



Animated Mousetraps

► THE INVENTOR who comes up with a better mousetrap has long been promised fame and fortune.

However, many people still feel that, when all the pros and cons are counted, man's most familiar mousetrap—the domestic cat—will probably stay the best.

Mice have been sponging off human beings since the first prehistoric families took up residence in caves. And since that time men have sought means of getting rid of them. It is quite likely that the first "domestic" cats came to the vicinity of men because of the rodents that were likewise attracted to human habitations.

Instead of killing the cats as food, early men tolerated and fed them, to keep the living mousetraps around.

Other flesh-eating animals are also good mousetraps, but for a variety of reasons humans have not taken so well to them.

For example, many species of snakes are avid mouse-catchers, although few people seem willing or anxious to keep them around for that purpose. Actually, the economic aid that snakes give farmers each year by destroying harmful rodents in fields, barns and granaries is tremendous but, instead of welcoming a corn snake around

the farm, too many farmers are apt to kill it thoughtlessly.

Snakes are something of efficiency experts when it comes to cleaning out a den of mice, observations in the laboratory have shown. In an experiment, two white-ankled mice were placed in a cage with a Davis Mountain ratsnake, *Elaphe subocularis*. The ratsnake immediately seized one of the mice in his mouth and constricted it with a single loop of its body. With this mouse secure, it began to stalk the second, captured and constricted it. For some ten minutes, the ratsnake was squeezing the two mice in its coils at the same time.

When they were crushed to the snake's satisfaction, he released them both and devoured them leisurely one at a time.

Many other reptiles, birds, mammals and even insects are efficient rodent catchers, but for animated mousetraps, the domestic cat will probably remain man's "old reliable."

Science News Letter, August 11, 1956

AGRICULTURE

2,4-D Spray Kills Sagebrush on Ranges

► SAGEBRUSH can be wiped off western ranges by spraying the chemical, 2,4-D, which is an effective partner to other sagebrush clearing techniques, plowing and burning.

Ten years of experiments in northern California proved 2,4-D 100% effective and low enough in cost to be a practical supplementary control for the average rancher.

U. S. Department of Agriculture range conservationists found that, although the chemical cannot always compete cost-wise with other control methods, it is highly useful on lands too thin to burn. After sagebrush has been chemically killed, native or sown grasses can be established.

The scientists, Dr. Donald R. Cornelius and Charles L. Graham, say best results will be achieved if grazing is deferred for one year and grazing management techniques maintained afterward.

Science News Letter, August 11, 1956

Questions

ARCHAEOLOGY—When was San Francisco first settled? p. 87.

MEDICINE—Why has the farm accident rate increased with the replacement of farm horses by tractors? p. 91.

PHYSICS—What fuel is suggested for a power plant using the thermonuclear reaction? p. 84.

PHYSIOLOGY—How can blood platelet counts help childless couples? p. 88.

STATISTICS—What new records could be set in this year's Olympics? p. 85.

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MEDICINE

Seek Heredity Clues in Babies' Blood Pressure

► BABIES and children are going to aid the fight against high blood pressure and consequent heart disease. They are going to have their blood pressure taken often enough to show the normal range and variability at these early ages.

From these findings scientists hope to clear up the question of whether high blood pressure is inherited or tends to run in families. Some of the children in the new study will be from families with a number of high blood pressure patients.

The baby and children blood pressure research is being conducted by Dr. Howard A. Joos of the Children's Hospital Society of Los Angeles under a grant from the American Heart Association.

The grant is part of the \$1,042,817.36 grants in aid just awarded to 180 scientists throughout the nation for research in diseases of the heart and blood vessels.

Science News Letter, August 11, 1956

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