microfiche. It will cut into the "grey" literature, and will make what has been available on a private basis available on a much wider basis through libraries and archives.

Among its longer-range recommendations, the publications planning committee is considering the following:

1) The pros and cons of publishing extended abstracts in the *Journal*, with the main equations and main figures, while the paper itself is available on microfiche to those who order it.

2) Investigation of new composing and printing techniques to see if they can reduce publication cost or increase publication services substantially.

3) More emphasis on the *Reviews of Geophysics* which publishes review articles covering all of the areas of interest to the members of the AGU.

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Plea of the Philatelist

As an avid collector of stamps and occasional author of biological papers, which even more occasionally elicit reprint requests, I deplore the trend among senders of reprints or request cards of allowing machine stamping on their envelopes instead of regular postage stamps. Surely, whether one collects stamps or not, one of the pleasures of receiving reprints or request cards, partially offsetting the tedium of reading or processing these, is the sight of exotic and colorful stamps, enlivening an otherwise humdrum heap of mail. Must we forever lose this splash of color from our working day? The price of this minor increase in efficiency is, I believe, too high.

I wish to exhort all scientists to insist on the use of postage stamps and I don't mean a never-ending tribute to Franklin D. Roosevelt or Queen Elizabeth II. Decorative commemoratives should always be at the fingertips of any competent secretary. Add some sparkle to your mail. Who knows—it may increase the impact of your publications.

A special plea to ecologists working in the Solomon Islands, Fiji, San Marino. . . .

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More about Abrus Precatorius

I wish to add more information to Gunn's letter (18 Apr.) about *Abrus precatorius*, the pretty but poisonous seed. The plant is native to India, and its seeds, known locally as *rati*, have been used here from time immemorial as weights by goldsmiths since it is presumed, though without any good reason, that the weight of all *rati* seeds is equal. Actually, each weighs about 1.75 grains troy. The seeds are extensively used as beads for necklaces. That they are poisonous has been well known from early times. The principal poisonous constituent is abrin which was formerly used as a remedy for granular eyelids, but a dangerous one, as it frequently proved. The bruised seeds have often been used as darts for criminal purposes such as poisoning cattle and even human beings. A poultice of the seeds is said to bring about abortion. Strangely enough, the boiled seeds have been used as a famine food in Egypt and India!

In addition, the roots and leaves of *A. precatorius* contain glycyrrhizin, the active ingredient in licorice which accounts for its being known as Indian licorice. The leaves taste sweet, and a decoction of the leaves and roots is widely used for coughs, colds, and colic.

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DDT: Maxwell's Demon

It appears from the letter by J. L. Fischer (15 Aug., p. 645) that DDT is well on its way to becoming a sort of reversible Maxwell's demon. If a species of wildlife *declines* in numbers, it is being poisoned by DDT; if it *increases* in numbers, this is because its natural enemy is being destroyed by DDT. Apparently, the hypothetical and unidentified predator of starfish, according to Fischer, has been eliminated by DDT, but there are no indications that DDT was present, or whether, if present, it would have killed the free-swimming and fragile larvae of the starfish themselves.

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