

varying between one and sixteen minutes. This extremely interesting difference from the Emu must be correlated with the relative abundance of raptorial animals. In Africa they are very numerous in number and variety, but almost insignificant in Australia. Obviously the limited sleep of the African Ostrich is an adaptation to environment. Amazingly, the physiological mechanisms of the sleep-starved Ostrich do not appear to suffer under these seemingly adverse conditions.

Casual observation of two Cassowaries (*Casuarus* sp.) in an adjoining enclosure showed a similarity in position and duration of sleep to that of the Emu, with the exception of the period of squatting. There, the Cassowary maintains a drowsy vigil from 1 to 1½ hours prior to full retirement. Further investigation of these birds is, however, required.

As yet completely unknown are the sleeping habits of the South American Rhea (*Rhea americana*) which, it is assumed, having the bodily features of the African Ostrich, may adopt some similar pose.

REFERENCE

Immelmann, K. 1959. 'Vom Schlaf des afrikanischen Strausses', *Die Naturwissenschaften*, 46, p. 564.

Food Parasitism by Silver Gull.—It has long been known, in several parts of the world, that some species of birds will on occasions steal food that has been obtained by other species. This habit is distinct from that of robbing food by force such as is done by skuas and frigate-birds.

Snatching food from ducks is sometimes practised by Coots, and one species of duck has been reported snatching food from Coots. W. P. Baldwin (*Auk*, 63, 96-97, 1946) records Laughing Gulls (*Larus atricilla*) in South Carolina, U.S.A., robbing Brown Pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) of fish just captured by the latter, sometimes even alighting on the Pelicans' heads. At St. Helens, Tasmania, Robert Money (*Wild Life*, 9 (4), 151, 1947) reported having seen 'sea gulls', probably Silver Gulls (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*), perching on the backs of Pelicans (*P. conspicillatus*) and occasionally robbing the latter of their catch of fish.

On February 27, 1960, in the company of Messrs. R. Schodde and K. G. Simpson, evidence of food parasitism by Silver Gulls was observed at the Salt Pans, between St. Kilda and Port Gawler, S.A. Altogether eight Pelicans were seen swimming and feeding, and each had a Gull perched on its back. When the Pelican lunged to take prey in the water, the Gull would walk along the neck of its host and then perch on the latter's head. As the Pelican withdrew its bill from the water, the Gull quickly settled on the water close to it and endeavoured to seize the catch. The associated birds

were too far away for us to see if the Gulls succeeded in stealing the catch, but the association of the two species in the circumstances leaves no doubt that the Gulls are successful often enough to make their parasitic habit worth while. —ERHARD F. BOEHM, Sutherlands, S.A., 16/4/60.

Lesser Redpoll and Skylark in South-west of the North Island, N.Z.—This note derives from observations made, except where indicated otherwise, in Wellington Peninsula (1938-43, 1946-56), Upper Hutt, (1956-60), and South Manawatu, (1955-56). Though it was usual to see the Lesser Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*) before 1953 in Wellington Peninsula in flocks of between ten to over one hundred birds, it was found there only in small numbers in 1953-56. I recorded twelve only on 9/5/53 on a ten-mile walk, found it virtually absent in known haunts in mid-winter and mid-summer 1954, and again in autumn and spring 1956. In 1946-53 Redpolls flew most of the year across Karori, a Wellington suburb, but less often from 1953. The species was not numerous in suitable country about Upper Hutt, twenty miles away, between 1956-60. No flock larger than twelve was seen, in contrast to the bigger flocks seen in Wellington Peninsula in 1946-53. In January 1960 it was practically absent from a nesting area not far from the Wakatikei River occupied by small numbers in two earlier nesting seasons. From these observations a decline appears possible in the numbers of the species between 1953-60 in the south-west of the North Island.

In that part of New Zealand the Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) is somewhat rare. Between 1938-40, but not between 1946-56, I remember the occasional small flock of a dozen in winter on a Wellington Peninsula hillside. In 1946-56 it was only sparingly distributed through Wellington Peninsula hill country. Rongotai Aerodrome, Miramar, had a small population from 1938-55. However, its position there in 1960 is unknown following reconstruction of the airfield, with adjacent land subdivision for housing. Elsewhere in N.Z. *Bird Notes*, 1943, and *The Emu*, vol. 46, p. 32, it is reported common at Waikanae River estuary but the Skylark was seldom recorded there when I paid a number of visits in 1955-56. It was common, however at Te Horo, several miles north-east, in October 1955. The *Proceedings of the N.Z. Ecological Society*, 1959, p. 57, refer to the Skylark in small numbers in 1948-58 in the Hutt and Akatarawa Valleys respectively. It still visited small open spaces in built-up areas including adjacent gardens in Hutt Valley in 1959-60. Such behaviour suggests it was an abundant bird on flat land in the Hutt Valley until recent years. The Skylark was found in big flocks in early October 1959 ten miles east of upper Hutt Valley at Featherston on the Wairarapa Plain. These two areas are separated by the Rimutaka Range.—H. L. SECKER, Upper Hutt, N.Z., 12/5/60.