

Animals Communicate; So Do Trees

A NEWSPAPER report informs us that one of the new shows on TV this fall will feature an orangutan who plays the part of a Washington consultant with an IQ of 256.

A number of observations might be drawn from that statement but let's ignore the political implications and pass on to the topic of communications, a major industry of our time.

University researchers have studied chimpanzees and claimed they had established limited language conversation with their proteges. Others have concluded that porpoises talk to them, although they can't understand what they say. Dolphins seem to understand English but haven't learned to speak it.

That also is the case with horses, cattle, dogs, cats, other animals and certain birds. The understanding usually is brought about through the universal language of food.

Last summer zookeepers in Moscow issued a claim that Batir, one of their elephants, could speak 20 words or phrases, presumably in

Russian. The emblematic Russian bear so far has neither confirmed nor denied the report.

Every farm boy has known all of his life that animals, birds and insects have means of communication that enable them to find each other, raise families and feed them. They regarded what they saw and heard as wonders of nature. Non-farm boys now report such findings as great scientific discoveries.

The Wall Street Journal recently published a front page story about how electronic communications are used to regulate the rations of milk cows. The scene was described as an old-fashioned family farm in Michigan where kittens and children roam the barns.

The modern age came into use when a cow stuck her head into a feed stall. Each cow was wearing a nylon collar that held a device similar to a transistor radio. The cow's 4-digit number was transmitted to a computerized feed regulator. If she hadn't had her full allotted ration feed was dumped into her trough.

With so many human beings on di-

ets, somebody might make a fortune by adapting such a device for people and pantries.

Plants and animals have long been known to produce chemical compounds that attract or repel. These have been utilized to develop resistant varieties and to lure insects to their deaths or at least make them sterile, thus reducing populations.

Recently ecologists at the University of Washington reported they have found evidence that trees under attack by insects can spread the alarm to nearby trees through airborne chemicals.

The scientists said the trees then protect themselves by increasing levels of phenol in their leaves so that they won't taste as good to invading insects.

The fact that animals, birds or plants may be able to communicate with one another or even make their wants and needs known to people does not endow them with human qualities. Their communications are dedicated to survival. Ours might well be.