

Readers write . . .

Super efficient service

I HAVE received my copy of FUR & FEATHER by post for a long time now. I must be one of the fortunate ones because I usually receive my copy on a Tuesday morning or, on rare occasions, Wednesday.

My copy of May 3 had not arrived by the Thursday, which was so unusual that I telephoned to query this. I was assured that copies went out as normal that week, and it was assumed that my copy had been lost in the post. I can't complain though as it is the first time that this has happened.

The lady who dealt with my inquiry promised to put another copy in the post that day. This was received on Saturday morning and the original still hasn't turned up!

I thank the staff at FUR & FEATHER for their help and reliability. It really is appreciated. Some time ago I wrote a letter in the 'Readers write' section. A reply was received, addressed to me c/o FUR & FEATHER. Some kind person forwarded the letter to my home.

As FUR & FEATHER probably receives its fair share of moans and groans, it's only fair it should get the praise it deserves in providing a really efficient service. Thank you FUR & FEATHER.
(Mrs) J ORCHARD

The Cavy Fancy in Ontario

IT WAS very interesting to me to read Brian Emmett's 'Cavy Postbag' in which he tells us of a visit from a Canadian couple. But I would query his remark that the cavy fancy in Canada is more on the young side than it is in France. Of course Canada is a very large country and travelling from one part to another can be as far as travelling from this country to Canada.

I note that Brian's visitors came from Calgary and it may be that in that part of Canada the cavy fancy is young, but from my personal observations in the southern part of Ontario—around Toronto in the part of Canada known as the 'Golden Horseshoe' the cavy fancy is strong with a very enthusiastic Ontario Cavy Club as well as a cavy section of the Dominion Rabbit and Cavy Breeders Association.

They have more or less the same varieties as

we have and if they haven't got the newer varieties, and they hear about them, they are not slow to import them from this country. They have indeed got Himalayans although I don't think they have chocolate Himalayans—yet. In fact some of my own Himalayans went out there.

The next time you get the chance Brian have a look at the Peruvian Cavy Clubs Scrapbook. There are lots of photographs and newspaper cuttings of Peruvians, both in Canada and USA. I think you'll find it interesting.

There is a good interchange of judges and exhibits between Ontario and the USA and they do travel very long distances to attend shows. I have seen a very handy van, fitted out with bunk beds and pens for the cavies which is used by Bruce and Rene Eisel—secretaries of the Ontario Cavy Club.

The Ontario Cavy Club has several British members—including myself and we regularly receive their 'Cavy Commentary'—which is a very interesting magazine with some good articles. ISABEL TURNER

Quick litters

I HAD rather a shock while feeding my cavies on the evening of May 8. Crystal, my pink-eyed White gave birth to two babies.

What surprised me so much was that her previous litter of four were born on April 3 1979 which means that the second litter was born only thirty-five days after the first. I thought I must have been mistaken but on checking my record book it proved to be correct.

Unfortunately one baby died at birth and the other two days afterwards, owing to the sow having no milk. One of my son's sows gave birth the following day and we managed to get her to accept the baby, but by that time it was too weak and just gave up.

I would be very interested to hear from any reader who has experienced anything similar to this, as it is the first time I have come across anything like this in eight years of breeding cavies.

I look forward to your replies either through FUR & FEATHER, or at my home address of 137 High Street, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 1TT, telephone Aldershot 20020.

(Mrs) PAMELA MADELEY

Genetics are not essential

John K Palin

MR ROY ROBINSON's article (FUR & FEATHER April 19) left me with the feeling that he rushed into print in reply to my remarks (FUR & FEATHER March 29) without fully digesting them. He picks me up on rather trivial points that are of no real consequence whatsoever.

He fully endorses what I stated, admitting that one can breed animals successfully without any knowledge of genetics. He also admits that there are students who are technically proficient in genetics having no practical knowledge of livestock. He only *thinks* some of the people will in his own words 'show their mettle'?

He continues with comments on the Dutch mouse. No matter whether he saw my article in 1959 or not, I have it in front of me as I write, plus his article 'Is there a Dutch marked mouse?' in which he says it is possible he erred in his remarks on Dutch marked mice.

In my article I quoted from the remarks on his previous article 'In mice there have been several attempts to establish a Dutch marked variety but without success.'

In his recent article (FUR & FEATHER April 19 1979) he says he has recently acquired a stock of Dutch mice.

When is Mr Robinson going to convince himself whether there are or are not Dutch mice?

He accepts Mr A Cooke's suggestions that there may be a Dutch type mutant in mice. Twenty years ago I told him the same thing.

fancy rats, gerbils, hamsters, ranch chinchillas etc.



mice

There are two points in Mr Robinson's recent article I would like to clarify. First he says that the term 'Mendelism' is old fashioned. Modern followers of genetics would like to take the credit for the subject but as far as I am concerned Gregor Mendel is still the father of the principles of heredity.

The second point is the word 'pedigree' mentioned in both our articles. The word 'pedigree' is a term that is used loosely and many do not really understand it. How often does one hear the phrase among dog fanciers 'It's a pedigree you know?' A pedigree is a piece of paper, and that is all it is worth—a piece of paper. It is what is on that piece of paper that matters.

A pedigree of an exhibition animal that contains a list of champions in the show ring is a pedigree worth having. One that contains no winners among its ancestors is worthless. A mongrel dog may have a pedigree, if it were of any use, for it is only a record of its family line. Humans have pedigrees in the form of birth certificates.

I prefer to use the terms 'high class' and 'pure bloodstock' if possible.

It is comparatively easy to breed, with the aid of genetics, a herd of dairy cows for high class milk yield or to establish a flock of poultry that are excellent egg producers. It is however a different matter altogether to form a strain of birds or animals for exhibition with the application of genetics. Where only one or two properties are considered genetics can help. Where there are many points to consider, as in exhibition mice, genetics are best forgotten.

In the same issue of FUR & FEATHER (April 19) an article by N Mays on Silver Jubilee mice is only concerned with one property, colour. If all other points had to be selected with the application of genetics, the case would be hopeless. Some points may be already established along with the colour, but with luck more than attention.

One of the greatest mouse fanciers of all times was Percy Ashley, who freely admitted he didn't know the first thing about genetics. His awards on the show bench with rabbits, cavies and mice are legion.

Fanciers I could mention who have achieved success in the exhibition world with mice to name a few are C Beckett, J Hartley, L Edmondson, etc. These fanciers, and others who have been consistent winners over many years, did not stay at the top with the application of genetics. I do not say that these fanciers have no knowledge of genetics but it certainly wasn't genetics that enabled them to stay at the top.

Actually Mr Robinson is straying from the subject which is genetics and exhibition livestock. What genetics can do for animal biology and medicine has nothing whatever to do with the matter.

My argument was that genetics were not essential to the breeding of exhibition livestock. Nothing more, nothing less. If Mr Robinson wishes to go off at a tangent on other aspects of genetics I do not wish to be involved. One doesn't need a Philadelphia lawyer to explain my articles, they speak for themselves.

Stay with breeding rats, Mr Robinson. If you can breed these with the same exhibition points as mice, eg: ears, tails, coat, etc, through genetics, I'll take my hat off to you.

Club news

NORTHAMPTON TOWN SHOW

ALL IS now ready once again to make Northampton Show 1979 (July 28) one to remember. This year we have an extra large tent with space to pen 1 000 cavies. There is an even bigger schedule than 1978, with far more breed and colour classes for you to enter. We are entertaining the National Cavy Club young stock show, Midlands Cavy Club summer cup show, Northampton, North Bucks and Bedford summer show, Peruvian Cavy Club summer show, Dutch Cavy Club cup show, Dalmatian and Roan Cavy Club summer show, Crested Cavy Club summer show, Tortoise and White Cavy Club young stock show. With nineteen top-line judges to place the awards this must make July 28 a day for all fanciers and their families.

For the first time Northampton has gone international for 1979.

We have invited Mr Peter Van Eyk, a top judge of the National Cavy Club of Holland, to judge for us. He will place the awards in the under five months Self section, which goes to show that no expense is too great to improve our show for you.

We also intend to run a stewards competition this year with prize money to be won of £25. Will any fancier who wants to steward at our show and enter for our stewards competition please say on their entry form that they wish to steward. The show manager will arrange who they steward for. All stewards will have the chance to win our three cash specials totalling £25. So don't forget, get your names in early with those entries if you want to steward and enter this new competition.

We are again running the inter-club match, to compete for that fine shield donated to our show by Ken Higgins. This was won last year by Birmingham Cavy Club. Mr and Mrs Woodward have again kindly offered to run this for us but this year will all fanciers who wish to take part please write on their entry form which club they represent as this does make life a lot easier for John and Maureen. Only fanciers who nominate their club on entry will be able to take part.

The full classification for this premier show will be in FUR & FEATHER at a later date, so watch out for and aim at the show that has the top class venue, top class judges and the top most prize money in England. FRED HOLMES

LEEDS METRO

ANOTHER YORKSHIRE Championship Show has passed. My thanks to all the judges and to stewards, particularly Mrs Emmett, Mr Davidson and Mr Lovell, without whose help the show would not have been the success it was. My greatest thanks go to my wife, who has no experience in taking entries but took ninety per cent of the entries for me as I was away at this time.

Two entries were accepted (by me) over the phone, but they did not exhibit. As only names and no addresses were given, I cannot trace these people. I look forward to receiving their entry fees.

An extraordinary meeting will be held at the

Valley Inn, Whitehall Road (the next pub towards Leeds from show hall) on Wednesday June 6 at 7.30 pm. The idea is to discuss and see who is prepared to help us run a special Yorkshire Championship Show in 1979.

J R NORTH, show secretary

CITY OF NORWICH

THE NORWICH Rabbit and Cavy Club's venture into holding its April show on a Sunday and at a new venue proved to be as successful as was hoped. Drayton Village Hall on the Norwich outskirts is a larger hall with much better kitchen and car park facilities than our last venue and, with two nearby public houses within a hundred yards, who could ask for more.

Judge Colin Clouter had the task of assessing an excellent entry of ninety-six cavies, including twenty-seven Abyssinians of which Donelmar Stud's was judged the best, winning best non-Self. Best Self and best in show was Waverley Stud's adult Golden. In fact, Golden's were very much to the fore with Bernard Wiles's 5-8 months pig also well in the cards. Best pet and best juvenile was won by Sharon Emery of Trimmingham.

Our thanks go to Denis Driver for his kind donation of specials, which were much sought after.

However, we do appreciate that the idea of a Sunday show doesn't appeal to everyone, so if any club member or regular exhibitor has strong objections, please would you let your views be known to a committee member or myself. So here's looking forward to our next show on July 15 when the judge will be Pete Hudson. RICHARD WOODS

TRIMDON

THE FIRST show in our new venue—and there is no other word for it but 'excellent'. The hall is light and airy. With the new tressels made by Mr Urwin the pens were adequately housed in two rows for the rabbits and the cavies at the bottom of the hall. The four judging tables were lined along the back windows thus giving the judges ample light. The refreshments were in good supply due to the good work of Mrs Urwin and her band of helpers.

The only unfortunate point of the day was our judge, Mr Alan Wilkinson, being unavoidably detained and not making our show. But as always in the Fancy, you only have to ask and Mr W Nicholson stepped into the breach doing a super job (he has also agreed to do our Christmas show in December). I can only say a very big thank you to him.

Best in show went to Mrs J Woods with a bonny young Peruvian sow. Best juvenile was Miss D Bawkes, Self Black and best pet Miss B Ripon.

We had our plaques for the first time and they were much admired by all. They will be for the three sections with the rosettes each month from now.

Thank you to Mr Bawkes who provided our pen prize of a beautiful pair of pillow cases. Dare I say it? Once again it was pen thirteen won by Mrs Usher, thanks also to Mrs J Woods who donated her winnings back to the club.

Our judge for next month is Mrs Mary Davidson, so once again I hope to see you all. Thirty cavies gave a total of 130 entries so lets try and top that yet again.

ELIZABETH TURNER

DUTCH CAVY CLUB

WELCOME TO new members Michael Jacques, Co Durham; Miss R Holroyd, Maidstone; Miss L Stevenson, Maidstone; N McClymont, Ayrshire; Mrs A Littlefair, Cambridge. I hope they will enjoy their stay with us.

If you have not yet renewed your subscriptions please send them either to Mrs Elward or me as soon as possible.

The stock show draws nearer so lets make it as good or better than last year. Mrs Elward, the judge, will be better pleased the more pigs she has to sort out.

If any club wishes to entertain the 1980 stock show will they let me have full details.

The annual general meeting will be after the show and this is one of the items to be discussed. Items for the 1980 yearbook are also very welcome. One has come in already so I hope that's a start and more will follow. Yearbooks are not of very much value if the biggest thing in them is the list of members. It is the wrong time of the year for writing articles but do think of something to write down when the nights draw in. P J DOLPHIN

PERUVIAN CAVY CLUB

ALTHOUGH I have been trying to organise things so that I could attend, I shall not now be able to get to our spring show at Newcastle on June 23. I have had the unexpected and pleasant surprise news that my daughter and her two little girls will be arriving that weekend for a visit from Canada. They plan to stay for about two months, so Judith will be looking forward to seeing some of her old friends at any of the shows we can manage to attend during that time.

However, I will see that all the relevant cards etc get to the show at Newcastle and I am sure that under the guidance of Jill Wood it will be a great show. Our judge is Mr George Gibson, so try to give him a good entry.

I thank Jackie Fish for her reply to my last notes and I hope she continues to have trouble-free breeding in the years ahead of her and will not feel too discouraged when she has her ups and downs like the rest of us. Perhaps her 'Bumblebee' will be one of our entries at the spring show! Have a go Jackie!

On the subject of breeding my crested have continued to breed well throughout the winter and spring. Last week one had yet another litter of five—all doing well. Four of these were Americans—not quite good enough to show but good breeding stock (don't write they are all spoken for). I actually have two Peruvians in pig—so hopefully my year of non-breeding Peruvians has just passed. I hope this applies to all members who have had the same trouble. ISABEL TURNER

BRADFORD METRO

BRADFORD METRO Fur Fanciers have now added a mouse section to their show. The first mouse show is to be held on Sunday June 10, the judges being L Heywood (Selfs), H Jowett (Tans and Marked) and G Booth (AOV and Satins). There will be the normal National Mouse Club support plus two Bradford Metro rosettes for best adult and best young. Money specials of 50p best in show, 50p best opposite age and 50p best juvenile, all per G Lupton, also 50p best in each section. So we are hoping for a good entry to keep the judges busy but please no late entries. Schedules from and entries to Dennis Capstick, 7 Poplar Drive, Windhill, Shipley, West Yorkshire BD18 2HL, telephone 592338.

Forthcoming show dates are September 16, October 21, November 18 and December 16.

Mice

FOR HOBBYIST AND EXHIBITOR

by JOHN KELLETT

Price 50p including postage and packing from the Book Department FUR & FEATHER, Idles, Bradford, West Yorkshire BD10 8NL

Joys of a partnership

I THINK that most fanciers would accept that Gill and I represent one of the few true functioning partnerships in the mouse Fancy. We are both active fanciers—a point which Jack Wormald made in his excellent 'Who's who in the Fancy' series a few years ago. But it goes further than that. Because of the nature of my job I would be unable to remain an active fancier if Gill was not one also. I am an industrial chemist by profession and my work can take me anywhere, literally anywhere in the world for one to three weeks at a time, sometimes at very short notice. There's no way that I could maintain a reasonable stud singlehanded in those circumstances.

Then there is the question of running open shows. In early March, when it looked as though we might not have a mouse section at the Nottingham Championship show I offered to step in and act as show secretary for the show. No trips were scheduled, no problems anticipated. Yet here I am, on the Wednesday before the show sitting writing this article (in a slack moment) in a chemical factory in Southern Canada—and it's snowing and blowing a blizzard outside.

Meanwhile, although it's 4 pm here I know that it is 10 pm back home in Petersfield and Gill has been dealing with all the entries for next weekend's show in my absence, sending off pen labels, putting entries in the book and onto the judging sheets, etc. and generally coping.

Mainly about Tans

INGRAM DAVIES says he does not want to upset Tan breeders but his comments do not help. If fanciers only select their mice for top colour, tan and feet colour as suggested by Ingram Davies then I wouldn't be at all surprised to find bad type in all Tans. Being more realistic, all litters of all breeds have some mice of better type. It may not be a large improvement but it will be a steady gradual improvement. All good fanciers will almost certainly pick the mice with better type for the breeding pen, even allowing a small disadvantage in other factors.

Getting back to Tans. I think it is all relative. Some Tans—notably silvers and blues—have as good a type as their Self counterparts or at least not a lot worse. But try comparing the type of a black Tan to a Self Black. In a large proportion of times you would find the Tan has the better type. In conclusion I would suggest some very good type Tans have been shown and still are being shown. In the south at least, there appears to be a shortage of Tans at the present. This being so, it is not surprising a few are being shown that may not have excellent type.

Changing the subject—Isn't it amazing how easy it is to accumulate a large selection of different breeds of mice without really trying? Recently I went through my shed with an eye to cutting down the mice to a more reasonable number. Apart from my stud of Tans (black, chocolate, dove) I also had a stud of Argentines. Associated with these there were a few silver Tans, Pink-eyed Whites, Self Silvers and Chins.

As a sideline I have a few Creams and a few Pearls (more of these later). I had already disposed of my blue Tans and my silver Tans not too long ago. The trouble appears to be that I cannot resist most varieties of mice. If anyone offers me mice I find it very difficult to refuse. Anyway I did manage to cut down the mice but that is another story.

As mentioned above I had acquired a few Pearls from, as it happens, several different sources. They were acquired as 'Silver Greys'. They were very dark with good ticking and were shown successfully as Silver Greys. The mice were very prolific but as the youngsters grew more and more were getting lighter and lighter. At this point I stopped exhibiting them but continued to breed from them, trying to get them more even. On close examination the under coat was also getting lighter. They were now approaching Pearls. At this point in time they are really quite presentable, a typical specimen having an even top with good tipping. The mice could be a shade or two lighter to good effect but it makes you wonder how the original 'Silver Greys' were produced. One unusual feature is that they are reasonably handleable, unlike most Pearls.

An item of southern news. At the last table show of the London and Southern Counties Mouse Club it was very pleasant to see one of our more senior members get best in show with a very nice Cream. Obviously, as anyone on the receiving end of his judging would realise, our Mr Eric Smith knows his mice. It was not that long ago that he started up again with Creams.

It's nearly time for the agricultural shows again—back to the hot stuffy tents, swarms of assorted insects, hordes of kids with sticky fingers, and above all mud. Still would be without it all? GEOFF SQUIBB

Fortunately things are going well here at the factory and my job is just about wrapped up. I get on a plane at 8 pm tomorrow night and should land back in England around 10.30 on Friday morning in time for a few hours in bed and then to take over the reins again. But without a fancier wife none of this would be possible and the mouse Fancy would not have had a Nottingham Championship show this year.

So I took David Montgomery to task when I saw him at Doncaster for writing that my ambition was to win the Mendel Gold Cup with a Dutch—that's one of our targets! We believe that it is achievable and were delighted to see our Dutch (and bucks at that) taking 1, 2, 3, in the 'best marked type' class at the last London Championship Show.

Ambition

I think that it is important to have ambition and targets as a fancier—something to work towards. On the first page of our FUR & FEATHER scrapbook, dated 1966, is an article by Ernie Higgs. In it he tells of his desire to win all of the NMC cup shows. At the time that I stuck that cutting in the book we had never won a first prize. Starting with Brokens it took us two years to get our first red card at an open show. But in those early days we could see the dizzy heights that were there to be climbed—and we could see a number of 'intermediate' targets.

Initially it was our first red card, then to win a best in section (best Marked) and then best Marked with a Rump-White (at that time a new and rather under-nourished breed). And always looking up higher, towards a best in show, or perhaps a specific class or cup, or to win an NMC cup show best in show. We find now, thirteen years on, that we are two-thirds of the way towards Ernie Higgs's objective, have taken Bradford Championship, the NMC spring cup show and the London Championship. Which means that we must strive even harder to win best in show at the NMC summer cup show and Annual show.

And we still have other targets—like the Mendel Gold Cup with a Dutch as David M mentioned, or establishing some dramatic Tricolours (like the cavies) or winning all five sections at an open show, and a few less optimistic ones. Think about it and set yourself a target or two for the coming year. Take an unpopular or uncommon breed and develop and improve it until you are getting winners and people are coming to you for stock (like John Kellett has done with Pearls and Silver Greys).

Travel

Looking out of the window I find that two inches of snow has arrived in the last hour whilst I was writing the above part of this article. It occurs to me that I might pen a few thoughts and observations on Canada—a country that I am working in for the first time. Indeed, I think that in my future articles for FUR & FEATHER I will include a small section sharing some of the experiences and my observations in some of the countries I have had to visit. For I have been fortunate enough to have visited or worked in more than thirty countries—some grotty, some fabulous, some hot, cold, some rich, many poor, but each different from the next one. Take Canada for example.

Canada

My first impression was one of immenseness. Vancouver on the West Coast of Canada is further from the Eastern cities than London is! You get some feeling for the scale of the country from the air because the route goes down the line of the gigantic St Lawrence Seaway from Nova Scotia to the populated areas. Of course from November to March the seaway is frozen—even though it is miles wide. Indeed, most of the Great Lakes freeze completely during the winter months when temperatures regularly reach minus twenty degrees to minus thirty degrees. The Lakes are vast fresh water inland seas—Lake Ontario (by no means the biggest), close to the

factory, is more than 200 miles long and 60 wide. Scotland would vanish in it without trace.

I found some strong United States influences. For example, more than thirteen TV channels! Jet-lag plays tricks on you and I was up at 5 am on my first morning in Canada, so just out of curiosity I turned on the television whilst I was running a bath. At that time in the morning there were no less than six stations putting out programmes. There was a sports programme, one on Montgomery's North Africa campaign, cartoons, a religious programme, a woman's keep fit and a cash and prizes quiz show with people rushing around all over the studio!

In the summer months the weather is good and the area between Toronto and Niagara is known as the 'banana belt'. Not that bananas grow there, but certainly cherries and vines do in profusion and local Canadian wines are produced—something I had not appreciated. There are a significant number of European immigrants now settled in Canada—Poles, Armenians, Yugoslavs and Latvians and these all add a dimension of their own. You see green-domed Eastern Orthodox churches with their Makarios-type priests (bearded, dressed in black flowing robes with tall black chimneytop hats). Or you are fed on Polish-style 'cabbage rolls' or the very dark, almost black, German bread.

And houses are different. They all have underground basements which provide superb games/TV rooms for the kids, utility rooms for the freezer, washing machine, central heating boiler, etc. plus masses of storage space for everything from skis and skates to apples or home made jams or pickles. They would make perfect mouseries.

Above ground double-glazing and minimum ten inches of roof insulation protect against bitter winters. Strangely enough the very deep snowdrifts provide insulation and protection from the elements for the local mouse population. They thrive and breed under the snow, doing considerable damage to plants and to the bark of trees in some areas.

Well, there it is—a very brief potted view of one week in one part of Canada—by no means representative of the country as a whole of course. In my next article I will look at El Salvador in Central America.

Ailments in hamsters (Part 1)

Dennis Homes

HAMSTERS ARE quite hardy little creatures and, provided they are fed a well balanced diet and adequate measures of hygiene are observed, their health will present few problems. With many diseases prevention is far better than cure. Cages should be cleaned out at least once a week and washed in a mild antiseptic such as Savlon Hospital Concentrate. Greenfood and root vegetable should not be allowed to stay in the cages for so long as they soon go bad. Fouled grain should also be removed.

A sudden loss of weight is often the first indication of something being wrong, so it is good policy to handle each of your hamsters daily. You should inspect the animal's vent each day to ensure that there is no diarrhoea. Faeces in the cage should also be looked at. They should be slightly moist when first passed and harden very quickly. By doing this regularly diarrhoea and constipation can be corrected before the condition becomes too serious.

First signs

At the first sign of illness a hamster will go off its food and sit in a hunched up position. Ears are usually held back and the eyes appear dull. The coat becomes open and the animal looks in a very sorry state. If you find a hamster in this condition then the first thing that you must do is isolate it from the rest of your stock. Sawdust and bedding should be disposed of and the cage thoroughly disinfected. Once fresh bedding has been added the cage should be brought into a warm room that is free from draughts. If you are unable to diagnose what is wrong the animal should be taken to a veterinary surgeon as soon as possible. Make sure that you thoroughly wash your hands, preferably with an

antiseptic, before attempting to handle anymore of your stock.

Abscesses

These are usually caused by bacteria entering an open wound that may have resulted from the animal fighting or cutting itself. At the first sign of a wound the area should be thoroughly cleaned with TCP, preferably before it has had a chance to close up. The cage should be cleaned out to lessen the chance of bacterial infection. Abscesses sometimes develop on the hip spots and also on the mammary glands of the females. One of the nastiest types of abscess are those that develop inside the cheek pouch. This is often the result of a sharp object cutting the membrane and as there is no saliva there to cleanse the wound and the animal is unable to lick the area, infection develops rapidly.

Obviously prevention is the best medicine. Hamsters should be separated by the age of six weeks and sharp objects should never be allowed in the cage. Only soft hay should be used for bedding, as of course hay is likely to cause abrasions. Crushed oats should be fed in preference to whole oats, as the latter can also abrade the pouches. If an abscess is discovered the animal should be taken to a veterinary surgeon, who may prescribe penicillin or tetracyclin to kill the bacteria.

Cannibalism

The devouring of a litter by the mother is an unpleasant facet that prevails among a great many rodents. At one time it was widely believed that to feed a hamster meat would give it the taste for blood and thus increase the chances of cannibalism. This theory, however, seems most unlikely because the act of

cannibalism bears no resemblance to the instinct of feeding.

Just prior to the birth of a litter a hormone is released into the body which, as well as causing the physical changes necessary to ensure a normal birth, also transmits a genetically controlled message to the brain that causes the mother to act instinctively in certain directions. This action causes the mother to deliver each baby, chew away the umbilical cord, eat the placenta and lick the baby clean. This is nature's way of survival. The cleaning of the young stimulates the heart and respiratory system, and the eating of the placenta recycles valuable nutrient back into the mother's body. It also destroys any strong smell that may attract predators. Sometimes outside influences put a great deal of stress on a mother and, in a state of anxiety, she goes through the 'cleaning up' process for a second time. This time, however, she mistakes her babies for the placenta and eats them.

Cannibalism has been found to be stronger among certain strains than others. The tendency is also partly inherited. When a litter is due care should be taken not to startle or alarm the mother in any way. The mother's feeling of security should, in fact, start long before a litter is expected. If she is handled frequently and becomes tame and used to noises then she will be far less likely to suffer any stress during the crucial birth period.

Sometimes a mother will eat just one or two babies from a litter and then quite happily proceed to feed and nurse the rest. This is usually because she has given birth to a litter that is too large for her body resources to handle and her distress signals the act of 'placenta eating' to begin again. The process of natural selection seems to take over in these circumstances, as she usually only devours the weakest of the litter.