

Aleksandrov stated that basic research "radically changes technology, leads to the appearance of new materials, and opens up possibilities of using new, often unexpected phenomena, which have no connection with the original field of research".

Dragon reprieve?

The death-throes of the 15-year old Dragon high temperature reactor project at Winfrith in the UK may last longer than expected if a proposal from the European Commission in Brussels is approved. The Commission wants to see the team kept together until the end of the year, mainly to allow the results of the whole project to be evaluated, but also, in turn, to

leave the way open for any possible but unlikely resuscitation. The proposed maintenance would cost about £1½ million.

BNFL complication

As British Nuclear Fuels Ltd awaits cabinet approval for its controversial Japanese nuclear processing deal, there are reports of French moves to break into the contract. Britain, being a member of the reprocessing group set up with France and Germany known as United Reprocessors Ltd, is obliged to discuss the French bid for a possible 50% share in the contract, or risk competing with France for the entire deal, worth up to £600 millions over the decade following 1980.

Dumping decision

Whatever the outcome of the BNFL negotiations, Britain is to continue dumping low activity material in the deep ocean. In a House of Commons written reply last week, the UK Energy Secretary Anthony Wedgwood Benn stated that desirable disposal rates of the "low activity plutonium contaminated solid radioactive waste", stored mostly at Windscale and Drigg in Cumbria, are well within International Atomic Energy Agency safety limits. They do, however, exceed the dumping levels arranged by the Nuclear Energy Agency of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and Britain is to push for higher limits.

SOME members of the Council of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), following their success in persuading the society to oppose fox hunting, are trying to engineer the acceptance of a similar policy towards angling. They say it is cruel and should be banned. If they are successful, the conservation of our environment, and in particular of our rivers, could suffer great damage.

Angling is by far the most popular outdoor sport in Britain, having as many as three million adherents. On an average weekend during the fishing season, there are likely to be as many as five individuals sitting patiently by our rivers and canals waiting for a fish to bite for every one spectator attending a professional football match. Although some members of angling clubs from the midlands may lighten the tedium of their coach journey home from the dykes of East Anglia by song lubricated with bottled beer, this seldom if ever leads to the sort of vandalism apparently inseparable from watching some of our more notorious soccer teams. The unobtrusive behaviour of fishermen generally is the reason why others are so surprised to learn of their numbers.

However, anglers can be aroused to effective action when their waters are polluted. Although salmon and trout can flourish only in the cleanest streams, even so-called "coarse" fish (which supply the bulk of the sport in England) are delicate indicators of pollution. There have been thousands of occasions when the first warning that some unauthorised and toxic effluent has been discharged into a river has been given by a fisherman who has spotted dead or dying fish which might never have been noticed by the river authorities. The Anglers' Cooperative has been effective in taking legal action to stop such practices. Of course anglers can only operate in

rivers pure enough to contain fish, and so our filthiest waters do not receive their attention. This is perhaps one reason for the slowness with which they are cleaned up. But once a river is clean enough to be invaded by fish, it is the angler who plays the

Angling right



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greatest part in safeguarding it and who may be responsible for further improvements.

Anglers not only outnumber other sportsmen; they also greatly outnumber all our organised environmental and wild-life conservationists. Angling is, furthermore, a sport with adherents from all social classes, including those unlikely to be involved in the more elitist forms of conservation. Yet, as I have indicated, anglers are really *effective* conservationists. It would thus be to their mutual benefit if the two groups could get together to cooperate whenever possible. If bodies like County Conservation and Naturalists' Trusts could recruit a

proportion of the anglers operating in their area, they could often quadruple their numbers and end the criticism that they are only a bunch of middle class protectionists working for their own selfish ends. The conservation bodies could help the anglers, for instance, by making waters in suitable reserves available for fishing, and by preventing bodies like the RSPCA (many of whose members are the self-same middle class conservationists) from endorsing policies likely to damage the countryside.

Presumably the move to ban angling is an attempt to benefit the fish. It might prevent a number of fish from being hooked, an experience which can hardly be pleasant, though there is disagreement about the extent to which fish and other cold-blooded animals experience what we describe as "pain". However, without the vigilance of the anglers, fish kills would almost certainly become commoner, and fish might be completely exterminated from many of our waters. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the experience of a fish, choking to death in unnecessarily deoxygenated streams, or writhing in apparent agony after exposure to poisoned effluents, could involve greater cruelty than that arising from normal fishing practices.

Today there is such pressure on our countryside and on its wildlife that all forces need to be mobilised to protect the environment. Freshwater is the habitat most endangered by pollution. It is to be hoped that those members of the RSPCA who are so strongly opposed to fishing will come to realise what would be the eventual consequence of their present policy. Fortunately they are more likely to destroy their own society than to stop a sport which has such widespread support from all sections of the community, and which contributes so much to preserving our environment.