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The features marked with a star (*) are based entirely on material taken straight from standard research (and other Official and Therefore Always Correct) literature. Many of the other articles are genuine, too, but we don't know which ones.

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On the Front Cover

Skulls of black-headed gulls (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) in the collection of the Natural History Museum Rotterdam. Photo: Aad Hoogendoorn.



On the Back Cover

Skulls of herring gulls (*Larus argentatus*) in the collection of the Natural History Museum Rotterdam. Photo: Aad Hoogendoorn.



Some Coming Events

The Covid-19 pandemic has introduced excitingly boundless uncertainty as to whether, when, and where public activities will happen in the near future. In 2023 some will happen teledistantly.

(See [IMPROBABLE.COM](https://improbable.com) for details of these and other events.)

Friday, September 8, 2023

— Quark Matter Conference, Houston, Texas, USA

Thursday, September 14, 2023

— The 33rd First Annual Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony

Wednesday, September 27, 2023

— Catania, Italy

Friday, September 29, 2023

— Perugia, Italy
— Cambridge (MA) Science Festival

Saturday, November 4, 2023

— Berlin Science Festival
Germany

Saturday, November 11, 2023

— Ig Nobel Face-to-Face
Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

Saturday, November 18, 2023

— Imperial College
London, UK



Where There's More

There's always new improbable — it's not what you expect! — stuff on the **Improbable Research blog** at [IMPROBABLE.COM](https://improbable.com)

AIR VENTS: GULLS, SEA LIONS, WAR

Exhalations from our readers

Gulls of a Past War

Both sides of my family were, some of them, engaged in the naval warfare planning in the first World War — my mother's ancestors for Germany, my father's for Great Britain. The series of letters you published about birds and European war planners failed to mention what I regard as the juiciest set of stories. My colleague Laura Bassett and I have been analyzing some fairly recent historical analyses done at the Cumbria Institute of the Arts:

"Avian Anti-Submarine Warfare Proposals In Britain, 1915-18: The Admiralty and Thomas Mills," David A.H. Wilson, *International Journal of Naval History*, vol. 5, no. 1, April 2006.

The key passage, in my view, is this:

"A few days later, on 22 July, Kearton wrote to Ryan: 'I have been asked by Vice Admiral Peirse to assist you in carrying out some experiments on seagulls in connection with Submarines.'"

I am proud to tell you that my great-aunt's mother, Florice, was the person who persuaded Peirse to ask Kearton to assist Ryan. However, combined with the fact that it is said that she once lunched with Thomas Mills, that is the full extent of my true knowledge of the happenings.

I have many other stories to tell, should you be desirous of my telling them.

*K. Fulplapp-Naughton Brühl
Wellow, Isle of Wight, UK*

Sea Lions, Greasepaint and the U-boat

Pray let me contribute to the swell of information your letter-writers have provided about animals involved in secret military operations in the early twentieth century. None of them mentioned the most important document about that subject. That document is:

"Sea Lions, Greasepaint and the U-boat Threat: Admiralty Scientists Turn to the Music Hall in 1916," David A.H. Wilson, *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2001, pp. 425-455.

I have a copy. This is the key segment:

Admiralty documents in the Public Record Office indicate that in 1916 Professor W.H. Bragg, F.R.S. of Section II of the BIR had been approached by 'Captain' Joseph Woodward, a music-hall sea lion trainer, who recommended his animals as a possible solution to the U-boat menace. Woodward's recommendation was taken seriously, and he was in due course taken on by the BIR as a consultant, provider of sea lions and experimenting participant. Experiments and trials took place in public swimming baths in Glasgow and Westminster, at Lake Bala and finally on the Solent."

I trust that you see the significance.

*Dr. Kerry Bishop-Bishop
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Fig. 6. Thomas Mills with his wounded son, Charles, of the Australian Light Horse, at the Royal Bath Hotel, Bournemouth in April, 1917. From 'The Fateful Sea-Gull'.

Detail from the study "Avian Anti-Submarine Warfare Proposals In Britain, 1915-18: The Admiralty and Thomas Mills."

Detail from the study "Sea Lions, Greasepaint and the U-boat Threat: Admiralty Scientists Turn to the Music Hall in 1916."

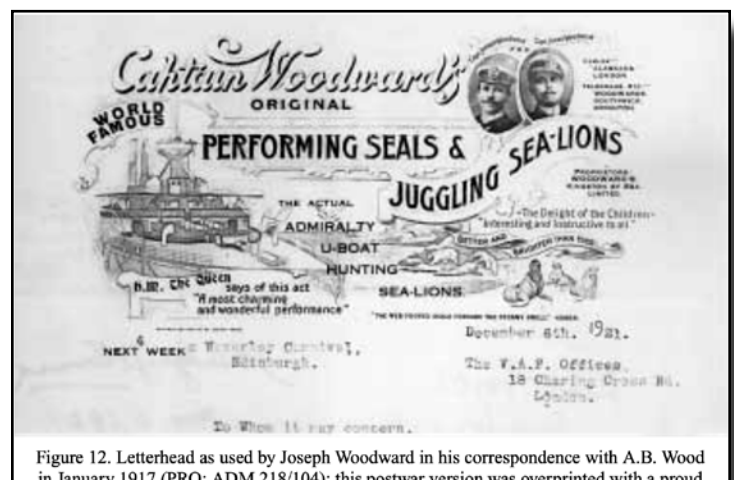


Figure 12. Letterhead as used by Joseph Woodward in his correspondence with A.B. Wood in January 1917 (PRO: ADM 218/104); this postwar version was overprinted with a proud