

Is That So?

By EUGENE BURNS
Ranger-Naturalist

To stay alive, and reproduce its kind, every animal must protect itself from enemies. And its defensive mechanisms are sometimes weird and wonderful such as hollow spines filled with venom, quills tipped with fishhook-like barbs, electric-jolting machines, pinchers, hooked beaks, needle-sharp spurs on wings and heels, and armor-

plated shields. Catfish and sticklebacks have sharp spines which can inflict painful wounds. The common sturgeon has a sharp, barbed, seven-inch spine sticking out from the middle of its tail. For more effectiveness, the weaverfish adds a jigger of venom to its spines which are located on its gill plates and back.

Some hard-shelled animals such as crabs and lobsters have claws and pinchers which can grasp and mash fingers with surprising strength. Somewhat similar to the claws of the crab, the scorpion has added a new weapon—a sharp spine carrying a load of poison. Besides the well-known American porcupine which has rather inferior quills with barbed points, there are some crested kinds in other countries which

have 16-inch long quills. Yeow! Certainly, no animal could look more helpless than the spineless jellyfish or sea-anemone. Yet be careful. Many carry tiny stinging capsules, each capsule containing a fine, pointed, poisonous thread coiled springlike. Upon contact the thread shoots out, penetrates any soft spot it touches and instills poison into the puncture. An even more amazing de-

fense organ, perhaps, is the electric battery of several fish. The jolt can be stunning! Birds with the astounding power of flight to escape their enemies as a whole are poorly equipped with weapons. Yet the beak, foot, and wings can be powerful. Some birds have long spurs, too—not only on the legs but also on the wings. Even more amazing than the complexities of these organs is this: What caused these parts

and organs to be modified to help protect the animal against its vicious surroundings, and thus keep the species alive? (Released by McClure Newspaper Syndicate) Free: By special arrangement with the editors of the Encyclopedia Americana, my panel of judges will award each week to the reader who sends me the

best true-life nature adventure, the best nature observation, or the best question on nature and wildlife, a complete 30-volume set of this world-famous reference work in a handsome Sealcraft binding. Each week new submissions will be considered. Sorry, I simply can't answer your many friendly letters. Please address your letter to: Is That So? c/o Medford Mail

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