

Letters to the Editor

• Brief letters—one or two pages—are more likely to be printed than are long ones, which may be cut.

SPARE WILDLIFE?

I would like to comment on the brief article “Nuts to Nature,” by Jo Anne Mueller (*ABT* 36[5]:308). She cautions against man’s aid to animals lest we “make them dependent on us or interfere with natural selection as we have in man.” She ends, “I ask that we spare wildlife this disastrous degeneration.”

I do not agree with this view and I am sure many other biologists do not either. All one must do is look at the list of dwindling and endangered species as published by the National Wildlife Association to know that nearly all kinds of mammals and birds are suffering reduction in numbers due to the activities of man and his apathy. We must make a renewed and dedicated effort to save and increase these precious animals, not “keep hands off” for some remote fear that we may theoretically be altering their genes or the processes of natural selection. I would rather risk these remote possibilities than see these unique and irreplaceable creatures march off into the twilight of extinction.

Dedicated efforts must be made by ecologists, conservationists, engineers, industrialists, land developers, and federal officials to maintain animal habitats and keep them free from pesticides, sewage, industrial chemicals, noise pollution, and a myriad of other ills. However, the real efforts must come from the individual. Only public concern can truly insure the survival of our remaining wildlife. What better way to nurture adult and student concern and appreciation for wildlife than through supplemental feeding of birds and other animals, habitat preservation and restoration, community clean-up drives, recycling stations, and other projects to preserve and clean-up the environment? Granted, such projects must be approached within a sound ecological framework, but to abandon them is to insure the annihilation of these animals long before Ms. Mueller’s hypothetical “disastrous degeneration” could possibly have an effect.

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Jo Anne Mueller comments:

I wrote “Nuts to Nature” to challenge some commonly held views that, I feel, do a disservice to wildlife. The question is not “should we save the wildlife?” (for we agree that we should) but rather, “how can we save the wildlife?”

Considering the rapid rate of reproduction in most species, the fear of altering the gene pool is neither

remote nor theoretic; rather, it is a possibility close at hand and based on solid data. Certainly, I would agree that dwindling species should be aided, but to aid species that can survive without our help is somewhat like tying a child’s shoestrings each day until graduation and then watching him trip as he steps from the stage with his diploma.

Competition among animals enhances natural selection and maintains an adaptive gene pool while supplemental feeding of healthy species can only alter their selective mechanism. At issue here is the prevalent idea that we humans can improve upon nature. The supposed innocuous gesture of feeding wildlife has unrecognized repercussions since we are exerting an influence upon a system with a multitude of related but, for the most part, unrecognized interrelationships. Simply stated, we can never do just one thing in nature. The effect desired is worthy, but the unforeseen effects could be to the detriment of the long-term well being of the species and community.

The struggle to live has been reinforced through evolution and is a force that must be preserved for it holds the promise of a future.

INTEGRATING LITERATURE AND SCIENCE

I was pleased that Professors Silva and Schatz (*ABT* 36[4]:225) were interested in integrating literature and science but amazed at their vagueness about *how* this was to be achieved and virtually dumbfounded at their notion of the nature of literary studies. Of course, everyone will agree with their statement that “teachers should be persuaded that a science–literature program could improve the teaching of literature, just as it could improve the teaching of science,” but I doubt if many serious students of literary studies will accept the methods which they vaguely point to. As far as I can determine, literature will become an enlarged *Bartlett’s Dictionary of Familiar Quotations* to which scientists will have recourse when they want to find an expression better than any they can think of themselves. This may advance science—though I don’t know how—but in its fragmentation of the literary text it will do very little for literary studies.

Another statement, that the “subject matter of both science and literature is concerned, on one level, with propositions and facts,” is also perplexing. Setting aside the precise nature of that “one level,” one might still question the presence of “facts” in literature. Where are the “facts” in Thomas Hardy’s *Return of the Native*? The characters and events in which they participate are, like all characters and events in literature, simply illusions. Their relevance to our lives is certainly not at the level of facts. Further, of what specific significance is it that Samuel Johnson was interested in balloons? That we know Shelley was interested in scientific information, and that we understand the use of that information in a Shelley poem, does no more to inform a literary