

Danger of Insecticides.—A 'news release' from the National Audubon Society urges caution in the use of insecticides in order to prevent widespread animal mortality. It deplores the fact that the attention they deserve is not given to repeated warnings by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Toxic agents such as DDT, chlorinated camphene and others, not only destroy birds and fish, but lead to destruction of bees and insects, valued by farmers and fruit-growers. Fertility of land may be affected.

Reduction of fifty per cent. or more in bird population of test areas has been ascertained following DDT dusting with 4.36 pounds per acre. Deaths of quail began on the eighth day with some, continuing up to 34 days with others. It is the slow action that is such an insidious factor in destruction, for the effect is to a great degree cumulative.

A great deal more experiment is necessary to establish the limitations and safety margins of these insecticides.

Practically all land birds are insectivorous in the nesting season, and that period largely agrees with the spraying season.

There are so many 'know-alls,' obstinate farmers, biased purveyors of materials and other opponents of common-sense and even of proved facts, that the fight against indiscriminate and unreserved use of insecticides needs support. The American investigators are certain of their facts but require further specific information. We might well take warning here.

American Ornithologists Union.—The sixty-seventh stated meeting will be held between October 10 and 14, at Buffalo, New York. Business sessions, field trips, and an annual dinner constitute parts of the proceedings. The Union has the good wishes of this, its equivalent society in Australia.

Stray Feathers

Another Introduced Bird making headway in Australia.—Although in early August 1947 it was reported to me that the Spotted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*) was occasionally noted in small flocks near Herne Bay, N.S.W., I had to wait until November 3 to observe my first 'wild' birds in Australia. This was at a place about six miles south of Brisbane. Messrs. J. Robertson and G. Barker have informed me that this bird can be noted in flocks of 20 to 30 about the river in Brisbane and suburbs at least eight miles away. Mr. Robertson has also recorded the breeding of these birds in Brisbane. Commonly known to the aviculturist as the Spice or Nutmeg Finch, this bird hails from Asia. It has a wide distribution, being found all over India and across to China and extending into the Malay Peninsula. It is a small brown finch with a light breast marked with



Dr. Dillon Ripley (right), leader of the recent American scientific expedition to Nepal, displays in his right hand the first specimen of the rare Spiny Babbler to be taken for more than a century. Dr. Ripley is showing his trophy to Dr. Gilbert Grosvenor, President of the National Geographic Society, which sponsored the expedition with Yale University and the Smithsonian Institution. After more than four months of exploration, the Nepal expedition scientists brought back more than 1,200 valuable bird and 100 animal specimens.

Photo, courtesy of the National Geographic Society.

brown half-moons. Mr. C. E. Bryant informs me that some of the birds 'acclimatized' around Sydney were temporarily mistaken there for Plum-headed Finches (*Aidemosyne modesta*).—HAROLD E. TARR, Middle Park, Vic., 12/11/47.

Sharp-tailed Sandpipers in Breeding Plumage.—As Mr. John Reed mentioned in his article 'Mud Island Re-visited' (*Emu*, vol. 46, p. 68) he was particularly pleased to see Sharp-tailed Sandpipers (*Erolia acuminata*) in breeding plumage, so was I pleased to note a pair at Fishermen's Bend on August 24, 1946, in similar plumage. As it was Mr. Reed's, so it was my first view of these waders in bright array. The birds were very 'jumpy' and had no doubt just arrived from the far north, and it was only when they joined a party of Little Stints (*Erolia ruficollis*) that I was able to obtain a good view of them. The breast and abdomen were rich rufous, the head and neck light grey, and the back a rich dark brown.—ROY WHEELER, Windsor, 2/2/47.

Concerning the Lovely Wren.—At 10 a.m. on October 1, 1947, at Edge Hill, a suburb of Cairns (north Queensland) I noticed a male bird of this species, *Malurus amabilis*, sitting on a low lantana bush alongside the road, with a small leaf in his bill. Knowing this to be part of the courting display I decided to watch. Judge my surprise when another fully-plumaged male flew alongside him with a similar leaf in his bill. I watched one bird follow the other to a nest under construction in a lantana bush about two feet from the ground. As one bird left the nest with his offering the other bird entered with his. During the three-quarter hour period I watched I saw no female bird in the vicinity and watched the males carry two leaf skeletons, three pieces of grass and another article that could have been a spider's egg-sac all into this nest. They carried on in a very friendly manner throughout these proceedings.—HAROLD E. TARR, Middle Park, Vic., 2/12/47.

Wren with Flower, and Mimicry by Whistler.—I refer to Mr. Hindwood's recent article in *The Emu* (vol. 47, p. 389), on *Malurus* wrens using flower petals for display. Going back through my diary I discovered the following entry concerning the Red-backed Wren (*Malurus melanocephalus*)—"June 7th, 1941, clear sunny afternoon, fully-coloured Red-backed Wren, with orange-coloured lantana floret in his bill, accompanied by four brown birds." From what I remember the birds seemed unduly excited over something (these wrens, of course, become excited very easily) and they chased each other in and out of the lantana in characteristic style, the male still retaining the floret for as long as I was there, which was half an hour or so.

Another note concerns 'mimicry' in the Golden Whistler (*Pachycephala pectoralis*). This species is a winter migrant

to the Brisbane area, the date on this occasion being June 22, 1947. The bird was a plain brown one, either female or immature male, and I distinctly saw and heard it several times deliver a series of notes, which would have been more appropriate coming from the Variegated Wren and the Striated Thornbill. In between this it indulged in the usual 'see-swit' of the Golden Whistler. I have never seen a Golden Whistler act like this before, and I have met plenty of them.—N. JACK, Brisbane, Qld., 26/6/48.

Atherton Tableland Birds.—While residing on the Tableland many years ago, I encountered two species not recorded by Mr. P. A. Bourke, *The Emu*, vol. 47, pt. 2, Oct. 1947, p. 87. These are the Bustard (*Eupodotis australis*), which occurred sparingly at Tolga and also between Atherton and Yungaburra, and the Pied Goose (*Anseranas semipalmata*) of which species I saw only one individual, a bird shot near the Barron River in a locality between Atherton and Yungaburra.—ERIC H. SEDGWICK, Caron, W.A., 25/11/47.

The foregoing five 'Strays' were inadvertently lost sight of for a considerable period.

A Prion Comes to Grief.—On Saturday, July 2, 1949, a dead sea-bird was picked up in Studley Park, Kew, Vic., between Walmer Street bridge and Kane's bridge, by my brothers, E. and R. Center. It appeared to be a prion. The bird was taken to the National Museum, Melbourne, and identified as the Medium-billed Prion (*Pachyptila salvini*)—a very rare bird, one should imagine, to be found in the particular locality, five miles from the nearest bayside beach, and a considerable distance further from the open ocean. Although apparently fresh when found, the body was too far gone for a skin to be made. There had not been any heavy southerly 'blows' just previously.—J. CENTER, Richmond, Vic., 20/8/49.

Obituaries

ROBERT HALL

Robert Hall, whose death occurred at Hobart on September 19, 1949, was an ornithologist of the 'old school', of which so few members remain. He was a competent field observer, a somewhat prolific writer with a distinctive literary style, a keen cabinet worker, and, in addition, a collector with no mean knowledge of the art of taxidermy and display.

He died in his 82nd year after a useful life as an ornithologist and general naturalist. His several books on Australian birds will be his memorial; and there are few ornithological publications in Australia as well as abroad