

# Animal Antics

## Beasts Go Ballistic!

‘**A cop in charge** of mounted officers had his £18,000 car trampled at a Middlesborough game - by a spooked police horse.’ *Daily Mirror*, 29/1/98.

**The whole of the country’s benefit system** is under threat today from rabbits. The animals have been undermining the Benefits Office’s Central Benefits Record Office in Clevedon, and chewing through the wires. Pest control have been called in. Workers will stage a protest if an attempt is made to kill the animals. *Radio 4 News*, 23/1/98.

‘**The grey squirrels** frequently remove their place of residence, and it not unoften happens that not one can be seen one winter where they were in multitudes the year before; they go in large bodies, and when they want to cross a lake or river they seize a piece of the bark of a birch or lime, and drawing it to the edge of the water, got upon it, and trust themselves to the hazard of the wind and waves, erecting their tails to serve the purpose of sails; they sometimes form a fleet of three or four thousand, and if the wind proves too strong, a general shipwreck ensues ... but if the winds are favourable they are certain to make their desired port.’ *The Squirrel Hunters of Ohio, or, Glimpses of Pioneer Life*, N.E. Jones (1898), quoted in *The Squirrel Tale No.4*, June 1997.

‘**Fortean Times reader** Penny Boot wrote in with a story about how her friend Diane was beaten up by a horde of angry squirrels in Chingford Cemetery, north-east London. She was collecting conkers when a pack of squirrels in one of the chestnut trees took to hurling horse chestnuts, still in their spiky shells, at her. They progressed to vigorously shaking branches to make more fall on her. She retreated, suffering eye-watering pain after a particularly large chestnut struck her on the bridge of the nose, leaving her with a massive bruise which made her look as if she’d been in a punch-up.’ *Letter to Fortean Times 100*, in *The Fortean Times Book of Exploding Pigs* (1997), p.31/2.

**A trawler off Norway** was sunk by herring. While the catch was being hauled in, the herring suddenly dived for the bottom, lifting the [front] of the boat out of the water. The crew were rescued by another trawler. The captain said that in 50 years he had never seen anything like it. *Radio 4 News*, 6/1/98.

**Oslo, Norway** - ‘A harpooned whale fighting for its life rammed the Norwegian boat that shot it, breaking the vessel’s mast and hurling two crewmen into the icy waters. The whale escaped, but it was unclear if it survived, the Oslo newspaper *Verdens Gang* reported Tuesday. The two crewmen, one of whom suffered cracked ribs, were rescued. According to the paper, the whaling boat, the *Bolga*, was off Norway’s northern tip on Monday when it harpooned a minke whale, which can grow up to 30 foot in length. The whale then rammed the 53 foot long wooden boat. The two crewmen, who had been spotting whales from the crow’s nest near the top of the mast, were thrown into the ocean, about 425 miles north of the Arctic Circle.’

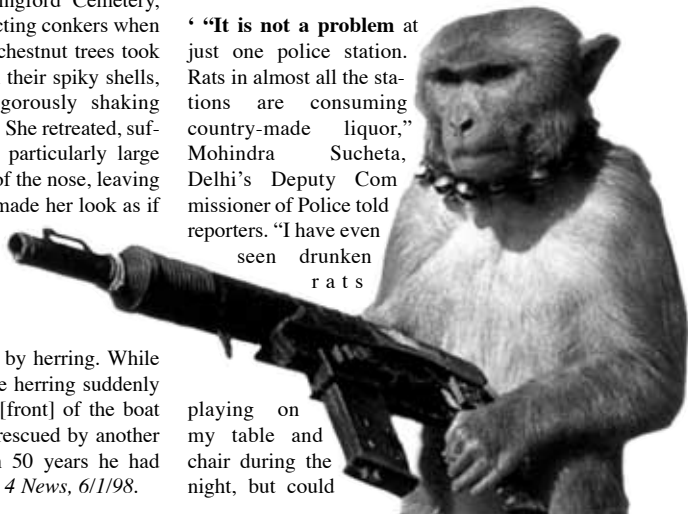
*Associated Press*, 2/6/98.

‘**Ceylon:** Deadly cobras are besieging a house in the village of Warakapola, 50 miles from Colombo. The owner had previously beaten a cobra lurking outside his door, but failed to kill it. The reptile slithered off into the jungle. According to Ceylon folklore cobras will always seek revenge, and soon afterwards four took up positions around the house.

The family was forced to leave and employ a snake charmer to rid them of the visitors. He succeeded in catching only two. Hardly had the owner moved back to his home when four cobras appeared and took up siege positions once more.’

*Sunday Express*, 30/1/72.

‘**“It is not a problem** at just one police station. Rats in almost all the stations are consuming country-made liquor,” Mohindra Sucheta, Delhi’s Deputy Commissioner of Police told reporters. “I have even seen drunken rats



playing on my table and chair during the night, but could



not do anything.” Speaking in Jafarpur Kalan Police Station, Commissioner Sucheta elaborated on the problem. “In the old days, people kept their illicit booze in bottles, but recently they began using plastic pouches, which are much cheaper. When we confiscate it, we store it in the station, but rats and mice can easily tear the pouches open and drink the contents. The results are disgusting. Tippy rodents are absolutely fearless, and they ignore all attempts by the police to drive them away. In some cases, the creatures become addicted, and turn violent and go on a biting spree when they find no booze. Here at Jafarpur Kalan, we decided to combat the menace by enlisting a cat, and setting it loose on the rats. At first this plan succeeded, because the rats were too drunk to resist, but lately the cat has begun eating the rodents and becomes drunk himself. After a while, he just staggers about, unable to deal with the remaining vermin. It is getting out of hand. I am considering resignation.” *Gulf Times* 24/12/97, in *Private Eye* No. 942, 23/1/98.

**NOT an Animal Antic:** ‘The full title of this [nature] reserve - Ravenglass Dunes and Gullery - is now a sad irony, for although the dunes are still a distinguishing feature, the gullery is not. In 1985 the birds decided that the level of radioactive pollution from nearby Sellafield had reached unacceptable levels, and the huge colony of black-headed gull and the four species of breeding tern - sandwich, common, arctic and little - all departed.’ *Wild Britain*, Douglas Botting, (1992), p.87/8. [This story lends weight to the persistent rumours that Sellafield experienced a major leak not long before the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, and used that incident to conceal the contamination resulting from its own operations.]

**‘The district forester** at Atherton Tableland, Cairns, Australia, was recently on his way home when he rounded a bend to see a car pulled up in the middle of the road. He stopped, and was confronted by an enraged driver. “That ... that thing there! That’s what did it,” shouted the driver, pointing up the road. It emerged that the car had encountered a 2-metre-tall cassowary standing in the middle of the road. After admiring the bird for some time, the driver tried edging forward. The bird stood its ground, so the driver blew the horn. The cassowary strongly objected to this and landed a kick that pushed the car’s radiator back onto the fan, cutting a hole in it. The victorious cassowary strutted majestically up the road, while coolant from the damaged radiator drained away

onto the tarmac. Birds one, cars nil.’ *New Scientist*, 13/6/98.

**‘I thought you might be interested** to hear about how animals in Japan are exploiting a technical loophole that allows non-human entities to start legal actions. [Bloody liberals!] An increasing number of species and natural phenomena are suing developers and the Japanese government for environmental damage. The 1995 ground-breaking case was brought by the endangered Amami rabbit supported by 67 volunteer lawyers, against two destructive golf courses. This has inspired bean geese further north to demand the cessation of a Tokyo ring road construction project on the grounds that it would destroy their winter feeding grounds. Kawasaki City is currently defending itself against foxes and a coalition of invertebrates made homeless by green-space destruction. And Hirofumi Yamashita, whose ongoing campaign to re-flood the Isahaya tidal flats earned him this year’s Goldman 500 environmental prize, is sharing the stand with waders, fiddler crabs and the Sensui Sea.’ *Letter to Positive [bleurgh]* *News* No.17, Autumn 1998.

**‘Monkeys drove officials out** of the Public Works Department office in Tezpur, North-Eastern Assam, in December 1991, and spent 25 minutes destroying





**“That dog’s worrying the sheep again”**

official documents. [Sound familiar?!] Police were summoned, but made no attempt to intervene - the holiness factor [i.e. veneration for the Hindu monkey god Hanuman] saved them again.’

*D.Post 10/12/91, in Fortean Times No.64, August, 1992.*

**‘Chimpanzees at a wild animal park** in Narbonne, southern France attacked a noisy construction crew that woke them up, mauling one worker so badly he needed 30 stitches in his face and neck. Another worker escaped by jumping into a pond ... The work crew had been fixing the ceiling of an empty animal shelter early Tuesday morning when it inadvertently woke up the chimpanzees, who were in a nearby shelter, officials said. One of the chimps broke through a window, and seven other animals followed behind. The chimps fell upon the workers, ripping open one man’s cheek and neck ... The chimps then charged the park’s office building, breaking some windows. Five employees in the building hid in the walk-in freezer for an hour until firefighters arrived.’ *Associated Press 18/3/98*

**‘Indian officials** preparing for parliamentary elections have had their efforts halted by hordes of monkeys, which have destroyed equipment in the election office and intimidated the staff. Delhi’s chief electoral officer, T.T. Joseph, said the roving simians had ripped the curtains off polling booths and pushed some officials into a corner. “We are apprehensive that they will damage valuable election material, such as electoral rolls, paper and stamps.” A private security firm has been hired to protect the staff and

to explore ways of getting rid of the marauders safely. The agency is toying with the idea of using sprays to immobilise the monkeys, then using airguns to scare them away.’

*Observer 31/3/96.*

**‘M. Camille Spiess** records in the French ‘Revue Scientifique’ [that] ... At the foot of the Jura, in the canton of Vaud, there lives a farmer who raises edible snails (*Helix pomatia*). He has as many as 50,000 of them at one time, in an enclosure surrounded by a wooden fence about 2 feet high. To prevent the escape of the molluscs the top of the fence is covered with a board, the edge of which is armed

sharp metallic points. Lately the snails have discovered the means to surmount this barrier. A number if them climbed the fence until they reached the top, and then, forming a sort of ladder, those behind passed over the shells of the others in front, and so all but one got safely over the top without being impaled on the metal points. “This simple story proves,” says M. Spiess, “that the vineyard snail is not without cunning; his behaviour in this case gives evidence of a reasoning faculty such as we have never before encountered in his actions.” One must go very low down the animal scale to reach the last trace of thought and will.’

*Daily Telegraph, October 14th 1902.*

**‘Our flock of sheep** are quite content to stay in the field in which they are enclosed—except for two ewes, and their lambs. No matter how well we think they are fenced in these two always manage to get out into forbidden pastures. As my husband was yet again herding them up, a neighbour told him how he had watched their “break out”. They had wandered all round the fence until they came to a weak spot. One ewe then pushed her head through but got stuck half-way. Sizing up the situation the other ewe then rushed at her pal from behind and “buted” her good and hard. She shot through the fence like a rocket—and the other followed through with her lambs. Who says sheep don’t have brains?’

*Letter to Sunday Express, 6/6/82.*

**Big shout** going out to: The Duchess, the Virtual Primitivist, the Pulse Thief and the Cliffhanging Organic Hicks.