

ZOOLOGY

Animal Actions Actually Help to Communicate

► THE HORSE MOVES his ear and is "saying" something. The honeybee dances and wags its tail, and a signal is given where to find honey.

Gorillas beat their breasts to attract attention, and snails and slugs leave trails of slime communication.

All these visual, auditory and tactile gestures are methods by which animals communicate with one another, stated Dr. Thomas A. Sebeok of the Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore and Linguistics at Indiana University, Bloomington.

A new behavioral science called zoosemiotics has emerged from semiotics, the science of language and ethnology, Dr. Sebeok stated in *Science*, 149:1006, 1965.

By cracking the code between one animal and another and deciphering the message, scientists hope to assemble an ordered body of data on communication, from the lowly bacteria, which communicate by glowing bioluminescence, to men who communicate by verbal sounds.

• *Science News Letter*, 87:189 March 20, 1965

Nature Note

Horsetails

► IN SPRING, as violets and marigolds unfold, a strange stiff spike pushes up from railroad beds, roadsides and waste places—the straw-colored horsetail, one of the most ancient plants still remaining on this planet.

The stiff spore-bearing stalks of these living fossils are first to poke above the ground in spring, capped with tiny single-celled spores that are more primitive and simple than seeds.

Later in the season, the more familiar part of the plant pushes above ground. These green jointed stalks have needle-like leaves radiating out from each joint. To some people, this bushy plant looks like the tail of a horse—hence the name.

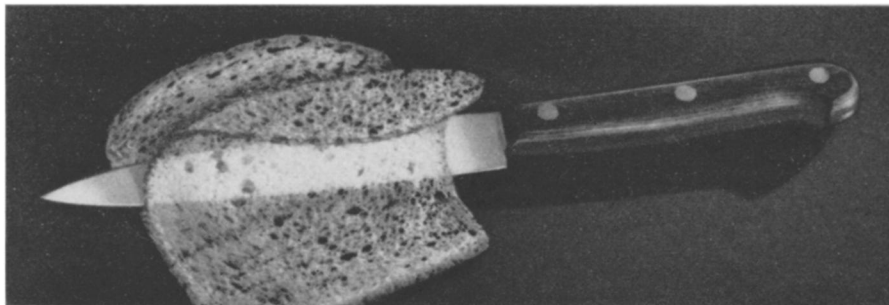
With a scientific Latin name of *Equisetum hyemale*, the plants are also called "scouring rushes" because they contain an abrasive chemical, silica, that gives them a hard, rough texture useful for scouring pots and pans.

The forerunners of this odd hollow stemmed plant, the Calamites, were giant tree-like structures that grew on earth during the Carboniferous times, millions of years before the dinosaurs. Fossil horsetails have been found in coal beds more than 280 million years old. Now all these tree-sized types are extinct.

Only about 20 smaller type species are still alive on earth today, growing about two or three feet high in all lands except Australia.

One tropical species, however, grows to a height of 40 feet, but since its hollow stem is only an inch in diameter, it is not strong enough to stand on its own and must lean on its neighbors.

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