

Obituaries

Dr G. M. Vevers

GEOFFREY MARR VEVERS died peacefully on January 9, 1970, in his 80th year, at the cottage he had built in a corner of Whipsnade Park. He was an outstanding officer of the Zoological Society of London for fifty years: from 1919 to 1923 as honorary parasitologist; then for twenty-five years as its superintendent with charge of the collections both at Regent's Park and, later, at Whipsnade; finally, from his retirement in 1948, as honorary life consultant.

He came of Herefordshire farming stock, being one of those rare contemporaries with a grandparent living in the eighteenth century: his grandfather was born in 1782. His father, born in 1821, practised locally as a surgeon. Vevers's own medical training was interrupted by the First World War, but after becoming MRCS and LRCP in 1915, he served abroad for three years in the RAMC, finishing with the rank of captain.

While assistant helminthologist at the London School of Tropical Medicine he won a Beit Memorial Fellowship and took part in the work of the British Guiana Filariasis Commission. That he early showed the capacity for rousing respect and affection that was his particular quality can be seen from the gesture of a grateful former student in Lucknow some years later, designating an oxyurid roundworm genus *Veversia* (Thapar). It was, however, on his appointment in 1923 as zoo superintendent in succession to R. I. Pocock, at the instigation of Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell, that he found his true vocation. It was a time of controversy in the zoo world, but Vevers passed through unscathed, seconding Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell in the building of Whipsnade and Sir Julian Huxley in his novelties of zoo architecture, facing the peculiar stresses of diet and security imposed by the conditions of the Second World War, and establishing a unique relation of confidence with council, colleagues and, above all, staff.

His directly scientific publications were few: three papers in *Proc. Zool. Soc.* between 1920 and 1923 on the parasitology of zoo inmates and, later, mostly in collaboration, papers on the birth of a hippopotamus and a chimpanzee in the collection, on Père David's deer and on tool use by a captive monkey.

He regarded the popularization of knowledge from the zoo collections not as an "extra" but as a part of his responsibilities, excelling as one of the earliest contributors to "Children's Hour" and one of the first of all zoo television educators at Alexandra Palace; it was a matter of pride to him that all fees received for such duties should be divided between the individual keepers who assisted him and the staff general fund.

In his later years of service, Vevers represented the Zoological Society in carrying out animal exchange in several countries. He had a great interest in the USSR and its peoples, taking a leading part in raising medical aid for the Soviet Union during the Second World War and for seven years editing the *Anglo-Soviet Journal*, the organ of the Society for Cultural Relations.

In 1943 he was awarded the Silver Medal of the Zoological Society and in 1946 elected FRCS.

During the twenty-two years he spent with his wife after retirement, his old friends found him as lively as ever and commenting on all news with humour and excitement. As mortality naturally diminished their numbers, they were succeeded by a whole range of birds and small mammals, with occasional visits by children and grandchildren from several continents.

Correspondence

Space for Britain and Japan

SIR,—I am grateful to you for giving some prominence (*Nature*, 225, 987; 1970) to the successful firing of the Black Arrow launcher on March 4. May I, however, clarify two points?

While, as you say, we did not think it necessary, as the result of the trouble with the first launching, to alter the overall timetable, a change was made in that the second firing was not an orbital attempt.

The suggestion that, after the next firing this summer, Britain will be square with the Japanese is a little hard. This firing is due to put into orbit a total payload (excluding the empty third stage) of some 80 kg, of which the small test sphere will form only part. The Japanese Lambda rocket is an adaptation of a sounding rocket similar to our erstwhile Black Knight, and its payload capability is limited to the order of the 25 kg satellite launched in February. The Japanese Mu launcher is comparable with Black Arrow, but it is in a considerably earlier state of development.

Yours faithfully,

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Compressed to Publish

SIR,—F. B. Sanford's letter (*Nature*, 225, 979; 1970) makes an important and thoroughly neglected point, that the average paper is let down by excessive economies in publication. Two solutions are open to the investigator: either he may reserve part of his research purse to pay for more expansive presentation, or he may consider channelling off the more weighty mass of data to a computer-based data bank. This is currently proposed by the Palaeontological Association. Essential information would be carried by a conventional summary paper, advertising the detailed data, available as a tabulation on payment of a fee.

These possible courses of action should not be allowed to confuse the basic point that, overall, publication is a trivial part of research costs. Further, many editors would not allow more expansive format because this would upset the commercial basis of their currently very profitable business.

I think we need a direct challenge to the commercial interests which have such influence on the circulation of information and ideas. Take *Nature* itself. What purpose is served by the present assemblage of highly compressed original papers and "letters" covering all of science, except personal advertisement?

Yours faithfully,

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Cardiff.

Mysterious Satellites

SIR,—The statement in your article "Mysterious Satellites" (*Nature*, 225, 899; 1970) that "Satellite DNAs were discovered some six years ago by several groups . . ." is not quite accurate. The mouse satellite DNA was discovered as a separate band in the CsCl gradient in 1960—10 years ago—by S. Kit of the M. D. Anderson