

My Career as Editor of an Animal Magazine

The sea-serpent season lasts only a few weeks in the daily papers, but as editor of the magazine *Animal World*, I had it all year round. Over the years, successive editors of *Animal World* had churned out all sorts of stuff about animals and when I took up the editorship in my turn, I found that there wasn't an animal in the world that hadn't already been written about in *Animal World*.

So I was forced to invent animals and this was much less like hard work than writing about animals that had been discovered ages ago.

My first exploit was the discovery of the Gruesome Guzzler, called 'Ajajoro' by the inhabitants of the Fortunate Isles, an animal that lives in the sea from ten o'clock in the morning till four o'clock in the afternoon. The rest of the day it spends on the Fortunate Isles gobbling up children. This is what I wrote:

This animal is not enormous, but its gruesomeness makes it extremely formidable. Dr Everich the scientist, well-known to our readers as a friend of this journal, has sent us this description of the Gruesome Guzzler from San Francisco:

'Judging by its bone-structure, it belongs to the lizard family. I suspect that it is the only species that has been preserved down to our own day from the age of the great lizards like *Ichthyosaurus* and other gigantic antediluvian animals. On the underbelly, beneath its armour-plating, it has feather-cases that it rubs together when agitated, producing a racket that can be heard two English miles away.

'I managed to snap up a specimen of this monster at the expense of a native boy. Having been placed in a large bamboo cage, it ate up the whole of the cage and half of the hut that contained the cage during the night and escaped into the interior, where it was finally shot with a machine-gun. In its stomach, they found a Major of the Civil Guard. The wretched man had starved to death imprisoned within the bony walls of the creature's stomach, on which he had written in pencil: "Please convey my last greetings to my poor wife."

'Interestingly enough, the flesh of this monster is very popular with the natives. I first tasted this meat on the island of Kalalo. Its taste

resembles that of pork. When cooked, the meat has a pinkish colour. The eyes are large. The brain-cavity is full of brain. How the creature reproduces, I have not yet been able to ascertain. I am sending a photograph by the same post.'

Thus far the account of our friend. We print the photograph on a separate page. [I had someone work up a reproduction of an Ichthyosaurus.]

This was an auspicious start to my editorial career. Two school-teachers immediately took out two-year subscriptions and I buckled down with a will to the job of animal-production.

Since turning out completely new animals all the time is very difficult, I went into the world of whales in the next number. I discovered the Sulphur-bellied Whale, which roams the seas around New Greenland and then, just to add a bit of spice, I began to regale the public with fascinating titbits from the life of the animal kingdom.

The hippopotamus, I wrote, likes it when the natives blow up its nostrils; ants are susceptible to the charms of *La Traviata*. And at the same time, I published a long article explaining how you can prevent buzzing around buffaloes by smearing the gadflies with turpentine.

Another peculiar fact of animal life is that snails recognise the points of the compass and crawl eastwards when the wind blows from the west. Termites build their nests in such a way that the sharp edge is turned towards the Trade Winds, so that they cut through the wind, and this constitutes a great boon for the whole of northern Australia.

One science-teacher was so taken with these odd facts that he became a subscriber to *Animal World* and wrote, in an enthusiastic letter announcing this scientific decision, that he would spread news of our journal far and wide for it had opened up new animal worlds for him.

Fired by this success, I composed for the next number an extremely eye-catching article entitled: 'A Practical Guide to the Keeping of Werewolves'. For the first month, I wrote, werewolves have to be fed on ox-blood and this should continue until the sixth month, when the ox-blood should be replaced with draff. Werewolves reproduce every other year, in the month of July. During the period when they are mating (or wolving), you have to keep out of their way, unless you are prepared to be sprayed with a liquid one part in twenty-five of pure spirits and that smells of musk. Werewolves are very affectionate, good and faithful companions and they make vigilant watch-wolves, so that

they are in every respect capable of replacing dogs, over which they have the advantage of exceptional intelligence and of self-control.

Two breeds of werewolf are distinguished: the Siberian and the Manchurian. The former breed has silvery fur, the fur of the latter is tinged with gold.

The article was a great success. A week, perhaps, after its appearance, a lady dressed in black turned up at the office, asking if we could supply her with a pair of young Siberian werewolves.

I was not in the office at the time and when the clerk (who hadn't the faintest idea what a werewolf is) took her there, she spoke to the assistant. We sold all kinds of animals on the side and the assistant, who knew as little about werewolves as did the clerk, said: 'Of course, Madam, we can get you a fine pair. We don't have any in stock here, because we keep only dogs in this location, but we've got some in our nursery out in the country. They're about four months old.'

She said she wanted six-month-old werewolves.

'Of course, Madam,' said the helpful assistant. 'We've got six-month-old werewolves as well, nicer than the four-month-old ones.'

'Are they Siberian?'

'We only do the Siberian.'

'Do they bite?'

'Oh dear no, Madam, our werewolves are completely tame. They're like children and they run round after their masters like little dogs. It's really extraordinary.'

'Very well,' said the lady in mourning. 'I found the article in your magazine very interesting, for I'm very fond of animals. When I was talking about it with my father, my little five-year-old, Karlíček, decided he wouldn't have anything else but a werewolf. Every day, when he wakes up in the morning, he cries: "Mummy, I want a werewolf!" I've even come all the way to Prague from Olomouc.'

'As soon as the weather's fine enough, Madam, we'll send you the werewolves on approval,' said the helpful assistant. 'If you would kindly let me have your address.'

A fortnight went by and then a man with long white moustaches appeared in the office.

'I've come about the werewolves,' he said sternly. 'My daughter ordered them and they haven't been sent yet. All our friends are looking forward to their arrival very much. I would like to see them straight away.'

'It's not possible to send them at the moment,' I said in my most

ingratiating manner. 'The Austrian authorities have banned the importation of werewolves because the Trade Agreement between Austria and Russia hasn't been renewed yet. As soon as the Agreement has been renewed, we'll let you know.'

Some time later, I was out for a stroll in a park in Olomouc. A lady in black sat down on the seat beside me. She had a fine young boy on her lap and he was crying furiously. This made me nervous and as I walked away, I heard the little lad say tearfully to his mother: 'Mummy, I want my werewolf; Mummy, when will the werewolf come?'

I hurried away. In my pocket, I had a letter from a certain farmer in Bohemia who wrote that (in accordance with the advice given in *Animal World*) he had smeared the gadflies with turpentine (when he could get at them), but that his cows were still buzzing, and so he was coming to the office to pay me a visit.

I had a number of such letters in my pocket, among them one from a teacher who wrote that he had spent fourteen days in the observation of snails to find out whether they recognise the points of the compass and that now he was going to pay me a friendly visit to inform himself of the breed of snail involved.

Since I was in Olomouc when I came face to face with the little boy who wanted a werewolf, you will have come to the conclusion that I had fled from these experts in natural history to Moravia, where I plan to start a new nature-magazine in which I shall write about the intellectual capacities of the centipede.