

Nature Note

The Last of the Numbats

The strange little numbat is rare—and soon may be extinct.

With a reddish brown coat and six or more white stripes curving around its slim body, the bright-eyed numbat is a lonely member of the Marsupial family just barely managing to exist in the bushlands of southwestern Australia. This animal is about ten inches long from head to rump and has a seven-inch scraggly tail. A dark cheek stripe runs through the eyes and emphasizes its pointed muzzle.

The numbat, *Myrmecobius fasciatus*, is different from other marsupials such as kangaroos and opossums, best known for their front pouches in which they carry and protect their young.

The female numbat has no pouch—only four teats. She makes a shallow nest under a bush or log in which she lives with her young, leaving them there when she forages for food, or on occasions, dragging the tiny babies hanging on beneath her as she travels.

When frightened, the numbat does not attempt to bite, but snuffles and hisses, flattens its body and fluffs its



tail trying to hide and slip away.

The numbat, usually a solitary creature, is not very well known by laymen, for it is so rare and inhabits no zoo. For a while it was protected in its native home, Australia, but as more forest and bushland is taken over by farmers and expanding civilization, the shy little creature is deprived of food and habitat, and slowly is being pushed off the planet. At one time numbats were seen occasionally in various regions of Australia, but today it has retreated to only one area—Everard Ranges in southwest Western Australia. Scientists do not expect the species will survive much longer.

LETTERS

To the Editor

Initial Teaching Alphabet

Dear Sir:

In reference to ITA (SN: 2/11 and 4/22) please label me enthusiast as opposed to authority. Any honest, qualified, average, classroom teacher will frankly admit that reading success in first grade depends mostly on the teacher-child relationship—not on the reading program.

But when heterogeneous classes of 25 or 30 can produce 15 to 18 children capable of reading anything translated into ITA after 20 weeks of little more than group study of 44 symbols, these critical letters I read sound rather like sour grapes. The transition is so simple it need not even be mentioned—the 15 or 18 can and will do it themselves from sheer pleasure of reading.

My personal observation might be —ITA for everyone since not many of us read too well in traditional orthography.

Margaret Ewing
Delmont, Pa.

SN on Campus

Dear Sir:

I would like to take this opportunity to compliment you on a fine magazine. I look forward to its arrival every week. It is one of the best ways I know of to keep up on the world of science.

I will be teaching in high school next year, and I will urge my students to read your magazine in the school library every week.

Keep up the good work.

Roger E. Malcolm,
Western Illinois University,
Macomb, Illinois

An Accolade

Dear Sir:

Normally I do not write letters regarding such articles, but this one (Mid-Atlantic Fault, SN:4/15) was so very well done that I thought I would call to your attention my appreciation of the article itself.

It was, I believe, written by John Ludwigson, and appeared on Page 351. It was an accurate job of reporting of a fairly complex subject, and you are fortunate to have on your staff people with this capability.

Harris B. Stewart Jr., Director
U.S. Department of Commerce
Environmental Science Services
Administration Institute for
Oceanography, Silver Spring, Md.

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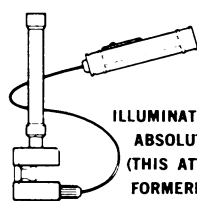
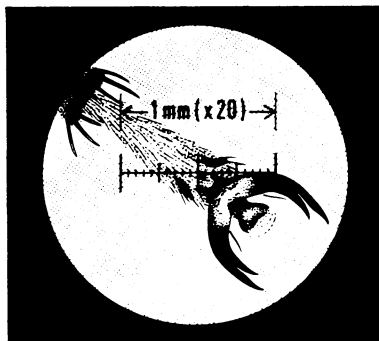
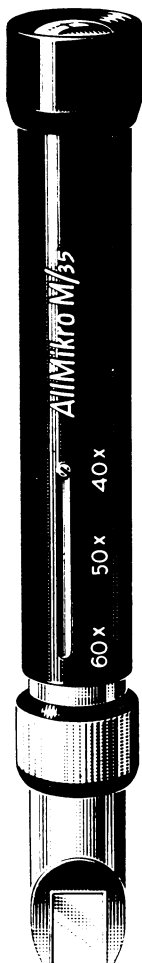
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