

# How Your Food Choices Affect

# Wild Animals

What you eat ultimately links you to the fate of such creatures as deer and dolphins.

**C**OMPARED TO THE wild animals from which they were selectively bred beginning 12,000 years ago, domesticated animals are artificial inventions of humans. Cows, pigs, chickens, and turkeys perform no role in the web of life, yet they face no peril of extinction. They march to their death, though, in an annual funeral procession that in the U.S. alone numbers six billion, of which one in ten, or 666 million, die before ever nearing the slaughterhouse.

Farm animals boil down to 215 pounds of meats eaten by the average American annually. Calculated in whole lives, both human and animal, an average American consumes 12 cattle, 1 calf, 2 lambs, 29 pigs, 984 chickens, and 37 turkeys. This omits all the cows milked dry and all the hens who count their chicks but never hatch them.

In addition to this direct impact our food choices have on farm animals, perhaps even more important is how what we eat affects animals in the wild. To the above shopping list add over 1,000 fish, many thousands more sea animals such as shrimp, and a grab bag of hunted animals. Finally, uncounted wild animals lose their lives because of how we produce cow or cabbage. Consider the deer and the antelope who have lost their home on the range to cattle and sheep. Consider the dolphins, sea lions,

turtles, and birds caught in the driftnets intended for tuna or salmon. Consider the woodchucks shot during the day and the raccoons trapped during the night by the farmer protecting carrots and lettuce. Even consider the lilies of the field—gardeners defend with poison and snares, with pick and ax, with tooth and nail their ornamental flower beds. What price morning glory?

## HELL ON THE RANGE

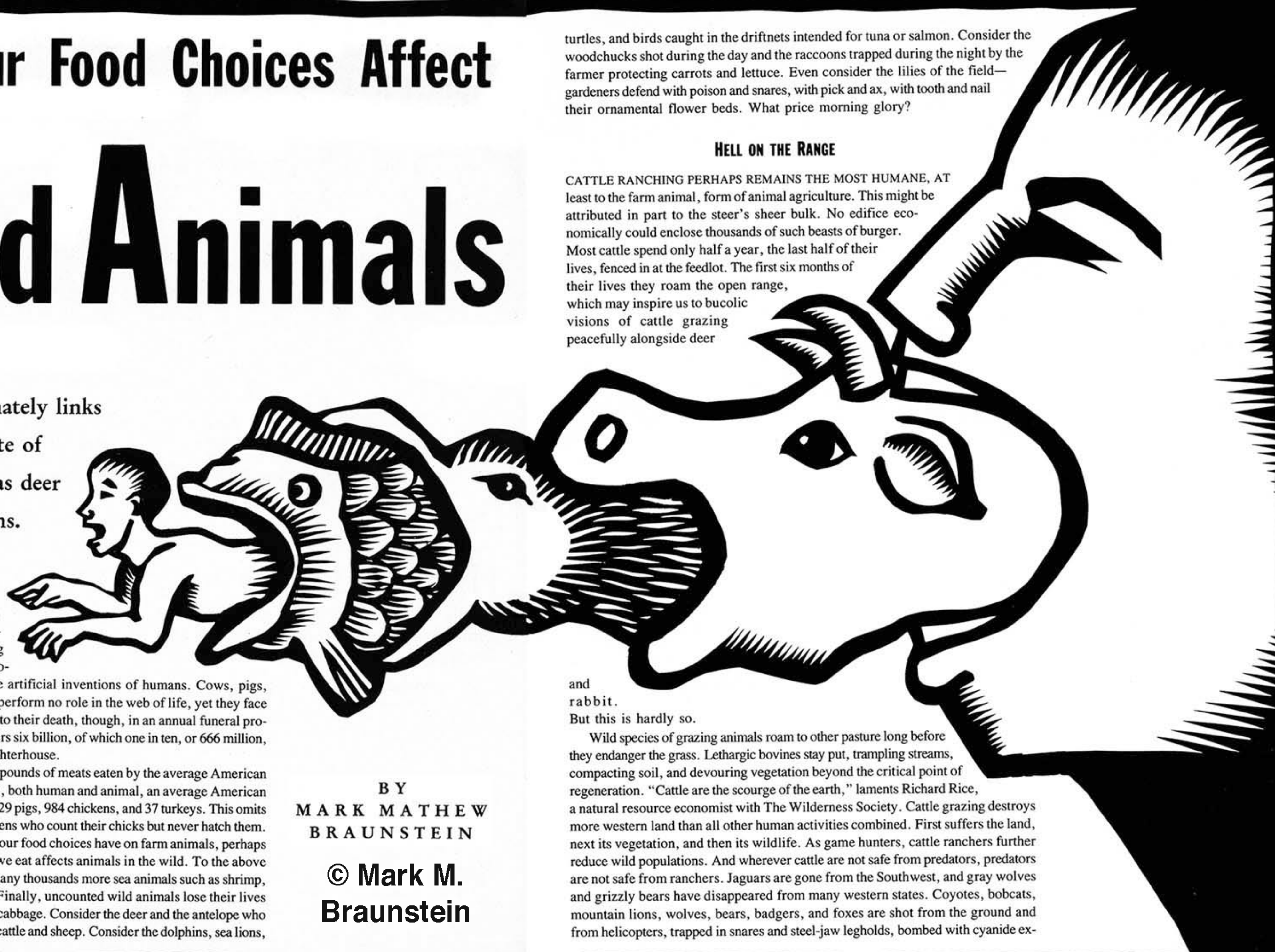
CATTLE RANCHING PERHAPS REMAINS THE MOST HUMANE, AT least to the farm animal, form of animal agriculture. This might be attributed in part to the steer's sheer bulk. No edifice economically could enclose thousands of such beasts of burger. Most cattle spend only half a year, the last half of their lives, fenced in at the feedlot. The first six months of their lives they roam the open range, which may inspire us to bucolic visions of cattle grazing peacefully alongside deer

and rabbit. But this is hardly so.

Wild species of grazing animals roam to other pasture long before they endanger the grass. Lethargic bovines stay put, trampling streams, compacting soil, and devouring vegetation beyond the critical point of regeneration. "Cattle are the scourge of the earth," laments Richard Rice, a natural resource economist with The Wilderness Society. Cattle grazing destroys more western land than all other human activities combined. First suffers the land, next its vegetation, and then its wildlife. As game hunters, cattle ranchers further reduce wild populations. And wherever cattle are not safe from predators, predators are not safe from ranchers. Jaguars are gone from the Southwest, and gray wolves and grizzly bears have disappeared from many western states. Coyotes, bobcats, mountain lions, wolves, bears, badgers, and foxes are shot from the ground and from helicopters, trapped in snares and steel-jaw legholds, bombed with cyanide ex-

BY  
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BRAUNSTEIN

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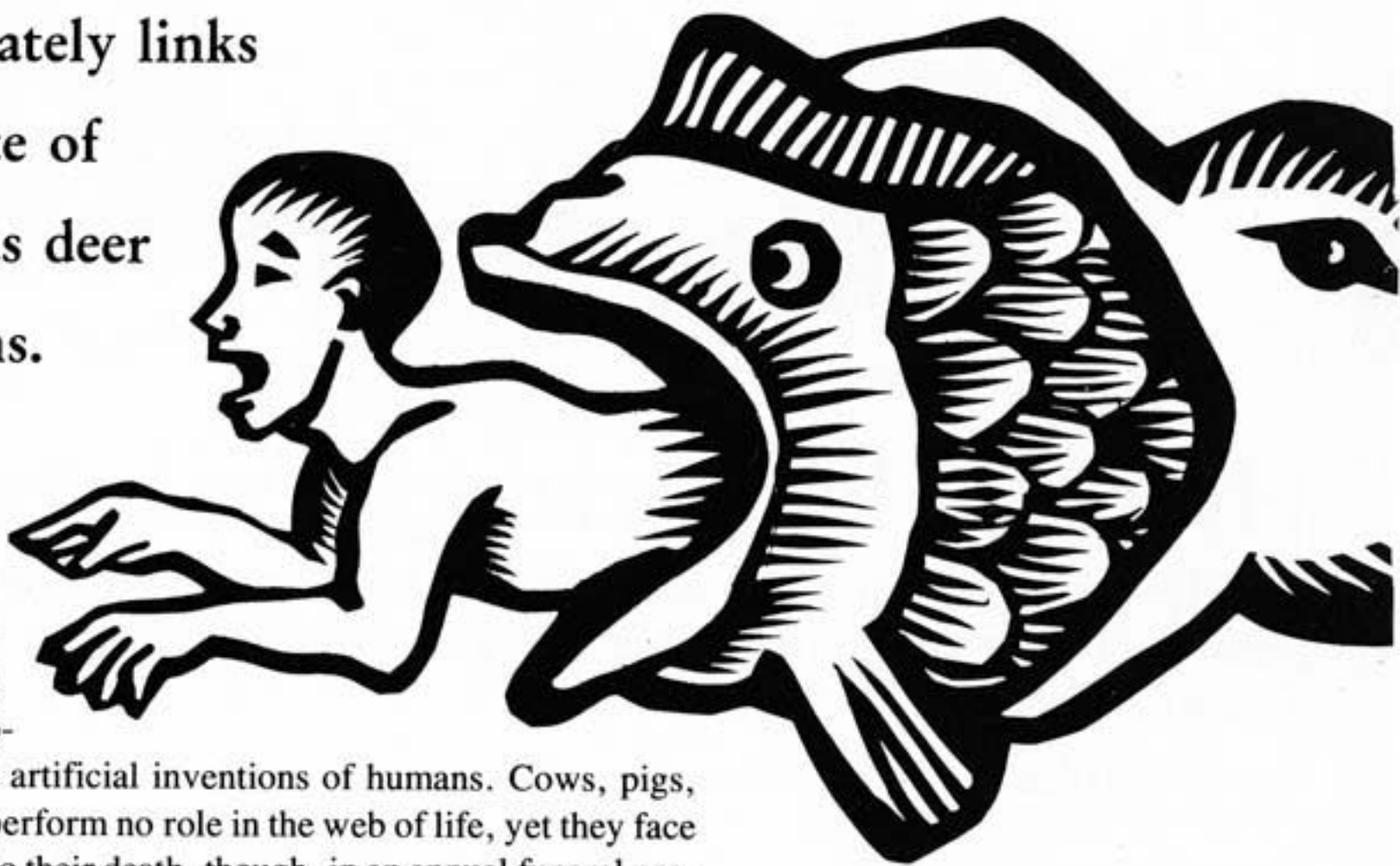
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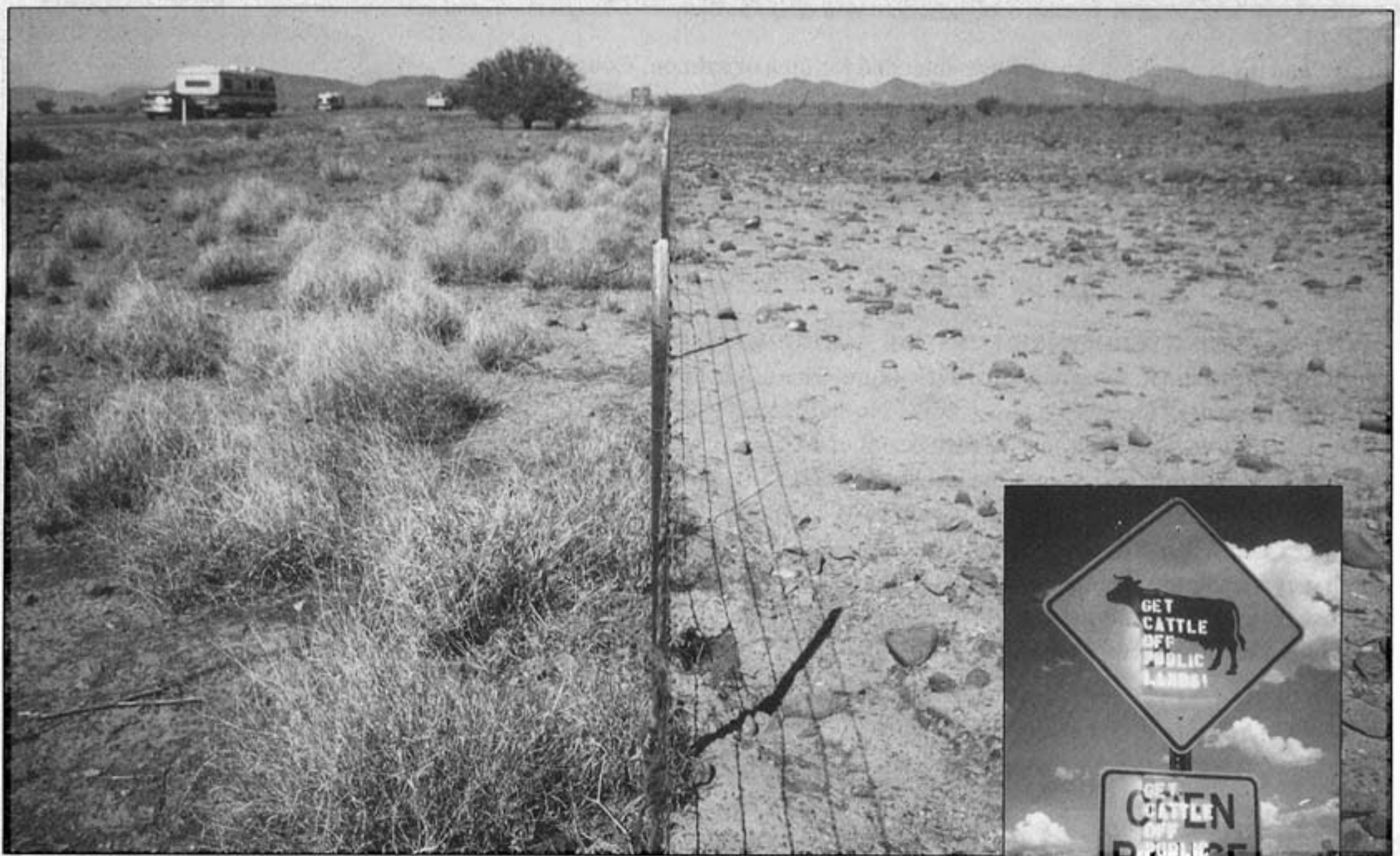
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ABOVE, A FENCE SEPARATES GRAZED AND UNGRAZED LAND IN ARIZONA, AND AN OPEN RANGE SIGN DISPLAYS ANTI-CATTLE GRAFFITI.

plosives, tracked with dogs, poisoned with tainted meat baits, and burned or suffocated in their dens. On private grazing lands the executions are carried out both legally and illegally by landowners and hunters; on public lands leased for grazing, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service carries out federally funded "predator control programs."

Much of the American West is laced like a battlefield with barbed wire—not to keep people out, but to keep cattle in. Barbed wire fencing ranks second only to hunting as the leading cause of death to deer and pronghorn. Every sunrise illuminates impaled or ensnared wildlife who never reached the greener grass on the other side of the fence.

Barbed wire defines the boundaries of private and public lands alike. Three-quarters of the West is federally owned public land, land originally intended for access by all Americans, yet three-quarters of that public land is leased to the private sector for grazing. Two federal agencies, the Bureau of Land Management and the National Forest Service, regulate grazing leases. The NFS statutes require that sufficient forage remain to serve the needs of wildlife. Yet

the summer drought of 1988 left next to nothing for cattle and less for wildlife. Jim Mower, an NFS officer for range and wildlife in Utah, says that many ranges during the drought were "so overgrazed, there isn't enough fuel on the ground to start a fire." "Cowburnt," author Edward Abbey called it.

Despite evidence that a few thousand wild horses have little or no effect on public rangelands where 6.6 million cattle and sheep graze, since 1985 the BLM has rounded up over 60,000 wild horses, leaving fewer than 25,000. The 8,400 more for the 1989 fiscal year will leave on public lands only 16,600 wild horses. Once rounded up, what then? Some have been killed in BLM pens, others auctioned off to slaughterhouses, and, until recently, some were transferred free to anyone who agreed to provide a home for them for one year. Such adoptions often served merely as a detour on the way to dog food cans. Legal battles currently are pending to decide the fate of the horses languishing in BLM pens like their cattle cousins in feedlots.

While North American forests disappear slowly but steadily, Central and South American rainforests disappear quicker than you can say "cheeseburger." South and Central Americans turn trees into pasture. Pasture for cattle. Cattle for beef. Beef primarily for burgers. Burgers

primarily for North American fast food.

Far more species of plants and animals make their homes in the rainforests than in northern forests. Most of those animals we North Americans do not know, but our migratory songbirds spend their summers in North America and their winters in Central America. Deprived more and more of their winter homes, they too are becoming casualties.

### THE MISSING LYNX

IN MAY 1989, A PREDATOR ATTACKED hens in a chicken coop in New Hampshire. The farmer, hearing the commotion, appeared promptly with a gun. Bang! Bang! Nothing newsworthy. Farmers, in order to protect their farm animals, legally can shoot any and all predators, including endangered species. In this chicken coop coup, the deposed predator was a lynx. Shooting a lynx in New Hampshire normally carries a \$1,000 fine and one year imprisonment. Except in the defense of scrambled eggs and chicken soup.

Another factor distinguishes this case. The lynx was able to find entrance into

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the coop because the chickens had exit out of it. The site was a family farm, rare among increasingly predominating corporate-owned factory farms. The one argument that can be posited in favor of factory farming is that, separated from all contact with the sun and the stars, with the wind and the wild, farm animals cannot fall prey to wild predators. And the wild predators do not fall victim to farmers. And the food chain has fewer missing links.

## AN OCEAN OF BLOOD

COMPARED TO THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE, fishing has much to commend it—at least fishing with a hook and line, one-on-one, angler to fish. Most commercial fishing, however, comes with strings attached—nets. Large schools of fish captured in nets beat frantically against each other and struggle to exhaustion, to finally suffocate aloft. Nets are an ancient device, but purse-seine and driftnets that stretch long miles belong to the technological age of the feedlot and the factory farm.

The tuna fishing industry with its purse-seine nets particularly attracts the wrath of environmentalists. Yellowfin tuna and dolphins, for reasons unknown, swim together, dolphins above, tuna below. Fishing fleets depend on dolphins to lead them to their quarry, then spread out nets that encircle and capture both. The dolphins are drowned or maimed; young are separated from their mothers, or if released are severely traumatized. Because Americans have not yet developed a taste for dolphin meat, the drowned dolphins are dumped back into the sea. And sometimes not. Few cats raise questions about the real flavor of tuna-flavor catfood.

Since 1960, tuna fishers have slaughtered six million dolphins. The Marine Mammal Protection Act, enacted in 1972 and renewed during the last days of the Reagan administration, allows American tuna fleets a maximum "accidental" annual kill of 20,500 dolphins. Yet the wholesale slaughter of over 100,000 dolphins a year by foreign fleets continues. Many American trawlers have re-registered under foreign flags, and the three leading American brands of canned tuna—Starkist, Bumblebee, and Chicken of the Sea—purchase from foreign fleets. The Humane Society of the United States endorses a boycott of these three brands. Greenpeace urges people to eat only albacore or chunk white tuna, because these are caught by methods that do not kill dolphins.

Driftnets are lightweight expanses of synthetic netting set adrift as submerged walls through which no marine animals can pass. American fishing fleets, subject to increasing regulation, until recently extended their curtains of death to nine miles long. Japanese trawlers in pursuit of fish in international waters and subject to no legal restrictions, go to even greater lengths, up to twenty miles. Millions of netted fish of low market value routinely are dumped back into the sea, and driftnets ensnare and drown whales, dolphins, porpoises, sea lions, sea birds, turtles. . . in short, every living creature to a depth of thirty feet.

The nets do not discriminate. Nor do they disintegrate. Japanese fishing fleets alone abandon or lose four hundred miles of the synthetic fiber driftnets every year. Discarded and dislodged nets float free,

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continuing to entangle animals who in turn become bait for other marine life who in turn become entrapped.

Ocean fish yields no longer are as bountiful as just twenty years ago, partly because of depletion by the ghost nets and by pollution. When an oil spill occurs off the coast of Alaska the news media bemoans the damage to the fishing industry. Not to the fish—to the *industry*. Some species of marketed fish now are raised in ocean pens. Fishing is fast becoming farming. Worldwide farming of salmon, for instance, has increased fivefold during the 1980s, harvests have doubled every two years, and the trend promises continued increase into the 1990s. Farmed salmon already constitutes one-tenth of all salmon sales. But there is a catch.

According to Marcia Lowe of the

Worldwatch Institute, aquatic farming techniques generate a series of problems similar to those inherent in factory farm techniques on land. For instance, the same underwater corrals that keep in farmed fish also keep out predatory fish, but protection against predatory birds is ensured with firepower. Fish, other than salmon, farmed in freshwater ponds are the most vulnerable. To protect the catfish in its commercial ponds, one California fish farm employed full-time hired guns who shot egrets, herons, hawks, avocets, kingfishers, and other birds by the thousands. This went on for years, until 1988 when a local birder smelled something fishy.

## BIOLOGICAL STRIPMINING

IN VIOLATION OF THE ENDANGERED Species Act, nets intended for shrimp have been drowning sea turtles, among them the Kemp's ridley, identified as one of the twelve most endangered species in the world. In 1988 alone, American trawlers in search of shrimp captured 47,000 turtles and drowned 12,000 of them. Turtle excluder devices (TEDs) could have prevented this for many years, but the shrimp industry sought one legal loophole after another in order to delay federal regulations requiring their use on shrimp nets. While political issues were debated, thousands of turtles were trapped. Effective July 1989, American shrimp trawlers must employ TEDs in offshore waters and by 1990 in inshore waters. In protest in late July, shrimp trawlers blockaded the port of Galveston, Texas. As promptly as August 1989, the Coast Guard issued summonses for shrimpers' failure to employ the TEDs. The shrimp industry has fought so long and hard because an estimated one-tenth of the shrimp catch escapes with the turtles.

Meanwhile, Mexican shrimp trawlers continue business as usual. They long have used monofilament gillnets, which are lightweight and nearly invisible underwater, and, intended for tiny shrimp, indiscriminately ensnare fish, seabirds, turtles, porpoises, dolphins, and even whales. Use of these nets is illegal in U.S. waters, but sale to U.S. markets of the netted shrimp is not.

Since 1981, hundreds of vessels from Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea daily ply international waters of the North Pacific in search of squid. Squid, under the culinary name calamari, remains an obscure dish in American cuisine. Squid

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# WILD ANIMALS

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fishing, however, eventually will affect the availability of all forms of sea animals for the dinner table. The Asians' vessels set out walls of monofilament nylon nets that stretch for 20 to 35 miles and drift across 30,000 to 40,000 miles every single day. All forms of marine animals die in these nets, just as in the nets American trawlers set out for tuna and salmon. But the devastation by these foreign vessels in international waters remains unmonitored. "What is happening," contends Sam LaBudde, a biologist with the International Marine Mammal Project, "is the biological stripmining of the sea."

In contrast to the tuna industry, whose slaughter of dolphins is merely expedient, the crab industry's is quite intentional. The Chilean crab industry, for example, in a single season two years ago killed 4,000 dolphins solely to provide bait for its traps. The king crabs captured off the coast of Chile are marketed mostly to the United States and Europe. As consumption of the prized delicacy has increased, the populations of both crabs and dolphins off the Chilean coast has plummeted. So the species in addition to dolphins they now use as bait include sea lions, seals, and even penguins.

## GARDENS OF STONE

NO OTHER HUMAN ACTIVITY CAUSES as profound an impact on American wildlife as agriculture. "The destroyers of our time are not greedy trappers or market hunters," averred Stewart Udall, the reform-minded Secretary of the Interior during the Kennedy Administration. "They are good farmers attempting to enlarge the yield of their farmlands," he said. Half the continental U.S. once was forest or prairie or wetland but now is either pasture or cropland. Where once roamed bears and buffaloes now grow beans and tomatoes. According to the National Academy of Sciences, by 1990 agriculture will have drained 110 million acres of wetland and will have irrigated 55 million acres of arid land.

Until recently, small farms were contour-plowed, terraced, or bordered by wetlands, woodlots, windbreaks, and orchards. All provided food and habitat for a diversity of wildlife. Today, however, adjoining farms are merged under single

corporate ownership into massive monocultures. Big business brings in big equipment. Big equipment cannot maneuver around natural obstacles. Illinois, for instance, is now one great desert of corn and soy.

Grandma and Grandpa once planted corn while singing, "One for the blackbird, one for the crow, one for the cutworm, and one to grow." Now their grandchildren are agribusiness managers whose lyrics might be, "Poison the blackbird, shoot the crow, spray the cutworm, and four to grow."

Four acres of forest can support seven pairs of breeding birds, four acres of marshland can support six pairs, grassland four pairs, cropland one or none. Reptiles and amphibians, "lesser" species, are less documented, not documented, or simply forgotten. Many species of birds, turtles, and snakes listed as threatened or endangered owe their demise directly to agriculture. Admittedly, some species, notably rodents, blackbirds, and sparrows, flourish with modern agriculture, despite baits and traps. But not despite insecticides.

Monoculture encourages increased dependence on insecticides. As farmers demand more potent insecticides, scanty government regulations and industry controls aim at safeguarding only human life, not wildlife. Well known is DDT's effect on thinning the eggshells of birds of prey. Well known also is DDT's subsequent ban in this country. Less known is DDT's continued manufacture in this country for export to other countries. Least known is that a derivative of DDT, DDE, was employed in this country until it also was found to thin the eggshells of gulls. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, carbamate insecticides alone killed two million birds in 1988. The EPA admits it, yet does not stop it.

In rare cases where insecticides kill only insects, they kill *all* insects, not just target insects that threaten crops. By limiting the biomass of the food supply for animals higher in the web of life, insecticides then reduce wildlife populations. The more accurate term for "insecticides" is "biocides."

Farming practices in North America annually destroy six million tons of topsoil. Nature creates one inch of topsoil every 10,000 years. Siltration from cropland erosion, along with the insecticides carried in the soil, have exterminated many species of freshwater fish. Fertilizers in the eroded soil pose yet another danger. The fertilizers boost growth of

plants in the water just as on land. But the aquatic plants that benefit most are microscopic algae. The algal blooms block sunlight from other larger plants, killing those that birds and turtles feed on. Furthermore, as both the algae and the larger plants die, sink to the bottom, and decompose, they deprive the water of oxygen. Fish suffocate by the thousands and shellfish by the millions in such waters.

In contrast to agriculture's damage to wildlife is agricultural damage *by* wildlife, because of reduced natural habitat. Crops are eaten by deer, raccoons, woodchucks, rabbits, squirrels, mice, crows, blackbirds (grackles, cowbirds, starlings, redwings), finches, sparrows, pheasants, and ducks, to name a few. During the 1980s in some Western states, crop damage increased twelvefold.

Through special hunting and trapping permits, farmers are encouraged to defend their crops against predation year 'round. Regulations for hunters vary from state to state, but most declare an open season with no bag limit on farm visitors, including crows, porcupines, squirrels, skunks, and rabbits. For raccoons, woodchucks, and opossums, some states define specified seasons but still no bag limit. The annual death toll by hunters and farmers? With no bag limit, no one is counting. Or no one is telling. The Humane Society's Dr. John Grandy suggests that state and federal wildlife agencies compile no statistics precisely because they fear the consequences if humane organizations gained access to them.

Hunting magazines offer rich sources of bloody details. *Outdoor Life* reports one informal survey in western New York where, as in most states, woodchucks can be hunted any time, no bag limit. Farmers welcome hunters into their fields. Small game hunters in the summer of 1988 each killed, among much else, an average of fourteen woodchucks.

If we choose to eat organically grown foods, we are exonerated from responsibility for much of the dismal affairs of modern agriculture. But we are not let off the hook entirely. Woodchucks and raccoons pose greater threats to homestead organic farms bordered by woodlots than to desert-like landscapes of monocultures bordered by more monocultures. If you were a 'chuck or a 'coon, which would you choose? Organic produce studded with yummy insects or chemically fertilized crops laced with gummy insecticides? Organic farmers at green markets boast of corn picked fresh this morning but never tell the story of the raccoon hunt last night. □



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## LETTERS

I can only wonder what the reaction of your readers will be to the February cover with the nude back of a woman in an erotic embrace, the partner's hand on her posterior. I can foresee the usual letters, with their subscription cancellations.

I enjoyed the article on aphrodisiacs, but I think that Mark Mathew Braunstein's "How Your Food Choices Affect Wild Animals" on the cover would have been, with a picture of a threatened wild animal, a more appropriate cover title and would have won you a new circle of readers and not caused any subscription cancellations. As it is, this important article is not even mentioned on the cover!

I basically agree with what Braunstein wrote and will recommend the article to my nature-loving friends.

EDWARD MACIOCHA  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

MAY 1990/EAST WEST 5

Dear Friend

Please be aware that what you read is only half my original article. East West deleted the other half. Their editing was excellent.

I do regret, however, that East West deleted two entire sections: one on the hunting of game animals, the other the conclusion. Other friends have commented that the article as published lacks resolution. So I offer the "Conclusion" to you. Here, friend, is the exciting...

### CONCLUSION

Future human generations, if any exist, will regard our century as The Golden Age. The age when gold was the measure of all things. Our mistreatment of wild animals is only one consequence of our greed. For a long list of consequences, consult Earth First! Journal. For long lists of causes, consult The Wall Street Journal. Our treatment of wild animals will not change until our economic values change. Economy opposes ecology.

The equations are apparent. More people equals greater demand for food. Human appetite for plant foods equals more cultivation equals less wilderness equals fewer wild animals. Also human appetite for animal foods equals more husbandry and hunting and fishing equals fewer wild animals. More people equals fewer wild animals.

The solutions also are apparent. Over five billion humans alive today seem enough. Meanwhile, due solely to human exploitation, another species of animals becomes extinct every hour. Some estimate every minute. Pessimists fear, too late, by the end of this decade nearly all wild animals will be dead as the Dodo. Optimists hope, not too late, the time has come to side with the scapegoat, the sitting duck, and the underdog.

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