

Nature Note

Pere David's Deer

► SOME OF THE rarest deer in the world are the Pere David's deer. The 400 survivors exist only in zoos and game parks.

These reddish, tawny deer, *Elaphurus davidianus*, may once have inhabited the swampy alluvial plains of China, before their numbers dwindled as they were hunted for meat, horns and skins. For a while the only surviving herd lived in the Imperial Hunting Park south of Peking, where in 1865 the first Westerner, Pere Armand David, a French missionary and naturalist observed them and bribed the sentinels for two valuable skins.

The species would be extinct now if it had not been for England's Duke of Bedford, who in 1900 brought back about 20 of these animals and kept them at his deer park at Woburn Abbey. All Pere David's deer existing today have descended from this stock.

The last species in the imperial herd died in 1920, 20 years after the Boxer Rebellion. In 1960, the deer were re-introduced into China from Woburn Abbey.

The antlers of Pere David's deer are peculiar, having a long, single straight tine pointing backward, and the main beam extending almost di-

rectly upward and usually forking only once.

Unlike horns, antlers are solid bony structures that develop from permanent bases or pedicels on the front bones of the skull. They usually are shed each year. Soon after the old antlers drop off, small growths appear from each base and rapidly expand, sheathed in vascular skin that is covered with fine hair or "velvet." These tissues are provided with a rich supply of circulating blood during the growing period. When the antlers reach full size, the blood vessels constrict and the velvet begins to dry up and shred. The deer rub their antlers against branches and bushes to scrub off this dead skin and burnish their antlers until they are smooth and bare.

• Science News, 89:500 June 18, 1966

GENERAL SCIENCE

Brain Information Service Established

► A BRAIN Information Service (BIS), has been established in Los Angeles to serve as a storehouse of information in the basic brain sciences and is available by request to scientists across the nation.

A corps of brain information specialists at the University of California Center for Health Sciences at Los Angeles, with instant access to a computer file of brain data, will edit and supply requested material to all suitably accredited investigators and teachers in basic neurological sciences.

The facility will be operated under a contract with the National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Blindness. Dr. Victor E. Hall, professor of physiology at UCLA, and Louise Darling, head of the Biomedical Library, are BIS directors.

A primary function of the information center will be to provide bibliographies in the field of brain research, stored in a computer file and retrieved on demand.

The bibliographies will be assembled from a core of the most actively used neurological journals. These are provided from the monthly computer tapes of the National Library of Medicine's Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System (MEDLARS) and from bibliographical publications not included in MEDLARS.

A second function of the BIS will be the production of authoritative summaries of topics in the basic neurological sciences by means of publication of reviews of proceedings of workshops or conferences.

Subject areas to be covered by BIS include neuroanatomy, neurophysiology, neuroendocrinology, neurochemistry and neuropharmacology. The literature of diagnosis and treatment of neurological diseases, however, is outside its scope, and will not be included.

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MEDICINE

Phenobarbital Controls Newborn Jaundice Case

► JAUNDICE is a fairly common condition in newborn babies but phenobarbital, the adult sedative, is reported as treatment for what is believed to be the first time. One case has been under control for nearly two years.

A baby girl appears to have a genetic disorder in which the liver is unable to metabolize pigments of bile, called bilirubin, properly. The pigments accumulate in the blood and body tissues, causing the typical yellow discoloration.

Dr. Sumner J. Yaffe and his co-workers at the State University of New York at Buffalo said that extensive animal studies have shown that the phenobarbital stimulates enzyme activity in the liver, and because of this, they tried the sedative on the baby.

The Medical World News, 7:111, 1966, reported that dosages were gradually increased until the patient was 39 weeks old, after which she was given 15 milligrams by mouth three times a day. When the drug was stopped, the bilirubin levels rose to a dangerous peak, so treatment was started again. The child shows no ill effects from the medication. She is free of jaundice but the bilirubin is still not normal.

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