

Dial 'F' for Future

(Continued from p. 134)

could be written in magnetic ink, to be read by machines, which in turn would immediately make the necessary adjustments to your bank records.

The filling of store inventories by Dataphone will be commonplace by the end of the century, predicts Frederick R. Kappel, chairman of the board of American Telephone and Telegraph Company.

He foresees machines taking inventory at the close of business each day and calling another machine at the warehouse. A truckload of the needed goods could be on its way the same night.

A housewife could lift a can of tomatoes from a store shelf, and simultaneously, through a series of machines, someone—or some machine—somewhere would plant a tomato seed.

Dial the Oven

Your telephone may serve as a master control for your house to answer the door or to control appliances, Mr. Kappel believes. You could cook food or turn on the lawn sprinkler or coffee pot even from miles away. You would simply dial your home, speak a code, and the standing rib roast would be underway.

Work on the laser holds great promise for telephone-type communications. Enor-

mous amounts of information in the form of electrical pulses can be sent on a single beam of intensified light over astounding distances.

Dozens of improvements and innovations on the laser have poured from research laboratories, but much research and development stands between today's laser and its ultimate potential.

The big job is to find how to control the laser itself. Communications would require adequate means of putting telephone, television or data signals on the carrier, or light beam.

Also needed is a way to amplify the signals. This means finding efficient modulators, detectors and amplifiers to operate at the extremely high frequencies characteristic of the laser.

Another problem to be solved is how to transmit light beams over long distances and still get clear signals. It is especially difficult to do this through rain, snow and fog.

There have been some strides in these directions. Researchers have found materials that are sensitive enough to be useful in modulators and detectors. They have discovered ways to increase the power of the laser. And they are studying ways to transmit a laser beam inside a shielding tube so the beam will not be seriously affected by the earth's atmosphere.

European telephone systems regularly supply customers with unseen interpreters if needed, but recent research has shown that the human interpreter could be replaced with a computer that has a human-like voice.

At Bell Telephone's research plant in Murray Hill, N.J., experimenters are learning to make computers talk in life-like fashion.

This knowledge is already being used to

give up-to-the-second stock quotations automatically over a special phone number in New York.

Who knows, some day you may be able to pick up a phone and chat for hours about all manner of things with a computer. That is another of those wild ideas that phone engineers just cannot seem to hang up on.

• Science News Letter, 88:134 August 28, 1965

Nature Note

Everglade Kite

► THE DRYING LAKES and marshes of the Everglades in southern Florida are causing possible extinction of another rare bird—the hawklike Everglade kite, *Rostrhamus sociabilis*.

There are only about 15 of these birds left in the United States, and most of them are at the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. Here they live almost entirely on a single species of freshwater snail (*Pomacea*, the apple snail).

The kite has an especially adapted long hook on its bill for eating this snail. The bird holds the snail quietly in its talons until the animal comes partly out of its shell, then spears it with the tip of its bill and pulls it all the way out. Since much of the scarce water of that area is diverted to man's use, the snails are dying out and the kites are therefore losing their only source of food.

Everglade kites have wider wings and tails than other kites. They fly steadily at low elevations with their heads at right angles to their bodies, searching the marshes for snails.

The adult male is dark gray or black, with a white patch at the base of its square tail. Its feet, eyes and part of its curved beak are red.

The female is brown, heavily streaked with dark lines over its eyes. These birds show surprising tameness.

Kites are members of the Falconiforme order of birds, also known as birds of prey. Birds of this order, which include vultures, hawks, and eagles, are usually skillful flesh-eating predators, built for quick maneuvering with strong wings, a hooked beak, sharp talons and keen eyesight.

• Science News Letter, 88:142 August 28, 1965

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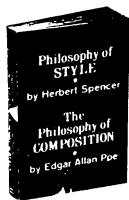
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