

# IT'S YOUR TURN

## It's no game for the magpie

Chris Mead is quite right to suggest that dead or dying magpies may be victims of illegal poisoning (Questions, July). The Game Conservancy joins in condemning this illegal method of control, which is dangerous to other wildlife, and is not as effective as selective trapping.

The Game Conservancy also accepts that there is currently no scientific evidence that magpies affect songbird populations on a national level. But its research on gamebirds gives a different verdict. Nest-predation by magpies and crows can have a big impact on the breeding success of wild gamebirds such as partridges and red grouse. It is also clear that the use of live-catch cage traps in the early spring, to remove magpies and crows before the nesting season, can significantly improve game production.

Thus, while Chris Mead may be correct in stating that "attempts at controlling magpie numbers are generally doomed to failure," this does not mean that selective trapping is a waste of time. Such control significantly reduces predation without harming the magpie population nationally. There is a distinction to be made between predation control and predator control. *Mike Swan, Game Conservancy*

## Legal eagle

On reading Miriam Rothschild's interesting article ('Road sense', July), I wondered whether she had considered challenging the Transport Inspector's decision in the court for failing to comply with the European Directive on Environmental Impact Assessment? *R C W Tilbrook, Chelmsford*

## Elusive butterfly guide

In the article on recommended field guides ('Guide lines', July), I was surprised to find no mention of Jeremy Thomas's *Hamlyn Guide to the Butterflies of the British Isles* (an updated edition is now available for £8), which I consider to be the most user-friendly of the modern books. *Christopher Holt, West Meon, Hampshire*

## Standing room only

At last, you have printed a hard-hitting article ('World in traction', June) suggesting that it is human numbers which are so rapidly and disastrously turning the world into an ecological desert. It

has been obvious for decades (if not centuries – *vide* Malthus), that human numbers, growing exponentially, could not be healthy for any of the world's species, nor sustainable *ad infinitum*. Would that world leaders spoke openly and honestly about it, and did something positive about it.

*Hally Hardie, St Ives, Cambridgeshire*

## Mind the gap

For a clear, concise setting-out of the problems, their causes, and the recommended solutions, I have not seen the equal of your article 'World in traction' (June). But there are a number of points which I feel require some comment.

"Closing the gap between the rich and the poor" seems a wholly admirable proposal. Unfortunately, it is the attempts of the 'poor' to achieve the living standards of the 'rich' that are causing many of the problems. If closing the gap means raising the Third World's standards to those of the developed world today, then the requirement will be for more cars, washing machines, furniture, travel facilities, sophisticated housing, etc, etc, all requiring more industrialisation, more depletion of natural resources, and more CO<sub>2</sub> emissions – exactly the trend which everyone agrees must be stopped and reversed.

The alternative – a simultaneous levelling up and levelling down towards a mutually acceptable 'norm' – poses difficult questions for us in the developed world. "What features of your present daily life – choice, comfort, security and 'freedom', for instance – are you willing to forgo?" This question has to be extended to "Which of these will enough people agree to in order that a democratically elected government can remain in office to impose the necessary changes?" And then, "How much of any significance will remain after all the 'possibles' have passed through these two filters?" *A J Yeatman, Holbury, Hampshire*

## Relatives valued

If I were a bonobo, I would take great exception to those humans – mentioned by Frances White in her most interesting article ('Eros of the apes', August) – who consider that the bonobo's behaviour is "socially unacceptable for a close relative of ours."

Bonobos never rape or abuse their young, rarely come to blows, and, where homosexual behaviour occurs, nothing goes beyond simulation.

As for scientists' preferred model

of chimpanzee male-bonded social behaviour, listen to Leonard Williams, author of *Man and Monkey*: "The degradation of the modern mother has its roots in the traditions of a man-made civilisation. Not until woman has escaped the tyranny and the hypocrisy of a male society which enslaves one half of humanity will she be able to live in harmony with man." *Ernie Crosswell, Slough, Berkshire*

## Mine-detecting in Ecuador

In July, Parrots in Peril – an Imperial College-based expedition – returned from its second trip to Podocarpus National Park, in which we visited the San Luis area of the park, where Ecuador plan to mine (News of the Earth, August). The expedition placed a great importance in working with the locally based environmental group, Arcoriris, whose main aim is to protect this park. Together with them, we found illegal gold mining occurring in the area, with detrimental effect to the environment because mercury is used to make an amalgam with the gold. Sediment samples were collected for mercury analysis, as part of an environmental impact assessment on gold mining and illegal colonisation within the park.

The expeditions aimed to study threats to the existence of three Red Data Book parrots which exist in the park. We found one species, the white-breasted parakeet, within the mining areas under concession, contrary to Ecuador director Midtbø's claim. If Ecuador were allowed to mine, a very important and unique habitat would be lost. *Paul Toyne, Parrots in Peril, London*

## A Date with Sir David competition results

Winner of a behind-the-scenes tour of the Natural History Museum with Sir David Attenborough is S Swan, of Dagnall, Hertfordshire. Eight runners-up each receive signed copies of *Life on Earth*. They are Jon Andrews, of Canterbury; J Baldwin, of London W5; Helen Benson, of Hampton Wick, Surrey; Jarrett Busto, of Godalming, Surrey; J Howe, of Hitchin, Hertfordshire; Keith Murden, of Yate, Avon; Giles Smithson, of Streetly, West Midlands; and Kenneth Ward, of Chatham, Kent.

The answers to the questions were 1 c, 2 b, 3 b, 4 a, 5 b, 6 platypus, short-beaked echidna or long-beaked echidna, 7 b, 8 humans.

## Erratum

Congratulations to Helen Sunderland of Brighouse, West Yorkshire, who was a runner-up for this year's Young Nature Writer of the Year Award – and our apologies for omitting her name from the published list in August.

## Coming soon



## MEERKATS REUNITED

*A reunion with Africa's endearing mongooses.*

## PLUS BONDING BETWEEN BUSHDOGS

*Co-operation among canids.*

## WINNING IMAGES: THE FIRST OF THE BEST

*A selection of commended shots as an appetiser for this year's Wildlife Photographer of the Year collection.*

## FOOD FOR FREE

*It's 20 years since Richard Mabey's famous book was published, but some recipes never go out of fashion. Richard gives us his favourites.*

## CULINARY CHALLENGE

*Fungal fries, nectar night-caps, or Sorbus surprises – share your hedgerow wisdom, and you could win a wild gourmet surprise.*

## HOME TRUTHS

*Are luscious wildlife films good or bad for conservation?*

## CARIBBEAN DELIGHTS

*The natural beauty of Trinidad and Tobago – voted favourite wildlife filming location by the 'Trials of Life' crew.*

## FREE:

## VELVET CLAW PORTFOLIO

*A collection of the world's best images of some of the planet's most spectacular mammals.*

**The October issue is published on 25 September**

ISSN 0265-3656  
Copyright © 1992 BBC WILDLIFE Magazine. All rights reserved throughout the world. Reproduction in any manner, in whole or part, in English or other languages, prohibited.  
This work may not be photocopied or otherwise reproduced within the terms of any licence granted by the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd or the Publishers Licensing Society Ltd.  
Printer: Cradley Print Plc, PO Box 34, Cradley Heath, Warley, West Midlands B64 6AB.  
Typesetter: Stephenson Moore Ltd, 13 Queen Square, Bristol BS1 4NT.  
Colour separator: Lithospeed, 5-25 Scrutton Street, London EC2A 4LB.