

# • New Machines and Gadgets •

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**FOG HORN** for small craft is trigger-operated and self-powered by a liquefied gas. It is hand-size and has been approved under U.S. Coast Guard regulations for small boats. The horn will emit a blast rated at 110-115 decibels and can be heard at least 1,000 feet away in the densest fog and one mile away on a clear day.

Science News Letter, July 11, 1959

**WHEEL BLOCKS** keep cars from rolling from the beach or ramp when unloading or launching a boat from car or trailer. The blocks, which measure six-by-four-by-eight inches, are also recommended for use with private airplanes and for emergency road use.

Science News Letter, July 11, 1959

**STRUCTURAL STEEL KITS** designed for do-it-yourselfers can be used to make anything from ladders and tables to a utility trailer. The kits contain 100 feet of steel members punched with holes so that they may be cut up and bolted together to comply with any specifications. All necessary nuts and bolts are included.

Science News Letter, July 11, 1959

**ELECTRIC GRASS TRIMMER**, shown in the photograph, for cutting grass along walks, walls, fences and garden edges elim-



inates the need for hand trimming. It has an adjustable handle, a protective cutter guard to keep stones and dirt from hitting the operator, and a blade mounting that absorbs vibration.

Science News Letter, July 11, 1959

**BOAT VARNISH** can be applied in damp weather and is said to retain its original luster despite exposure to salt water

and severe weather conditions. The varnish dries to touch in one hour and can be sanded and recoated within four hours. It may be used on the boat's decks, spars, cabin furniture and interior woodwork.

Science News Letter, July 11, 1959

**GARAGE DOOR** of glass fiber is one-third the weight of wooden garage doors and admits light much the same as frosted glass. The door, which has extruded aluminum frames, is said to be weather-resistant, shatterproof, and warp-proof. It is available in ten sizes and comes in several colors.

Science News Letter, July 11, 1959

**WIND-UP SHAVER** works entirely by spring action. No batteries or electric wires are necessary. Recommended for campers, it is self-sharpening and is said never to nick. Two interchangeable heads, one for short and one for long hairs, are supplied. The shaver has rotary blade motion and is encased in unbreakable plastic.

Science News Letter, July 11, 1959

**MUSICAL CIGARETTE LIGHTER** begins to play music when it is ignited, and keeps playing while lighted. The music stops when the igniter is released and the flame extinguished.

Science News Letter, July 11, 1959



## Nature Ramblings



By HORACE LOFTIN

REPORTS FROM all over the country indicate several species of song birds are at an all-time low in numbers. This is due to extreme weather conditions, use of insecticides and other harmful factors. But if there are fewer birds, the same can hardly be said for the bird-watching enthusiasts across the nation.

For example, take a look at the number of observers taking part in the annual Christmas Bird Count. Sponsored by the National Audubon Society, this midwinter bird census is held throughout the U.S. and Canada every Yuletide season.

In 1900, when Frank M. Chapman started the first counts, there were 25 areas reporting and 27 participants in all. By 1929, 500 bird watchers covered 205 census areas. Then the phenomenal growth really started. Ten years later, 1939, there were 1,900 participants, then 4,615 in 1949. Finally 7,477 eager census takers participated in the last midwinter bird count, covering 572 areas from Key West to Coho, Alaska.

### A Sporting Proposition



On the basis of these figures, it can be said that the Christmas Bird Count is a very large organized outdoor sporting event and, considering the number of active participants, possibly the largest in the nation. Of course, the midwinter census-takers represent only a portion of the active bird watchers in the nation.

What is it all about? What is the fascination of this hobby-sport? You get a clue when you consider the states that have the greatest number of areas reporting each year: New York with 41, Ohio with 36, Pennsylvania with 31. These are regions

with many large cities and beautiful countryside to escape into. The first attraction of bird-watching to many people, then, is an "excuse" for heading for the wide open spaces, away from concrete and neon into green fields and sunlight.

Then there is the element of skill: you have to be good to be a competent bird watcher, since you must learn to identify by sight all the birds of your region, in fall and winter plumage. In many cases you must learn to identify them by their songs, too. And after you have mastered the 200 to 400 species of your own area, you strike out for new country and new birds to learn.

Then the element of competition, a healthy one, is added to this exciting sport. You want to crack your own record, or strive for the top number of birds for your count area over a "competing" area of your state.

And finally, there is the satisfaction of learning and knowing that you are adding to the understanding of the natural world as you help uncover the habits of bird life.

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