

New Machines and Gadgets

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PLANT OR FLOWER HOLDER of plastic may also be used as a scale for flower decorations or as a cigarette holder. Shaped in the form of a triangle with bowed sides, the holder is also equipped with a wick to permit water to be sucked up from its hollow body into a flower pot.

Science News Letter, July 18, 1959

TRANSISTOR RADIO comes in kit form for do-it-yourselfers. It is said to have high sensitivity and selectivity and can be built even by the novice. The portable radio is equipped with a built-in loop antenna and comes in a tan simulated leather carrying case with retractable handle.

Science News Letter, July 18, 1959

HOUSE PAINT is reportedly stain resistant. A barium pigment keeps the white paint stain-proof and prevents it from streaking down on sidings underneath. The paint covers most surfaces in one coat.

Science News Letter, July 18, 1959

EASY-HOLD SPATULA, shown in the photograph, has a handle that is impervious to acids and chemicals. Made of plastic, the



handle will not soften in boiling water, nor conduct heat or electricity. The blade is made of flexible, resilient stainless steel.

Science News Letter, July 18, 1959

FISHING ROD HOLDER is made of polyethylene and floats. The watertight

holder measures 48 by 2 inches inside and will hold six rods. It is said to keep the rods always in top condition and ready for use.

Science News Letter, July 18, 1959

SPRAY GUN will apply all sprayable materials including insecticides, paints, moth-proofing preparations, upholstery shampoos, lubricants, and waxes. Operating from the air supplied by an ordinary vacuum cleaner, the sprayer is said to produce professional results with ease.

Science News Letter, July 18, 1959

SAFETY GLASSES for industrial workers combine lightness and sunglass-like styling with protection. The glasses are designed to take the place of goggles for workers doing spot welding, buffing, wood-working, handtool operations, and inspection.

Science News Letter, July 18, 1959

GARDEN HOSE branches off into six smaller hoses and waters six plants at once. Some of the hose ends may be looped and tied when less than six outlets are desired.

Science News Letter, July 18, 1959



Nature Ramblings



By HORACE LOFTIN

Covering the Birds

AVIAN PTERYLOSIS continues its grip on the birdlife of America. But ornithologists are showing little alarm, because birds have been subjected to pterylosis since there have been birds. In fact, that awesome word which sounds as if it comes from a glossary of tropical medicine simply means "plumage," especially its distribution on the body.

With all the care and skill of geographers mapping the earth, pterylographers study and map the distribution of feathers on the body of different kinds of birds. Only the ostrich, penguins and South American screamers have their feathers almost continuously covering their whole body. All other birds have their feathers located on very definite feather tracts, with bare spots in between.

If the feathers of a bird are clipped so that only the stubs remain in the skin, the feather tracts are seen quite clearly. Another method is to remove the body and turn the skin inside out to see where the



feathers are attached. The extent of the featherless areas of most birds is quite surprising; but in nature these are covered by overlapping feathers from the tracts.

Each group of birds, and even many species of the same group, may be characterized by distinctive patterns of feather tracts. Different groups of birds vary from one another not only in distribution but in the number of feathers.

It takes patience and close observation to

count a bird's feathers one by one, but pterylographers have done it for many species. For example, record holder to date for the fewest feathers is the ruby-throated hummingbird, with just 940 feathers. On the other hand, the whistling swan, with over 25,000 feathers, is champion for highest number.

Most of our typical songbirds have from 1,500 to 4,000 feathers. The mockingbird has been counted at 3,297 feathers; the cardinal, 3,183; the blue jay, 3,773.

The water birds usually have a considerably higher number of feathers than the perching birds. The little pied-billed grebe, for example, boasts 15,016 feathers. The mallard duck has given a count of 11,903 feathers. The common coot's feathers totaled 13,913 in one examination.

Where are these feathers located? One female green-winged teal with a total of 11,450 feathers had them distributed as follows: head 4,832; neck 2,226; body 1,690; oil gland and tail 400; left leg 160; right leg 152; left wing 976; right wing 1,014.

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