correspondence

Stantec Zebra

SIR,—May we venture to answer your question (October 16, page 544) regarding the present whereabouts of the Stantec Zebra? It is alive, well and working unconscionably hard somewhere approximately 350 miles north of St Albans.

The Computer Board has little reason for complacency as regards the implementation of the Flowers report at Edinburgh Regional Computing Centre (ERCC). Subsequent to the return of a rented IBM 370/158, the centre finds itself without effective access to a major batch processing facility, with concomitant serious consequences for teaching and research at the Universities concerned (Edinburgh, Glasgow and Strathclyde).

The expensive and wasteful debacle ensuing from totally inadequate attempts by the Computer Board to provide comparable facilities on an IBM 370/168 situated at Newcastle University defies comprehension.

Yours faithfully,

D. WHITE P. MALLISON
C. GILMORE D. MACNICOL
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University of Glasgow, UK

Mosquitoes

SIR,—Though not directly connected with the Research Unit on Genetic Control of Mosquitoes in New Delhi, I have followed closely the progress of its research work and the recent unfortunate controversy which surrounded it. I would like to comment briefly on some of the points raised in the letter (September 18) by Mr C. Raghavan and Dr K. S. Jayaraman of the Press Trust of India on the subject of the research unit:

- The release strategy, as set out in the unit's protocol for the planned experiment in the town of Sonepat, was to adjust the numbers of sterile mosquitoes to be released in relation to the number of wild mosquitoes currently emerging in the town, so that any females unavoidably released would constitute only a small minority of the total female population. The journalists' mention of the release of "at least 2,000 females a day" makes the unwarranted assumption that the unit's maximum possible output of 400,000 males a day would have been required in this experiment. In reality, during the first week of the experiment 35,000 sterile males were scheduled for release daily and these would have been unavoidably accompanied by about 90 females.
- The releases in Sonepat would have been from a grid of over 500 release points in the town. All mosquitoes for release were to have been marked with the same colour. Therefore, among the samples of mosquitoes recaptured there would have been no way of knowing from which of the release points or which day's release they originated. Can the journalists seriously suggest that a specialist in mosquito ecology could 'extrapolate' such data to give information on the dispersal pattern of female mosquitoes which would be of use to someone interested in biological warfare?
- It is typical of the journalists' method of argument that in support of grave allegations against the work of the WHO on mosquitoes in India, they produce an unsubstantiated allegation about the work of the FAO on sugar in Cuba.
- The journalists refer to "bird migration studies supoprted by the GCMU [*sic*] and the US Army". In fact the research unit in Delhi had no connection whatsoever with the bird migration study.
- The Assessment of the National Filaria Control Programme (India) 1961–1970 (C. G. Pandit, Indian Council of Medical Research, 1971) recommended a dual strategy based on vector control and drug treatment, contrary to the journalists' statement that exclusive reliance on drugs was advocated. The research at the Filaria laboratories of the Indian National Institute of Communicable Diseases reflects this dual strategy.
- The journalists have missed the point about the conclusion that can be drawn from the history of the eradiction of *Aedes aegypti*, but not other *Aedes* species, from Poona. It has never been suggested that this disproves the existence of a degree of cross immunity between dengue antibodies and yellow fever virus. What it does provide is a practical demonstration that if *A. aegypti* (the vector of urban yellow fever) is removed from an Indian town, this does not cause the appearance of yellow fever, contrary to the fears expressed by the journalists about the consequences of the unit's planned experiment in the town of Sonepat.
- I am surprised by the journalists' opinion that research on "sophisticated technologies" should be restricted to the developed countries, as this runs directly counter to the commonly expressed view that the developing countries require more home-produced technology which has been tested for its feasibility and developed in relation to the actual field conditions in which its application is required. Fortunately the journalists' attitude is not widely shared, and the recent successful genetic control of an *Anopheles albimanus* population in El Salvador (Lofgren, C. S., *et al.*, *Am. J. trop. Med. Hyg.*, **23**, 288–297; 1974) suggests that these techniques may provide a practical weapon in the struggle against malaria and other vector-borne diseases on a much shorter time scale than that suggested by the journalists.

Yours faithfully,

R. J. WOOD
University of Manchester, UK

A hundred years ago

MR GLADSTONE AT GREENWICH

WE may surely regard it as a hopeful sign of progress that a whole page of the *Times*, as well as of other daily papers, of last Friday was practically devoted to the discussion of matters connected with Science and Art. When we find the daily papers giving so great prominence to these subjects, and when men of such position and mark as Prince Leopold, Mr Gladstone, and the Lord Chief Justice, take what is evidently a genuine interest in the progress of science and art education among the lower classes, it seems quite safe to infer that this movement has at last taken a prominent and important place in the everyday life of the country.

Prince Leopold, in his address at Oxford, showed that he had taken some pains to become acquainted with the latest statistics of the Science and Art classes. The discrepancy between Prince Leopold's statistics and those of Mr Gladstone has been commented upon in the *Times*. At the same time it is gratifying that a man like Mr Gladstone should think it worth his while to take an interest in the matter at all, but when he does determine to think about it, the least he can do is to inform himself correctly as to statistics.

From *Nature*, **13**, 41, Nov. 18, 1875.