

natural sciences notes

ECOLOGY

Voracious imported snails clear U.S. lakes

Two kind of voracious fresh water snails from South American rivers are clearing United States lakes by devouring submerged weeds such as elodea, southern naiad, coontail, pondweed and certain algae.

In 1965, three ponds in southern Florida were stocked with hardy *Marisa cornuarietis* snails—8,000 snails per acre, according to researchers of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Research Station at Fort Lauderdale. One year later the ponds were free of submerged weeds and continued clear.

Marisa, a native of Columbia and Venezuela, can tolerate highly polluted water. It would have to be restricted in certain areas of the world, however, for it also devours rice, watercress and water chestnut. The other weed-eating snail, *Pomacea australis*, from Brazil, can survive colder climates than *Marisa*, and eats aquatic plants even more vigorously.

ORNITHOLOGY

British seagulls roost inland

British seagulls are leaving the sea and spending the winter inland, particularly around city areas where food supply is plentiful.

At least 50 percent and probably more than 100 percent more birds are roosting inland during the winter now than ten years ago, according to a report to the British Trust for Ornithology. The estimated number of seagulls found inland is now about 500,000—10 years ago it was about 233,000. In the London area alone, researchers found that sea birds have increased in numbers about 260 percent. The lesser blackbacked gull, in the past 13 years, has increased its inland numbers from 310 to 7,000.

ICHTHOLOGY

Trout return to Lake Superior

The waters of Lake Superior are stirring with lake trout again as the sea lamprey declines.

There were about 35 percent more trout last year than in 1966, according to Fish and Wildlife Service officials. This is the greatest abundance in almost 30 years.

Trout nearly disappeared from Lake Superior in the 1940's, when the Great Lakes were invaded by swarms of sea lampreys, eel-like parasites that attach themselves to the fish bodies and then extract life juices. Lakes Superior, Michigan and Huron were hardest hit. Since then wildlife officials have been restoring trout populations by spreading chemical lampricides in spawning areas and by restocking the lakes with juvenile trout.

MEDICAL ZOOLOGY

Search for the blue ringed octopus

A search is on around the seacoasts of Australia for 100 specimens of the deadly blue-ringed octopus. Medical researchers are trying to find an antidote for its lethal bite.

Little is known about the poison of this ringed octopus, which is quite common along much of the Australian coastline. Only recently have researchers realized the local variety was poisonous. Last June a soldier at Camp Cove, Sydney, died of a bite. It will take about 12 months to develop an antidote for human use, said Dr. S. K. Sutherland, head of the immunology section of the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories in Melbourne.

People have been warned not to touch any of the creatures. They are advised to edge the specimen into a bucket of seawater and notify the laboratories.

MAMMALOLOGY

Dog temperature rises at sight of person

When a dog sees a person, or another dog, its body temperature rises some five to seven degrees F., according to scientists at the Argonne National Laboratory, Argonne, Ill.

Temperature sensors about the size of a match, and radio transmitters the size of a stack of three 25-cent pieces can be surgically inserted into the abdominal cavity of a dog where they cause no discomfort.

A dog can carry on normal activities while the transmitter beeps information for as long as 18 weeks.

In the early stages of research, scientists have found there is no diurnal rhythm in a dog's body temperature as there is in some other animals. Temperature fluctuations become more pronounced as the dog becomes more active. The mere sight or smell of another individual can cause a rapid rise in body temperatures. Scientists hope that constant monitoring of body temperatures can indicate malfunctions as in sick or aged animals, or effects of nuclear irradiation.

ORNITHOLOGY

Record bird count in California

By spotting 209 different species of wild birds in one day during the 1967 Christmas Bird Count, a group near San Diego set a new record in the yearly nationwide bird census conducted by the National Audubon Society.

Until now, Floridians have held the record for identifying different birds in one of the 800 15-mile-diameter count areas established across the United States and Canada. This winter some 15,000 professional and amateur bird watchers took part in the census, which serves to gather data about bird population and ranges. Census results, still being compiled, will be announced in the April issue of *AUDUBON FIELD NOTES*, published by Audubon and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

HERPETOLOGY

Coral snake antivenom

An antivenom to the poison of the coral snake, which occurs in the South, has been licensed by the National Institutes of Health after two years' development.

Wyeth Laboratories in Philadelphia will provide the antivenom free to the Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta, Ga. Preliminary distribution will be in Florida, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Texas, Arkansas and eastern North Carolina.

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