



Season of Sneezes

► THE ragweeds, low and tall, will begin shedding pollen in the northern states in a few days, and will continue to keep sensitive noses and eyes miserable until well into September. In the South, ragweed pollen seasons begin later, about mid-August or even the first of September, but last into October. Southernmost ragweed patches, far down in Texas and Florida, however, seem able to pour their irritating dust into the breezes from early July until late October, or even longer.

Ragweeds figure most importantly as hay-fever causes in this country. Although pollens from some dozens of other plant species do provoke this most distressing type of allergy in some persons, at least nine-tenths of all cases are primarily due to the pollens of these two weeds.

Although they are botanical first cousins, low ragweed and tall ragweed do not look very much alike. Low ragweed is usually about knee-high to a tall man, seldom more than waist-high. Its leaves finger out into many fine subdivisions. Tall ragweed ranges normally from head-high to more than twice that, and its big, coarse leaves are three-lobed—like mittens with two thumbs instead of one.

In classifying plants, however, botanists

go by the flowering structures; and in these the two weeds are very much alike. The pollen-shedding or male flowers (which are the business end of the weed, so far as hay-fever causation is concerned) are borne in long spikes at the top of the plant.

Many communities now attack their ragweed patches early in the season with 2,4-D or other chemical weedicides, instead of laboriously scything them down, as form-

erly. Even if this precaution has been neglected in your neighborhood, however, and the ragweeds are ready to shed their pollen, much of the mischief can still be prevented if action is taken promptly. A good spraying now may not kill the troublesome growths outright, but it will largely abort the flowers and prevent the shedding of the pollen.

Science News Letter, July 30, 1949

## GENERAL SCIENCE

## Attack AEC Clearance

► A PROPOSAL to require Federal Bureau of Investigation clearance for all holders and applicants for Atomic Energy Commission fellowships is under attack from some scientists.

Sen. Joseph C. O'Mahoney, D., Wyo., is offering an amendment to the Independent Offices appropriation bill, which carries AEC funds, calling for the blanket FBI investigation of AEC fellows.

AEC fellowship holders are now required to sign a loyalty oath and non-Communist affidavit. This was inaugurated in May after the discovery that a University of North Carolina student receiving AEC funds was an admitted Communist.

Any of the AEC fellows doing secret work or using secret information are investigated by the FBI, but many of the students aided by the fellowships have no contact with such material.

When the issue of an FBI clearance for all AEC fellows came up in May, Sen. O'Mahoney and others supported it. But vigorous objection was voiced by leading scientists, including several who approved the oath and affidavit adopted by the Commission.

Among the scientists who have publicly opposed extending the FBI investigation to fellowship holders doing non-secret work are: Dr. Detlev W. Bronk, president of Johns Hopkins University and chairman of the National Research Council which administers the AEC fellowship program; Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, N. J.; Dr. Alan Gregg, director of medical sciences for the Rockefeller Foundation; Dr. Lee A. Dubridge, president of the California Institute of Technology; and Dr. Enrico Fermi, Institute for Nuclear Studies, University of Chicago.

Chief points made by these scientists and others are that the FBI investigation is unnecessary where no secrets are involved and that such investigations would be against the traditions of both science and the nation.

In support of the investigation, Sen. O'Mahoney has explained that he wants to make sure no atom fellowships go to Communists.

Latest attack on the proposal is a letter signed by representatives of several scien-

tific, educational, religious and political groups urging that the amendment be withdrawn.

The letter just made public attacks the investigation as being "at variance with our democratic tradition and procedures." It urges more public discussion of the issue before it is decided.

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## ORNITHOLOGY

## Ducks Forced Northward By Drought Conditions

► DUCKS have been having their drought troubles, too, this summer, states F. C. Lincoln of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Flocks flying north last spring found their usual nesting sites in the southern parts of Canada's prairie provinces and the north-central states of this country badly dried up. So they had to keep on going until they found adequately wet habitats in the "bush" country of Canada, and even on up into the margins of the tundra. That is where they are now; but it is definitely second-rate housing so far as ducks are concerned.

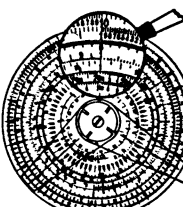
At that, though, the situation might have been worse, Mr. Lincoln adds, philosophically. If there had been enough water on the usual duck range to induce them to nest, and if drought had come after their families had been started, the mortality among the new generation of ducklings would have been extremely high. As it is, the ducklings are getting at least some kind of a break, although they are more exposed to attacks from their enemies than they normally are on the southern parts of their range.

Despite this unfavorable situation, there will be a good increase in the duck population this year. Only, it would have been very much larger had breeding conditions been more nearly normal.

In the meantime, rains have fallen over much of the normal duck country—but there are no ducks there to enjoy the renewed wetness. However, the water-plants on which ducks like to feed are growing apace now, so that when the autumn flights start southward there should be plenty of food waiting for the migrants.

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