

Nature Note

Flamingos

See Front Cover

► WITH necks and legs longer in proportion to their bodies than those of any other birds, pink-feathered flamingos offer a breathtaking sight as they fly in long undulating lines across the skies.

The West Indian Flamingo, *Phoenicopterus ruber*, is the most brightly colored of the world's six remaining flamingo species. This deep-pink beauty breeds in scattered colonies from the Bahamas to Cuba, in the Yucatan, the northern coast of South America and the Galapagos Islands. The northernmost chick to be bred in the United States, shown on the cover, was born this spring in the N.Y. Bronx Zoological Park.

Flamingos are gregarious birds, and thousands of them nest together in their favorite areas of brackish or salt waters. Here they build mud nests much like short stocky pedestals or stools—about one or two feet in diameter, five to 18 inches high, with a scooped-out top on which the female lays her single white egg. Both sexes incubate this egg alternately for about a month—each parent sitting atop the mound with its stiltlike legs folded beneath and sticking out behind.

Flamingos feed mainly on the highly nitrogenous muck in which they live, containing a rich mixture of algae, diatoms, protozoans, small worms and other tidbits. The flamingo's bill is unique. In order to feed, the birds bend over so that the top half of the bill is on the bottom and the lower half is above it. They pump and sift the muddy water through slits on the top half of the bill and toothlike projections on the tongue which act as a sieve.

(Cover photograph by New York Zoological Park.)

AGRICULTURE

Cherries and Apples Handy Source of Water

► THE DOZENS of cherries or apples hanging on a fruit tree are not only good to eat—they are tiny reservoirs of water that a tree draws on in time of need.

Every day, as the sun climbs higher and the day gets warmer, the tree may tap some water stored in its own fruit, thus causing the fruit to shrink, according to T. T. Kozlowski, University of Wisconsin forestry specialist.

This same kind of handy built-in water supply is found in many other trees, such as oranges, plums, walnuts, pears and avocados.

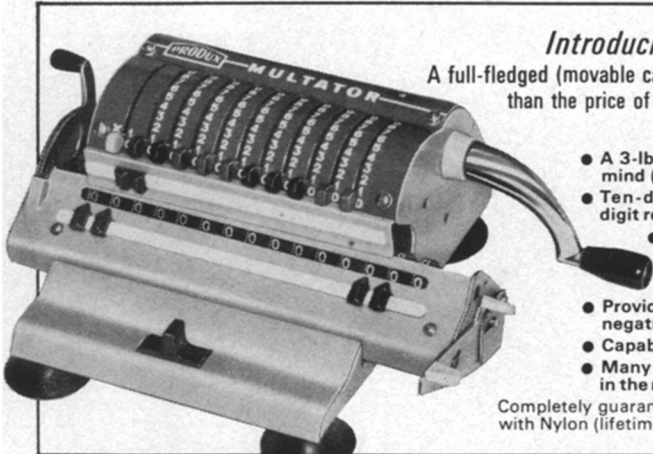
In measuring the changes in diameter

of fruit and stems on Montmorency cherry trees, Mr. Kozlowski found that the young cherries expand during the early morning hours between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. Then the tree starts to tap the water supply and the fruit shrinks until about 2 p.m., or even as late as 4 p.m. in some trees. When there was a shortage of moisture in the soil, the shrinkage went on even longer.

With his experimental cherry trees, Mr. Kozlowski noticed that the cherries develop in about 59 days from blossom time to the ripe fruit late in the summer.

Some of the most spectacular growth occurred in the last 21 to 23 days of the fruit development cycle, when some increased 300% in volume of the fruit.

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