

Do You Know?

The largest number of *colds* occurs in the 20 to 29 year age group.

Raw silk was produced in Virginia in 1622.

Bees sometimes rob honey from other hives rather than hunt for nectar.

Oysters may pass as much as 50 gallons of water through their gills in a day, though the amount is usually nearer 10 gallons.

Gasoline is not one chemical compound but comprises many different hydrocarbons; their nature and amount determine the behavior of the fuel in an engine.

The *white-fringed beetle* of South America, introduced into Florida in 1936, has become a menace to peanuts, yams, cotton, and other plants in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama.

The *puff adder*, a common snake in America, is one of the world's biggest bluffers; when cornered it spreads its head cobra-fashion, or opens its mouth as if to strike, which it sometimes does—but with its mouth closed.

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Returning Birds

► THE SWALLOWS of Mission San Juan Capistrano, at first a California institution, have now assumed the proportions of a national legend. On exactly the same date each spring, local observers declare, the arrowy flocks come in a twittering rush, to reestablish their homes. They are not supposed to deviate by so much as a day from the established calendar.

In southern California's stormless springtime such clocklike punctuality may be possible. In the East, where spring weather is gustier and less dependable, and where a relapse into winter may occur any night, bird arrivals are more irregular. Yet even in that less favored region the dates of the first robin, the first bluebird, the first oriole may be forecast within a week or so with some degree of surety.

Birds really do fly by the clock—the oldest clock of all, the one by which all man-made timepieces are set: the sun. At about the time the farmer says, "Days are getting quite a bit longer; I'd better look over my plows," the birds in their southern winter homes are also feeling the urge to be on the move about their business.

There is no conscious response to the lengthening of daylight hours, as in the case of farmers and other folk whose activities are season-governed. The increasing length of day itself is the stimulus, according to the theory at present most widely accepted. The larger daily doses of light in some way change the internal chemistry of the bird's body, arousing the migration impulse. In similar fashion, the shortening days in autumn set in motion the southward migration.

Experimental support for this seemingly fantastic notion was first produced by a Canadian ornithologist, Dr. William Rowan of the University of Alberta. He caged birds of various species in autumn, and subjected them to artificially lengthened days by means of electric light, as if spring, not winter, were coming. When he released them the bewildered birds started north!

Another Canadian-born naturalist, now an American citizen, Dr. T. Hume Bissonnette of Trinity College, Conn., demonstrated a connection between lengthening daylight and the reproductive cycle in birds, and in mammals also. Since springtime daylight hours arouse in birds the mating and nestbuilding instincts, it can only be expected that they will then move swiftly to the northern homesites where they are used to building their nests.

Science News Letter, March 23, 1946

NAVIGATION

Revision Proposed For Nautical Almanac

► REPORTING on a study of methods used by merchant marine navigators during the war, Col. George W. Mixter, author of several textbooks on navigation, proposed a new revision of the time-honored *Nautical Almanac* at the annual meeting of the Institute of Navigation in Washington, D. C.

Designed to incorporate the more simplified forms of the present *Air Almanac* for use in surface navigation, the new edition proposed by Col. Mixter would have fewer tables than the present system uses.

Col. Mixter said that his survey had showed that the *Air Almanac* has found great favor among ship captains and navigators though it is not required for licensing examinations and is seldom taught.

He said that the proposed change would not decrease the accuracy of figures obtained and would be faster and more convenient for navigators.

The present *Air Almanac* is designed for rapid calculation in flight and is not as minutely accurate as some of the surface navigation tables. Col. Mixter's suggested nautical almanac would have the air edition's tables plus declination and Greenwich hour angle figures down to tenths of minutes.

Science News Letter, March 23, 1946

A lack of *protein* in the diet will delay wound healing.