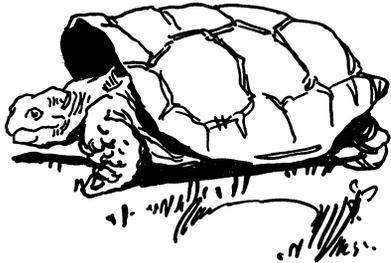


BIOLOGY

NATURE RAMBLINGS



Man Outlives Animals

➤ EXCEPT FOR a few species of giant tortoise—and who wants to be a tortoise?—man lives the longest life of any animal on the face of the earth.

Threescore years and ten was the lifetime assigned to man by the Psalmist, and that is still counted a fair old age after 30 centuries. And just as David and other Old Testament writers lamented the brevity of human life, people today feel that 70 years

Galileo's

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is not enough, and envy animals reputed to reach extreme ages of 300 or 400 years.

If there is any consolation in living longer than other creatures, we have it. Our seven decades, short though they seem, really represent a longer life span than that of all except some species of giant tortoise.

Among his nearest animal kin the warm-blooded mammals, man is easily the patriarch.

Old legends die hard, and the idea that man is the longest-lived of warm-blooded creatures will be disputed by many. Nevertheless, this view is supported by a careful examination of all really verifiable records, made by many zoologists and collated by R. Marlin Perkins, director of the Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago. A considerable share of his figures come from Maj. Stanley Smyth Flower of the Zoological Society of London, the rest from American zoological parks.

All figures represent extreme ages reached by animals in captivity. There are no reliable figures for the life spans of wild animals, but it is probable that most of them are shorter than the limits attainable in captivity. The relentless law of the jungle, that killers eat the old and the weak first, would seem to take care of that.

Three animals that are often reputed to outlive man by many years, even to fantastic limits, are elephants, parrots and the giant tortoises of the Galapagos islands. Actually, the greatest surely known age for an elephant is 60 years, with an average life expectancy of 45. The oldest parrot on record died at 54; other parrots have lived to be nearly 50. Cockatoos, closely related to parrots, reach ages between 30 and 40 years.

Only the tortoises outlive man, though

the claims of 300 years and more cannot be authenticated. The Galapagos tortoise is known to live more than 100 years; another species, Marion's tortoise, holds the record at 152 years. Size does not have any necessary correlation with age: the little Carolina box turtle has been known to live as much as 123 years, whereas the big, mean-tempered alligator snapping-turtle can claim only 42. Also, the loggerhead, a sea turtle that rivals or surpasses the Galapagos tortoises for size, doesn't quite make the 40-year mark.

Science News Letter, January 16, 1954

DENTISTRY

Combat Dentist's Drill Inspired by Toy Train

➤ A POCKET-SIZED dentist's drill resembling an aluminum ball-point pen has been worked out at the University of Michigan to help dentists fill soldiers' teeth on the battle line. Powered by a built-in motor patterned after that of a toy electric train, the gadget goes into action when clipped to the terminals of a jeep's battery.

Science News Letter, January 16, 1954

Questions

BIOLOGY—Why is tobacco mosaic virus a good agent for studying cell reproduction? p. 42.

GENETICS — What controls the number of white blood cells. p. 36.

GENERAL SCIENCE—What is the position of the AAAS concerning President Eisenhower's proposal on atomic energy control? p. 37.

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VETERINARY MEDICINE—How can the sheep disease blue tongue be spread? p. 39.

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