



Quickest in Feathers

BLITZBIRD would seem to be a good name for the little ruby-throat hummingbird—since we're sticking this German prefix, nowadays, on everything quick and sudden. The hummingbird is easily the quickest thing in feathers, and probably the most skillful of all flying creatures, states Dr. Winsor M. Tyler, in a new publication of the Smithsonian Institution.

The bird's wings are tiny, but powerful for their size. They beat at a rate as high as 75 times a second; when the bird is "standing still" in the air the rate is 55 beats a second. Seven hundredths of a second is all the time a hummingbird needs to get off a perch. Straight-ahead flight reaches a speed close to 50 miles an hour.

Hummingbird nests are tiny but beautifully constructed, lined with soft plant down and covered with bits of lichen. Usually the female does all the building. The young are no bigger than a pea, naked, helpless and probably blind when hatched. They grow very rapidly, however, and in two weeks are as big as their parents and ready to leave the nest. Then the family breaks up and the parents separate and go back to single life.

Hummingbirds make long migration

● Earth Trembles

Information collected by Science Service from seismological observatories resulted in the location by the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey and the Jesuit Seismological Association of the following preliminary epicenter:

Wednesday, August 21, 10:27 a.m., EST

About 180 miles south of Dutch Harbor, Alaska. Latitude 53 degrees north. Longitude 165 degrees west. A strong shock.

For stations cooperating with Science Service, the Coast and Geodetic Survey, and the Jesuit Seismological Association in reporting earthquakes recorded on their seismographs, see *SNL*, Feb. 24.

flights, timing their travels to correspond with the blossoming of the flowers that supply their food. They not only sip nectar but eat large quantities of insects. Their appetite for sweets is phenomenal, states Dr. Tyler. One bird has been known to eat two teaspoonfuls of sugar daily—about a third of its own weight in sugar.

For all their daintiness, grace and

beauty, hummingbirds have tough dispositions. They bicker with each other, in rasping little, mouselike voices. And they viciously attack birds dozens of times their size, darting and diving at them like a pursuit plane after a bomber, depending on speed and agility to gain immunity from any counter-attack by the victim.

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METEOROLOGY

Radio Silence Handicaps Hurricane Forecasting

HURRICANES, and near-hurricanes like the two tropical storms that recently brought destruction and floods to the South, will come with less than usual warning so long as the war lasts. Silence imposed for safety's sake on ships' radio is responsible.

These disturbances, some of which breed the most violent and destructive of all storms, all originate at sea and as a rule move from east to west. Many of them are first reported, in normal times, from the other side of the Atlantic, in the neighborhood of the Cape Verde islands. Radio messages from ships at sea trace their course across the ocean in that latitude, thence through the Caribbean, to wreak their fury first on the West Indies and then on the American mainland.

Most numerous and ubiquitous of merchant fleets in the Atlantic is, of course, the British, with Norway second and Germany and the Netherlands figuring importantly. German ships are completely out of the game—tied up at home, interned in neutral harbors, captured by the enemy or scuttled to escape capture. Parts of the neutral shipping fleets have shared a like fate. Britain's ships, and many neutral vessels that escaped German hands when the Nazis overran their homelands, still ply the sea, but under strict radio silence lest they betray their location to German submarines. So where our weathermen used to get dozens and scores of radio weather reports they are now lucky to get twos and threes, virtually all of them from American cargo ships.

So serious is the lack of weather information from the far reaches of the Atlantic that two Coast Guard cutters, with Weather Bureau scientists aboard, have been maintained all summer along the route of the Atlantic clippers from New York to the Azores. These obtain excellent data for the planes, but their figures

are of little direct value in forecasting hurricanes because their stations at sea are too far north.

Navy ships on the neutrality patrol can, of course, obtain some useful information on weather prospects, to supplement the meager returns now coming in from merchant ships. However, their reports are not as numerous as those that used to be sent by the now silent European ships, and their positions are usually not as far east as the Weather Bureau would like, for hurricane prediction purposes. In general, the hurricanes are receiving the advantage of the world-wide partial blackout of scientific activities that has resulted from the war.

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