

# • New Machines and Gadgets •

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**DISH TRUCK** for fast, efficient meal handling has three 18-by-22-inch, crevice-free stainless steel shelves. Chromium plated tubular frames provide easy maintenance and upkeep. The truck rolls on four swivel bearing casters.

Science News Letter, October 24, 1959

**ELECTRONIC THERMOMETERS** are battery-powered, standardized to permit interchangeability, and stabilized against drift. They provide accurate readings from 400 to 800 degrees Fahrenheit, and respond in .75 second in liquids and 2.2 seconds on surfaces.

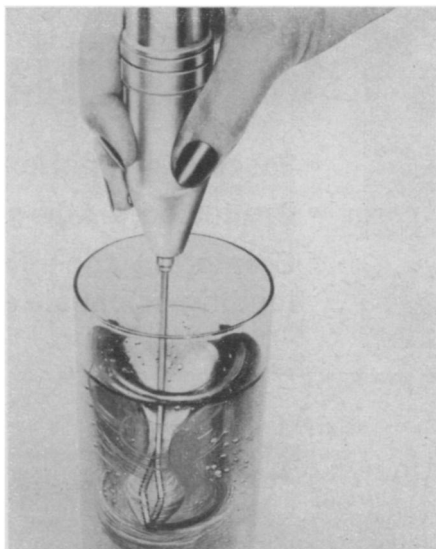
Science News Letter, October 24, 1959

**STEAM-IRON COVER** applied over the flat side of the iron while in use eliminates the need for damp pressing cloth while pressing pants, suits and skirts. The cover is also said to help iron away tell-tale shine from fabrics.

Science News Letter, October 24, 1959

**AUTOMATIC DEFROSTER** for refrigerators operates noiselessly when plugged into an electric outlet. It is said to fit all types of refrigerator and to eliminate completely hand defrosting.

Science News Letter, October 24, 1959



**MIXING ROD** of stainless steel, shown in the photograph, has a battery-driven motor. It may be used to mix drinks, stir baby foods and salad dressings, and whip meringue and eggs. The rod is safe, easy to clean and has a chrome finish.

Science News Letter, October 24, 1959

**WATER-TEMPERATURE REGULATOR** for amateur and professional photographers is said to provide absolute control over solutions used in processing black and white and color films and papers. It features self-cleaning rotary check valves, an easy-to-read thermometer and do-it-yourself installation.

Science News Letter, October 24, 1959

**POCKET CHECK WRITER** enables those who cannot afford high-priced machines to write checks that cannot be forged or tampered with. Once its number dial is set and its "jaws" compressed, the device automatically perforates the word or number into the check in red, indelible ink. The unit is small enough to be carried in pocket or purse.

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**SELF-POWERED DEPTH SOUNDER**, weighing less than five pounds enables small boats without electrical power to determine water depth and location of fish. The sounder bounces 1,200 ultrasonic signals a minute off the water bottom. Returning echoes signal a flash on an indicator face, accurately reporting depths up to 120 feet.

Science News Letter, October 24, 1959



## Nature Ramblings



By HORACE LOFTIN

SOME 150,000,000 years ago, the earth was dominated by reptiles large and small. This was the Mesozoic era, the day of the dinosaurs, the Golden Age of Reptiles.

Even then, the reptilian giants were feeling the pinch of competition from an upstart group of animals—the mammals.

By about 50,000,000 years ago, the reptiles were on the wane, and a new era came in, the Cenozoic or Age of Mammals. Geologically speaking, the earth is still in this Cenozoic period, and the mammals dominate the vertebrate life of our planet today.

Now man is a mammal and one we like to think of as being at the top of the list, so to speak. But if we think in terms of actual numbers of kinds and individuals, we might reluctantly yield first place in mammal-dom to the rodents. In fact, we could well call the present time the Age of Rodents!

In the first place, the majority of different kinds of mammals fall into the group of Rodentia, including some 6,400 species and

### The Age of Rodents



subspecies. In North America north of Panama, 2,150 out of 3,600 kinds of mammals are rodents. In terms of numbers of individuals, the rodent population of one haystack might outnumber the human citizenry of a fair-sized town.

With man's steam heat and air-conditioning and his traveling on rails, wheels, ships and wings, civilization has extended itself from the equator to the poles. Rodents have been right along with mankind in this process, too, taking advantage of their fellow-traveler's means of transportation and

his artificial environment to invade virtually every region entered by man.

Rodents are found from sea level to 19,000 feet up in the Himalayas, from the tropics to the Arctic (but not the Antarctic, unless some hitchhiked over with the current rash of explorers). They live in the desert, the plains, jungles, swamps and fresh water. None had adopted a typically marine way of life, though dwellers on the waterfronts might argue otherwise for the wharf rats.

Rodents range in size from tiny mice of about two inches long up to the lumbering capybara of the South American swamps.

Most of them reproduce at a very high rate, so that without some kind of biological controls, the earth would soon be knee deep in rats, mice and their kin. But controls there are: the sharp teeth of the hosts of carnivorous reptiles, birds, mammals and other animals. The rodents furnish the staple food for most meat-eating creatures.

In a sense, rodents are to the carnivores what grass is to the herbivores—the chief source of life-giving food.

Science News Letter, October 24, 1959