

# from abroad

## FROM AUSTRALIA

### Children Find Koala Ranges

In New South Wales 250,000 school children have tracked down koala bears—small furry fellows who resemble nursery toys—to secret haunts where naturalists didn't believe they existed.

The school children found the bears in colonies west of the Darling River, in the center of the State, and in different groups in the far northwest.

The children have even discovered that the bears eat other foods besides the gum leaves which were believed to be their only source of food.

The youngsters took part in a survey conducted during Conservation Week. Thousands of forms were distributed to schools, asking students to note locations of koalas and the type of food they were eating.

The survey is the first major effort ever undertaken to collect data on the koala, which has frequently been reported facing extinction. Conservationists now find koalas more widely scattered than they thought. It is now planned to move bears from overpopulated areas, such as the northeast corner of the State, to places where they no longer exist.

The New South Wales survey has had more than one beneficial result. Wheat and cattle ranchers in the Bando area of the northwest have asked that thousands of their acres be declared wildlife reserves, which would give them much more power to deal with poachers.

In the normal course of events a rancher's only recourse would be to sue a hunter for trespassing. If the land were declared a Wildlife Reserve, a hunter could be arrested if found on the land with a gun.

Its slow breeding rate has prevented the species from replacing the enormous numbers that have been killed since the time of early settlement by diseases, by trappers seeking the skins and by bushfires.

In 1908 about 60,000 pelts went through the Sydney market alone, while in 1924 about two million were exported from the eastern states.

Although this had almost exterminated the koala in Victoria and New South Wales, another open season was declared in Queensland in 1927, and some 500,000 skins were exported.

Total protection has now been enforced, but except in special sanctuaries survival of the southern koala has been in doubt for some years.

### Mongoloid Outbreak Feared

A mental health expert forecasts an outbreak of mongoloid births in Victoria. He said the increase in mongolism would follow a hepatitis outbreak in 1967-68.

The expert is the Director of the Victorian Mental Health Institute, Dr. Allan Stoller. He gave evidence before the Royal Commission on Fluoridation in Hobart, Tasmania.

Dr. Stoller has been working for several years with a team studying mongolism in Victoria. He said extensive checks of records showed that 1,134 mongol children had been born in Victoria between 1942 and 1957—about one in 688 live births. Statistical study of this data showed peak years about five years apart when two or three times as many mongol children were born.

Looking for a cause of the five-year cycle of mongolism, Dr. Stoller and his co-researchers matched the graph of mongol births with outbreaks of all reportable diseases. About nine months before each outbreak of mongol births there was a hepatitis epidemic.

Dr. Stoller said the evidence linking hepatitis with mongolism was "highly significant," but not biological proof. The theory had held water when investigators correctly predicted an increase in mongolism in 1962-63. The proportion of mongol births in Victoria then jumped about 250 percent.

### Legume Revolutionizes Beef Output

A plant accidentally introduced from South America 50 years ago has triggered a pasture change in Northern Australia which could bring a 20-fold increase in beef production.

The plant is the legume, Townsville lucerne, which could transform 60 million acres of low-productivity grazing land. This area could support four-fifths of the present total of beef cattle in Australia.

Results of the intensive research on the legume were reported by Dr. M. J. Norman at the bi-annual meeting of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation advisory council.

At the CSIRO's experimental station at Katherine, N.T., the legume has increased beef production 20-fold.

Dr. Norman says shorthorn cattle

(see p. 564)

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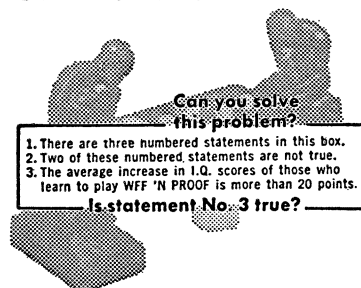
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normally reached slaughter weight only after five or six years at a stocking rate of one beast to 20 acres. With Townsville lucerne, slaughter weight can be achieved in less than three years at a stocking rate of one beast to five acres. On one commercial ranch near Katherine, 1,300 acres sown with the legume last year carried 600 cattle throughout the dry season.

**Dr. Norman** says research showed that Townsville lucerne has two vital effects upon pastures: it enriches soil by adding nitrogen from the air and it increases the protein content of the pasture for stock.

On Cape York Peninsula, Australian and American developers are planning to sow 10,000 acres a year from the air. At Katherine the company which began with 1,300 acres last year is planning to increase sowing at a rate of 5,000 acres a year.

*W. A. Scholes*

**FROM SWEDEN**

**Polluted Fish Sale Banned**

The Swedish Medical Board has banned the sale of fish from 40 Swedish lakes and rivers. A high level of poisonous methyl mercury has been found in fish taken from these waters, which are both in the south and the far north of the country.

Many other lakes and rivers have been exempted from the ban because the Medical Board has decided to adopt a relatively high acceptability limit for methyl mercury levels before declaring the fish unfit for human consumption. The board has decided that there will be an adequate safety margin if the limit is put at one milligram per kilogram of fish compared with the internationally recommended upper limit of 0.5 milligram per kilogram in food stuffs.

**Nevertheless,** the board issued a warning to regular eaters of large quantities of fresh-water fish taken from waters known to have a significant methyl mercury content to moderate their consumption. Other waters are likely to be added to the list as investigations proceed.

The ban will have serious consequences for hundreds of fresh-water fishermen; fishmongers are already finding strong sales resistance to all fresh-water fish. Though pollution has been stopped or severely reduced in recent years, the ban is bound to stay in force for many years. The source of the problem is mercury released by pulp factories. It breaks down into methyl mercury, and it takes decades for the methyl mercury level to become diluted.

*H. J. Barnes*

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