

# • New Machines and Gadgets •

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☛ **POTATO-SHOOTING GUN** shoots pellets as far as 50 feet. Pressing the nozzle into a potato loads the durable, all-metal gun. A single potato will yield about 300 pellets. Said to be completely harmless even for the smallest child, the gun can also be used with orange peels, watermelon rinds, apples and carrots.

Science News Letter, April 11, 1959

☛ **EYEGLASS REPAIR KIT** enables one to tighten loose screws or replace lost ones. It consists of an optical screwdriver and an assortment of standard frame screws and nuts.

Science News Letter, April 11, 1959

☛ **FILTER FACE MASK**, a disposable cotton filter with a head strap, is so pliable it fits the contour of the face. The half-ounce filter protects the wearer against non-toxic dusts and hazards of sprays and it can be worn with eyeglasses or goggles. The replaceable filters are packaged in a self-dispensing container.

Science News Letter, April 11, 1959

☛ **METAL DETECTOR** for locating buried metal deposits comes with binaural headphones, batteries and operating instructions. The sturdy six-pound detector, shown in the photograph, guides the way to buried



metals by the dual tracking device of an audible change of tone pitch and an increase of the tone frequency.

Science News Letter, April 11, 1959

☛ **TOWEL SET** for golf carts consists of two 12" by 18" shrink-proof denim towels, each in a different tartan plaid. The towels are attached to the golf cart by means of

a one-inch brass eyelet and a rust-proof brass snap fixture.

Science News Letter, April 11, 1959

☛ **ANIMAL PLACEMATS** for children have color portraits of woodchucks, fawns, bears and rabbits alongside line drawings of the same subjects on plastic-laminated mats. Washable crayons are provided so the child may fill in the line drawings. The mats, which are tough, flexible and easy to clean, come in sets of four.

Science News Letter, April 11, 1959

☛ **OPTICAL BENCH** enables amateur astronomers, photographers, hobbyists, students and teachers to make their own telescopes. Consisting of a hardwood stick base, two end supports and four lens holders, the bench can facilitate testing the focal length of lenses and may be used as a collimator.

Science News Letter, April 11, 1959

☛ **SHAVING GEAR RACK** of aluminum is designed to accommodate any man's shaving equipment, whether he uses an electric razor or a safety razor, with or without a brush. The 5½ by 6½-inch rack fits into the shelf of a medicine cabinet or may be hung on a wall.

Science News Letter, April 11, 1959



## Nature Ramblings



By HORACE LOFTIN

► WE AMERICANS have an oddly limited outlook about our birds. Even without our new states of Alaska and Hawaii, our boundaries extend from near-tundra regions to the near-tropics. As a result we are able to boast of a variety of birds, variously adapted to our many climates.

Yet, the majority of us persist in thinking of robins as unique "heralds of spring" and their departure as the signal for winter's approach.

This may be true for a part of the country—perhaps the area from which most has been written about birds. But it ignores the ways of birds in perhaps one-half or more of the nation. For example, in many southern states winter is really setting in when the robins begin to arrive. Likewise, the departure of robins and many other species from states along our southern border is an excellent announcement of the imminent arrival of spring there.

### Greeting the Robin



A less obvious, but more intriguing, example of birds disrupting such preconceptions is that of the snow bunting.

This sparrow-sized bird thrives on cold weather. Its breeding grounds are in the Arctic wastes, and it nests even in northern Greenland. But the Arctic winter is too much for this hardy lover of the snow, so it makes a minor concession by migrating south, to Unalaska, Manitoba, Quebec and southward to a tier of our northern states.

Its winter home, then, is the very land so

recently abandoned by other birds which could not endure the winter climate there. The ice and snow of this area seem to act as a tonic to the chipper snow bunting, who makes his living from last summer's seeds.

Then comes some hidden signs of spring, the signal for the snow buntings to leave their winter resorts for the Arctic breeding grounds. Most of them leave the United States before the end of February.

Stragglers may stay on through March, perhaps to greet that famous first robin.

As a general rule, ornithologists have found that birds migrating South early in the spring are the ones that leave their nesting grounds late, while those who arrive late start their return trips early. Goshawks, snowy owls, redpolls, Bohemian waxwings and various other birds do not leave the far north until forced to do so by severe weather conditions or by scarcity of food. Their return northward is likely to start at a time when the country is still in the grip of winter.

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