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<p><545/e></p>	<p>on 0285-659918. BEAR-FACED CHIC Alfonzo (inset) reaches new heights of ursine designer chic: he wears a Cossack tunic and trousers to emphasise his Russian heredity, and his bright-red mohair fur is distressed to look as if generations of Grand Dukes have hugged him. Teddy Bears of Witney have the original Steiff Alfonzo, made in 1908 for Princess Xenia Georgievna, and a limited edition of replicas. The Cotswold-stone shop sells bears vintage (£2,500) and everyday (£10), and owner Ian Pout has trawled the world for the top teddies. At £110 Alfonzo is beyond most piggy-banks, so look on him more as an investment than a bedfellow. The shop is at 99, High Street, Witney, Oxon (0993-702616). New (not vintage) bears are sold by mail order. LOVE STORY ‘I feel sad when I don’t see you. Be married, why won’t you? ... I will not make you bring in wood and water, or feed the pig, or milk the cow.’ Who could decline this touchingly simpleproposal from a 19th-century American suitor? It appears in a new range of books (Birthday Book, Address Book, Book of Days, Book of Secrets) published by Pavilion in time for Valentine’s Day to complement Love, Penhaligon’s latest Scented Treasury of Verse and Prose. Celebrated and little-known meditations on love by Donne, Rossetti, Shakespeare, and many others are coupled with beautiful paintings that prove the power of love to inspire artists, too. The fragrance of Elizabethan rose, flower of love, permeates each book. To win one of 25 copies of the Book of Secrets, tell us on a postcard who wrote The Great Lover and send it to Country Living /Love at the address on page 2 by 31 March. BRIAN REDHEAD ‘A worm may turn, but it will never turn nasty’ Please, said a friend of this journal, egged on I suspect by a green-fingered two-year-old son, will you put in a word for the worm? Charles Darwin beat me to it, I replied. He considered the earthworm to be the most important animal in the history of the world. But she has a point. The worm is not only overlooked but undervalued. The very word, whether used as noun or as a verb, is dismissive. Even a worm will turn, we sneer. He wormed himself in, we hiss. All of which is very unfair. A worm may turn, but it will never turn nasty. And the garden would be lost without them. It is estimated that the worm population in the average herbaceous garden is about</p>
 <p>Key: Footprint ConEn1 Footprint ConEn2 Footprint ConEn3</p>	<p>a quarter of a million</p>
	<p>per hectare, which is roughly a hundred thousand per acre. And as Gilbert White, the 18th-century naturalist, said, without worms the earth would soon become cold, hardbound, void of fermentation and consequently sterile. What worms do is tunnel through the earth. Although they have no bones or skeleton, they are very strong. All segments and bristles, they can anchor one end while pushing themselves forward with the other. The maze of tunnels they create constantly aerates and drains the soil. But they do not simply push their way through: they eat their way through, digesting any organic material as they go. In effect, they both turn over the soil and fertilise the soil. Worms are hermaphrodite - each one is both male and female, so any adult pair can reproduce, duly and dually, as it were. They need to because they have many enemies both above and below ground. Every early bird is after them, and a mole can eat twice its weight in worms every day. The common</p>

	<p>earthworm can be anything from four inches to a foot long, and many people claim to have seen worms 20 inches long, but that may be stretching a point. Three years ago there were reports that an earthworm six feet long had been found in Stratton St Margaret, near Swindon in Wiltshire, on an allotment. But when they sent the specimen to the Natural History Museum it was found to be the intestine of a hedgehog, if you will pardon the expression. A few months later a man living in Herne Bay in Kent found a live earthworm in his garden after a rainstorm. He said it was six feet six inches long, and he took it to Bramble Wildlife Park near Canterbury for examination. Unfortunately, before it could be positively indentified it fragmented and somebody threw the bits away. Not that we need worms to be giants to be seduced by them. The first World Worm Charming Championships, I recall, were held at Willaston, near Nantwich in Cheshire, in July 1980. A local farmer's son, Tom Shufflebotham, who was then 20, charmed 511 worms out of the ground in half an hour. He did it by gently vibrating the soil, coaxing the worms to the surface. A great feat. Perhaps you would like to take up worm charming, or at least worm watching. March is the month when they begin to venture forth, having spent much of the winter lining their tunnels with fallen leaves. They emerge at dawn and in the evening, for they are not wholly subterranean in their habits. No more are they carefree. They keep one</p>
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