid of leather traces. In order to move the capstones upward, a ramp of sand and clay was presumably built." But nobody is really sure how this was done. Why were the dead not

just buried in the usual manner? What notion did the builders have of life after death? Why were artifacts left in the graves? Researchers can only guess at the answers. Because the dolmens were built long ago, it is not possible to say exactly when, by whom, why, and how.

When, in God's due time, the dead are resurrected, those returning may answer some of these questions. (John 5:28; Acts 24:15) Dolmen builders may then, at long last, reveal when they lived, who they were, why they built their impressive monuments, and how they did it.



**Long tomb in Emmen (Schimmeres),  
Netherlands**

## IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

### Return of the Great White Bird

### Five Ways to Improve the Quality of Your Life

### Islands Under Construction

## WATCHING THE WORLD

### Gloomy Baby Boomers

"Baby boomers" is the term coined to describe people born between the end of the second world war and the beginning of the 1960's. During that period many countries on the winning side of the war reported a marked population increase. A 16-country survey shows that baby boomers, once carefree and optimistic about the future, now "feel insecure about themselves and their children, and regard their old age with something like dread," says the *European* newspaper. Why the gloom? "They are now confronted with a world which they feel has gone too far in terms of individualism, materialism and lack of self-control and good manners," states the report.

### Hidden Hepatitis-C Infections

"Hepatitis C appears to be a major public health concern in France," says a report by a team of French doctors. The doctors point out that most hepatitis-C infections are detected only *after* a patient has already been diagnosed as having developed chronic liver disease of 10 to 30 years' duration. Infection with the hepatitis-C virus can be deadly and is most often transmitted through blood transfusions and intravenous drug use. The report warns that more thorough screening methods are urgently needed, as less than one quarter of those found to be infected were previously aware of it. According to the journal *Hepatology*, an estimated 500,000 to 650,000 French residents are presently infected with the virus.

### Breast-Feeding Cuts Illnesses

"Breast-fed babies are less prone to ear infections and diarrhea, according to a study of more than 1,700 babies ages 2 through 7 months," states *Parents* magazine. "Researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that a baby who is exclusively formula-fed is nearly twice as likely to develop one of these



conditions as a baby who is exclusively breast-fed." While doctors have long felt that breast milk protects against infection because it passes on the mother's protective antibodies, the study shows that the benefits are significant. Says Laurence Grummer-Strawn, an author of the study: "It's safe to say that the more breast milk an infant receives in the first six months, the better."

### Piercing Presents Problems

Body piercing may be all the rage in some countries, but "pierced lips, cheeks, and tongues present risks that go beyond infection," reports *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. According to dentists at the West Virginia University School of Dentistry, in

Morgantown, "pain, swelling, infection, increased salivary flow, and gingival injury are common in patients with oral piercings. . . . Jewelry for oral piercing poses additional risks." The jewelry can chip or crack teeth, produce speech impediments, cause formation of scar tissue, and—if swallowed—obstruct airways.

### No Competition Please

The World Council of Churches (WCC), with 330 member churches, has "called for an end to 'competitive' attempts by some churches to poach new members from other churches," reports the *ENI Bulletin*. The WCC "specifically criticises the use of 'humanitarian aid' in developing countries . . . to influence the poor, lonely and uprooted to change their denominational allegiance." Guidelines were offered to distinguish between an 'acceptable witness to the Gospel and unacceptable proselytism.' Included in the latter are "unfair criticism" of another church, presenting one's church and beliefs as being the true ones, offering educational opportunities or humanitarian aid to persuade others to join another church, using force or psychological pressure to induce people to change their religious affiliation, and taking advantage of people's distress or "disillusionment with their own church in order to 'convert' them."

### Desertification in Italy

Though not a country normally associated with deserts, Italy has instituted a Nation-

al Committee for the Fight Against the Desert. The reason? Soil infertility has been rapidly advancing northward in Italy. "If a serious environmental policy is not introduced to reduce gases responsible for the greenhouse effect and to change certain unhealthy agricultural practices," says the newspaper *La Stampa*, "within just a few decades, 27 percent of [Italian] territory could become scorched earth." The alarm was raised at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization conference on desertification that was held in Rome. It was explained that zones at risk are no longer confined just to the southern Italian regions of Sicily, Sardinia, Calabria, Apulia, and Basilicata but that certain traditionally productive areas of the north have also been affected and are now registering a drop in fertility.

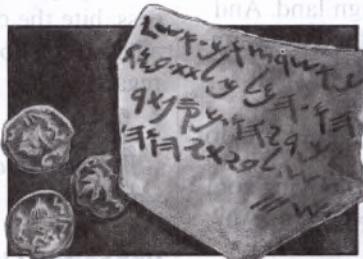
#### Treating Childhood Diarrhea

"Venezuelan researchers have developed a vaccine that almost eliminates severe diarrhea among children," says *The Daily Journal* of Caracas. "The vaccine . . . is designed to protect against rotavirus diarrhea, which kills about 873,000 children under age five in developing countries each year." Even in the United States, the illness still sends more than 100,000 infants and preschoolers to the hospital annually. The study, published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, reports that use of the vaccine had an 88-percent protection rate against the virus and reduced hospital admissions for severe diarrhea by 70 percent. How-

ever, there is a drawback. "The treatment may be too expensive for developing countries where it is needed most," says *The Daily Journal*—countries "where less than \$20 is spent per person each year on health care." Until the vaccine can be produced inexpensively, dehydration from diarrhea must be treated by replacing lost fluids, the method that has been used effectively for 20 years.

#### Temple Receipt Found

What "appears to be a receipt for a donation of three silver shekels to the Temple of Yahweh" has "recently surfaced on the antiquities market," states *Biblical Archaeology Review*. "This is the oldest extra-Biblical mention of King Solomon's Temple ever discovered. [The words] BYT YHWH, 'the



Courtesy: Shlomo Moussaieff

house of the Lord [Yahweh], . . . had been found complete in only one extra-Biblical inscription," and because of obscure context, its meaning has been disputed. The new inscribed potsherd, measuring 4 inches by 3.5 inches and containing five lines and 13 words, is clear and easily readable. Dated as early as the ninth century B.C.E., it is at least a century older than the other inscription and has been declared authentic by experts.

#### Queen of Sheba Dispute

In Ethiopia she is called Makeda. In Yemen her name is Bilqis. She is better known as the queen of Sheba, mentioned in both the Bible and the Koran. Each country claims her as its own and hopes that her tomb will soon be found there, encouraging archaeologists to keep digging for proof. If evidence of the queen of Sheba can be found, the site will be a huge attraction for tourists and will add to claims of that country's ancient ties to civilization. "Archaeologists have found plenty of inscriptions from the ancient Sabeans kingdom on old stones in Ethiopia and Yemen," notes *The Wall Street Journal*. "Strangely, none mention a Makeda or Bilqis." It adds: "The Bible isn't much help. It details all the gold and spice Sheba brought to Solomon, but doesn't say where she came from."

#### Hostage Scrolls

The Samaritans, now reduced to only 600 people, must come up with a million dollars in ransom to get their holy books back. The two scrolls, said to be 700 and 400 years old respectively, were stolen from a Samaritan synagogue in the West Bank city of Nablus over three years ago. The thieves spirited the scrolls out of the country, and only recently did they surface in Amman, Jordan, where they were viewed by Samaritan elders. It is believed that they were stolen by a person who was familiar with where they were kept. Most of the Samaritans live on the mountaintop above Nablus, which is their holiest site. It is there, they believe, that God commanded Abraham to offer his son Isaac in sacrifice.

## FROM OUR READERS

**Illness** I was touched by the article "Young People Ask . . . How Can I Cope With Being So Sick?" (June 22, 1997) I admire Jason, Ashley, and Carmen for dealing so well with their sickness.

R. D., France

The advice you give is truly practical, stimulating, and effective. Ashley's story particularly encouraged me. I am a full-time minister of Jehovah's Witnesses. The thought that there are people who would dearly love to enter the full-time ministry but cannot because of health has encouraged me to persevere despite the difficulties I have.

D. I., Albania

Since learning that I have Crohn's disease, I have been admitted to the hospital over ten times and have needed two surgeries. However, for the past four years, I have served in isolated territory here in a foreign land. And though my health still isn't perfect, it has improved tremendously. The articles were a great encouragement to me.

G. H., Ecuador

**Disappearing Wildlife** I am studying zoology, and the series "Who Will Save Our Animals?" really touched me. (July 8, 1997) I hope that people reading these articles realize how greed and cruelty have affected many species.

G. H., United States

As an avid wildlife enthusiast, I was delighted to read your articles. Zoos are doing much to help endangered species. But if zoos are wildlife's last hope, then wildlife surely is in trouble. Taking animals out of their natural environment and breeding them in concrete jungles is not the answer.

M. T., Canada

*While such conservation efforts are commendable, we believe that the only long-term answer is*

*the management of earth's resources by God's Kingdom. (Isaiah 11:9)—ED.*

**Pet Safety** I want to thank you for the article "Are Children Safe With Your Dog?" (July 8, 1997) I have been a professional dog trainer for 18 years and have always tried to stress the importance of training and personal responsibility. I was pleasantly surprised to read this informative article and happy to see that the trainer interviewed uses the same type of training we use. I hope all dog owners will read and apply the advice.

B. C., United States

I'd like to add one point: Dogs instinctively react to food. A child waving a hot dog or candy while walking past a dog can become a target. The dog doesn't intend to be vicious, but it may lunge at the food and, in the process, bite the child's hand. Parents are well-advised to shoulder their responsibility in this regard.

K. S., United States

*We appreciate these additional observations.—ED.*

**Unhealthy Life-Styles** I appreciated the article "Unhealthy Life-Styles—How High the Cost?" (July 22, 1997) As a Christian youth, I face many temptations. But this article really made me see that by following Bible principles, we avoid diseases and injuries.

R. K., United States

**Talking Drums** After reading the marvelous article "Do African Drums Really Talk?" (July 22, 1997), I went to my grandfather, a centenarian, to test the veracity of the story. He confirmed it in every detail, and I was impressed!

G. M. O., Nigeria

# Do You Judge by Appearances?

DO YOU judge a book by its cover? You could be fooled. To avoid that, you first check its contents. This is illustrated in the case of a famous character from Turkish folklore, Nasreddin Hoja. (The Turkish word *hoja* means "teacher.") He "is both crafty and naive, wise and foolish . . . He is devout, but has human failings." He is the "invincible victim of life's ironies."—*Tales of the Hoja*, by John Noonan, *Aramco World*, September-October 1997.

One story is told of a journey he made to visit an Ottoman official and have dinner with him. "Stiffly, [Nasreddin] dismounted and knocked on the imposing front door. When it was opened, he saw that the feast was already in progress. But before he could introduce himself, his host, looking at his travel-stained clothes, told him curtly that beggars were not welcome."

## **Jehovah warned Samuel not to be fooled by appearances**

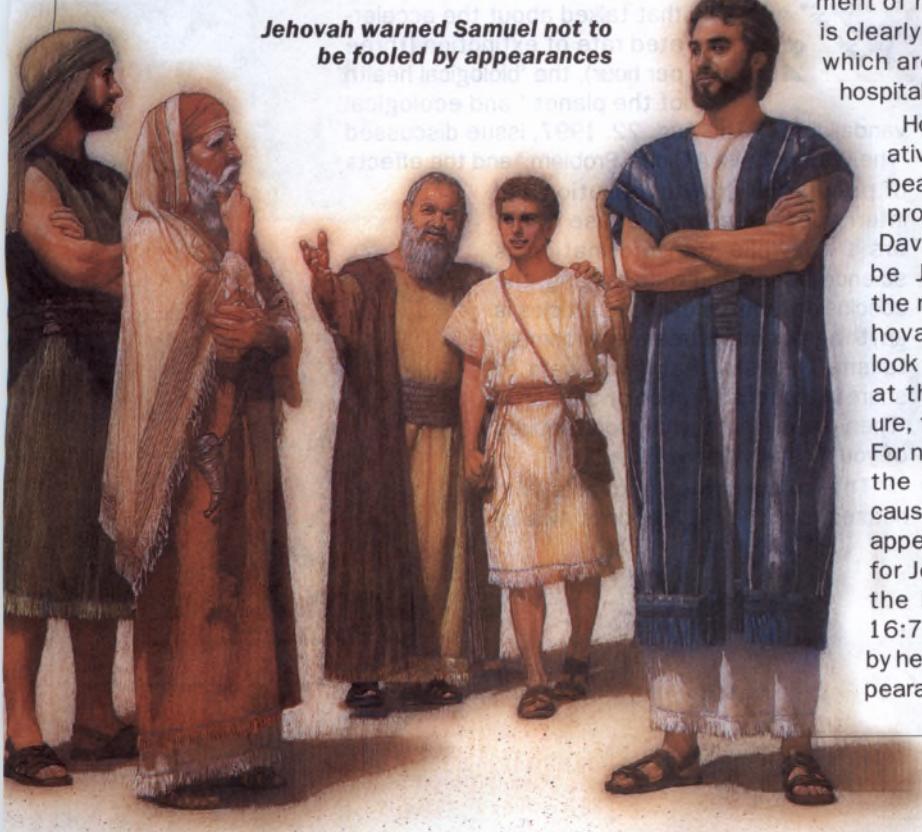
Nasreddin left, went to his saddlebag, and "changed into his finest attire: a magnificent silk robe trimmed with fur, and a vast silk turban. Thus arrayed, he returned to the front door and knocked again.

"This time, his host welcomed him warmly . . . Servants placed dishes of delicacies before him. Nasreddin Hoja poured a bowl of soup into one pocket of his robe. To the astonishment of the other guests, he tucked pieces of roast meat into the folds of his turban. Then, before his horrified host, he pushed the fur facing of his robe into a plate of pilav, murmuring 'Eat, fur, eat!'

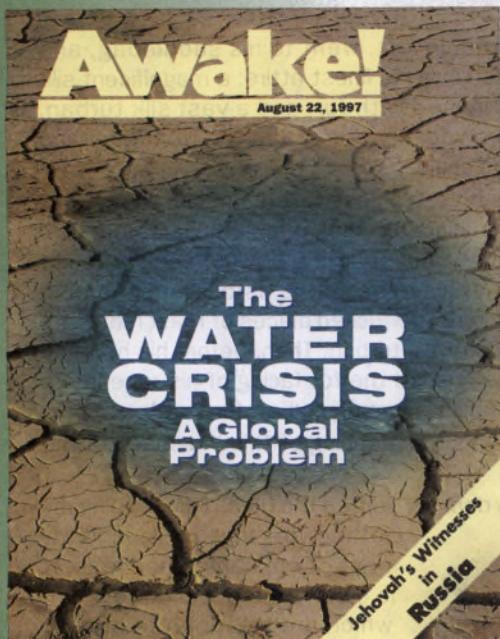
"What's the meaning of this?" demanded the host.

"My dear sir," replied the Hoja, "I am feeding my clothes. To judge by your treatment of me half an hour ago, it is clearly they, and not myself, which are the objects of your hospitality!"

How often we judge negatively or positively by appearance alone! When the prophet Samuel thought David's brother Eliab must be Jehovah's choice for the next king of Israel, Jehovah told him: "Do not look at his appearance and at the height of his stature, for I have rejected him. For not the way man sees is the way God sees, because mere man sees what appears to the eyes; but as for Jehovah, he sees what the heart is." (1 Samuel 16:7) Yes, Jehovah judges by heart condition, not by appearances. What do you?



# A Journalist Appreciates Awake!



The following recommendation appeared in the *High Country News* of October 13, 1997, published in Paonia, Colorado, U.S.A.

"Greenpeace [an international environmental organization] may no longer be going door to door, but another group continues its long-time canvassing, often stressing environmental issues. It distributes millions [19 million of each issue] of copies of its material in about 60 [actually 81] languages, including Pidgin, Hiligaynon and Zulu. The July 8 [1997] issue asked on its cover: 'Who Will Save Our Animals?,' with a story inside that talked about the accelerated rate of extinction (three per hour), the 'biological health of the planet,' and ecological

vandalism . . . The Aug. 22, 1997, issue discussed 'The Water Crisis: A Global Problem,' and the effects of population growth, pollution and international tension over use of rivers . . . While the information is science-based and wide ranging, the conclusion of many of these articles is anything but mainstream environmentalism. They say that if you want to share in the rehabilitation of the earth, 'Then please learn what God requires of you by studying the Bible.'

"The group is the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the publication is *Awake!*

