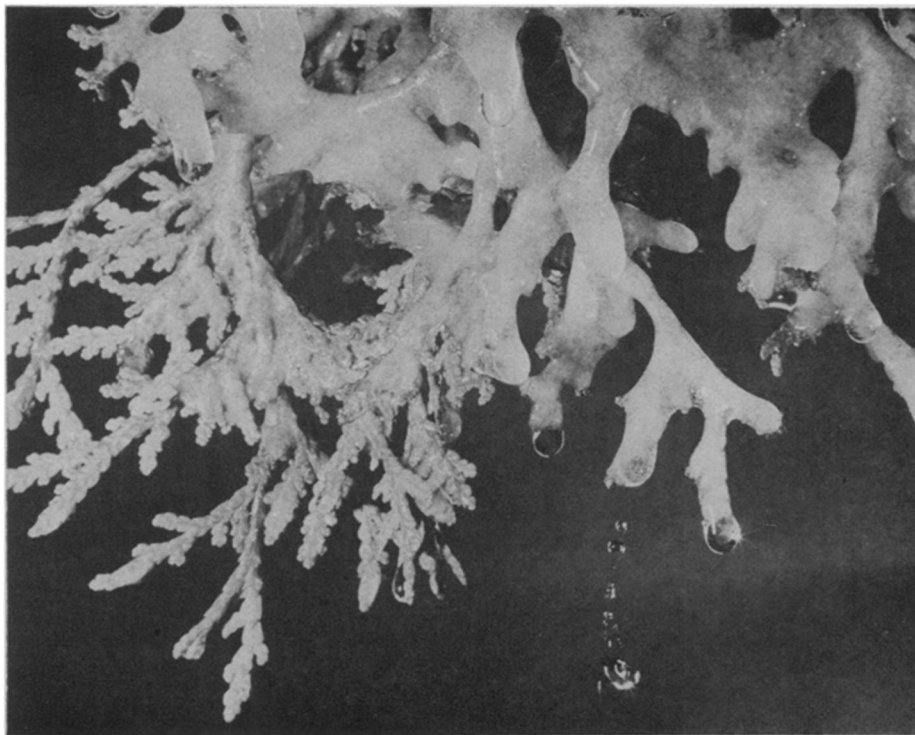


Nature Note

Ice



For water, solid state is prettier.

► AS WATER solidifies to ice, it exhibits a seemingly simple and yet remarkable characteristic—it floats!

This simple behavior is contrary to general laws of nature which state that as a substance cools, and turns from gas to liquid or from liquid to solid, it shrinks, and hence becomes more dense and sinks.

Water obeys this natural law—up to a point. As temperatures are lowered, water vapor condenses into water liquid and then the liquid keeps on shrinking until it reaches 39 degrees F. As cooling continues, the water expands and gets lighter. As it freezes into a solid at 32°F, it becomes still lighter until it finally has gained about nine percent in volume and is floating on top of the water.

This strange property in essence is

keeping the world from being one immense icy mass. As winter moves over the Northern Hemisphere, ice begins to form on the lakes, streams and rivers—on the surface.

If ice behaved in a “normal” manner, and became heavier than its liquid, it would sink to the bottom, and gradually all the ponds, streams, and even the oceans would be filled up with ice. Even during the summer thaw, the sun’s rays would not be able to penetrate this icy mass, and only a fraction of it would be melted at the surface. Under these conditions, most of the world’s supply of water would be locked up in a form that plants and animals could not readily use, and man would have to spend an enormous amount of time and ingenuity heating and thawing enough water for his needs.

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ZOOLOGY

Wildlife Census Precedes Drilling of Oil Wells

► ABUNDANT wildlife on Australia’s Barrow Island will soon be living in the shadow of 200 oil wells, but before their natural sanctuary is invaded, a mammalogist will take a census of the island dwellers.

His study will ensure a collection of scientific data about the native animals before Barrow’s environment is altered.

Wallabies, hill kangaroos, bandicoots and possums, as well as true water rats with webbed hind feet are among the creatures living on the island which is about 30 miles off the west coast of Australia.

Reptiles and birds, unusually abundant on Barrow, will also be studied by Mr. Butler.

Recent sighting of animals previously thought to be extinct make the prospect of a thorough census all the more interesting. A pigmy possum and a paradise parrot were found on the Australian mainland within the last few months.

The great proliferation of Barrow wildlife can be explained by the lack of predators, according to Harry Butler, a collector for the American Museum of Natural History, New York, and the Western Australian Museum, Perth. Sea eagles and perenties, giant six-foot lizards, are the only major predatory animals on Barrow, he said.

Furthermore, because water is scarce on the island, it was uninhabited until 1963, when an Australian oil company began exploration. Although the company has enforced rules concerning wildlife presentation, drilling and operating 200 wells will inevitably reduce the animal population.

However, the oil from the small island, only 18 miles long and six miles wide, is estimated to be sufficient to meet the demands of all Australia for years.

Mr. Butler’s research, which will probably take him most of December, will be supported by a grant from the Explorers Club of New York.

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