

Nature Note

Titmouse

► ONE SMALL, PERKY BIRD seemingly at ease in man's busy and noisy civilization is the titmouse, of the Paridae family. This bright-eyed, curious bird is unafraid of human beings and accepts man-made offerings with saucy grace. He will nest in boxes, come to windows for tidbits of suet and sunflower seeds, and can even be tamed to take food from a human hand.

Their lisping reedy calls and simple whistled songs are well loved by urban and suburban bird watchers who despair the loss of the song sparrows, finches, cardinals and bluejays as the more gregarious starlings, sparrows and pigeons take over the bird habitats close to man's cities.

Most of the titmouse family members are very small—less than six inches. They all have soft thick plumage in grays and browns, often strikingly marked with black and white or blues and yellows. With short stout pointed bills and small, strong legs, they are extremely active, often hanging upside down on twigs in their busy search for insects.

They are generally found in the Northern Hemisphere, but also inhabit Africa.

Titmice are among the most adaptable and teachable of the very small birds. They have been taught scientifically to solve simple problems and can learn amazing tricks.

• Science News, 89-321 April 30, 1966

ZOOLOGY

Polar Bears Tracked By Orbiting Satellite

► SOME OF THE WORLD'S most mysterious large animals, the polar bears, will be wandering across the snowy polar ice caps with neat collars around their necks transmitting radio waves to an orbiting satellite.

By 1969, about 50 polar bears may be radioing their whereabouts to a Polar Orbiting Nimbus Satellite, said Dr. Vagn Flyger, head of the Inland Resources Division of the University of Maryland, in College Park.

Depending upon the active cooperation of the nations involved, such as Russia, Canada, Denmark and Greenland, the program will produce valuable information on the little-understood bear, Dr. Flyger told the eighth annual meeting of the Arctic Institute



Luther Goldman

TITMOUSE

of North America, Washington, D.C.

The data transmitted from the bears' collars will be received by a Nimbus weather satellite and then transmitted to earth receiving stations.

The bear program also will include marking another 450 polar bears with purple dye so they can be easily spotted from a ship or from land, or by a small airplane or helicopter. Each bear will be marked with an individual sign, number or even names such as JOE, so that the spotters can accurately check the location of any individual animal.

The bears also will be identified with ear tags bearing identification numbers and instructions to send the tag to the Arctic Institute.

By these methods, Dr. Flyger said, scientists will learn more about the bears' migratory habits and population. Further research on the polar bear will include studies of their parasites, diseases and their ability to adapt to temperatures reaching 65 degrees below zero. F. Dr. Flyger also hopes to find out more about the bears' curious liver which is so richly packed with vitamin A that it is poisonous to eat.

The program, sponsored by the Arctic Institute, has started in Point Barrow, Alaska, where Dr. Flyger

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and his team injected 10 bears with drugs to paralyze them long enough for the men to fix identification marks.

Practically nothing is now known about these rare white animals, which weigh up to 1,200 pounds and eat almost nothing but seals.

The lumbering polar bear has recently won reprieve from the gun of the big-game hunter.

The official keeper of North American big-game records, the Boone and Crockett Club of the Museum of Natural History, New York City, recently decided to eliminate polar bears from the list of wild animals eligible for big-game hunting competitions.

American hunters have formerly used light airplanes operating out of villages and towns on the Arctic Ocean. The planes operate in pairs to locate the bears. While one plane lands on the ice, the other circles around to herd the polar bear toward the waiting hunter.

The big-game club made its decision because it believes that the use of airplanes is not fair in hunting the rare animals in the Arctic regions.

Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall has publically commended the decision. The Federal Government has no authority to control the methods of hunting or the harvest of polar bear.

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