

have proved one of the most baffling of ancient peoples to understand. The beauty of their bronze craftwork and their other possessions, and their alphabetic writing—which is still incompletely understood—have lured scholars to try persistently to learn more about Etruscan civilization. A new bit of information about a single Etruscan alphabet letter is apt to be heralded as news of importance.

Dr. Eva Fiesel of Yale University has been studying three Etruscan inscriptions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the University Museum in Philadelphia, and she has learned something new about the letter X in Etruscan. This letter has heretofore been recognized in its place

in the Etruscan alphabet, which, by a curious Etruscan custom, was often inscribed on vases or other objects. But how the letter X sounded in Etruscan words no one could say.

From the three American inscriptions, Dr. Fiesel finds evidence that early Etruscans before 600 B.C. pronounced X as S or Sh, or in some similar way. This pronunciation ties the Etruscans, by language, to ancient Asia Minor, suggesting that the Etruscans brought their alphabet with them when they migrated to Italy. At the same time, it suggests that the Latin alphabet was borrowed elsewhere, for in using this strategic letter X the Romans gave it a sound value familiar to Greek colonists in Italy.

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## PHARMACY

## Vitamin Experts Confer on Standard for Vitamin B<sub>1</sub>

**T**HE NATION'S vitamin experts recently sat around tables in a hotel room in Washington, D. C., for an entire morning and attempted to draw up a standard for one of the B vitamins to put in the next revision of the U. S. Pharmacopoeia.

This volume is the legal standard in the United States for medicines. It is revised every ten years by a committee of physicians, pharmacists and other medical scientists. It is instrumental in preventing the sale of inferior medicines to the public.

The revision committee of the Pharmacopoeia called in the leaders in vitamin research to give advice on which method of determining the presence of vitamin B<sub>1</sub> in food and drug products should be made the official standard. Sitting in at the conference was Dr. Katherine H. Coward, one of England's leaders in vitamin research.

A tremendous number of food and drug products, claiming to be of health value because they contain vitamin B<sub>1</sub>, are now on the market. At present there is no way for a physician to be sure which of these is best for his patients, because there is no standard to judge them by.

Since the original discovery of vitamin B and its importance for health, scientists have found that there are some four or five, or maybe six B vitamins. All of them are necessary for health. One of them prevents pellagra.

Others have other effects on the body. The one chiefly discussed, known as B<sub>1</sub>, protects against nervous ailments and particularly against the serious disease, beri-beri. It is found most abundantly in whole grain cereals (refining or polishing removes it), in yeast, egg-yolk and liver.

Standards for vitamin B<sub>1</sub>, unlike standards for chemical medicines, depend on animal studies. Scientists may test for B<sub>1</sub> by determining the amount of a vitamin-containing substance, such as yeast or rice polishings, that will cure beri-beri in a pigeon or in a rat, or the amount that will promote normal growth in the animal or bird.

The experts meeting here agreed that it would be helpful for the U. S. Pharmacopoeia to recognize one method of determining vitamin B<sub>1</sub>, but that it should not be made the legal standard until it had been tried generally by vitamin researchers and manufacturers of vitamin products. They seemed to favor using pigeons for test animals. Yeast as a test material was not favored because it contains too many of the other B vitamins which might interfere with the results.

The consensus of opinions expressed will be used to guide the revision committee in deciding whether to adopt a vitamin B<sub>1</sub> standard for inclusion in the U. S. Pharmacopoeia. Physicians, general public and manufacturers will all benefit from such a standard.

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## ORNITHOLOGY

## Mallard Duck Built Nest In Tree Instead of Grass

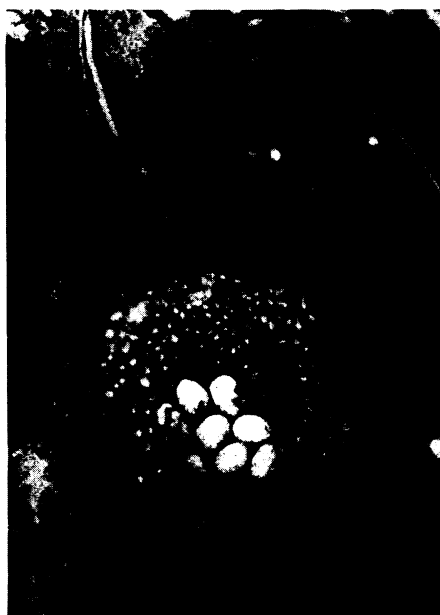
By GEORGE A. SMITH

**S**PRING is here, and the wild ducks are coming back. And I am wondering whether the pair of mallards I got acquainted with last spring will repeat their strange behavior, and build another nest in a tree.

One morning early in the season, while taking a walk along the shore of Jones Lake, just south of the New York State Fish Hatchery, Cold Spring Harbor, Long Island, New York, I noticed a mallard duck fly out of a tree. Knowing that mallards seldom alight on trees, I guessed that the duck had built her nest in it, so I climbed the tree to satisfy my curiosity.

On an overhanging branch about ten feet from the ground, directly over a path, and only a few feet from the lake, I found a nest lined with down and containing nine duck eggs. It is rather uncommon for mallards to build nests in trees. They often lay their eggs and hatch their young in a field, or even close to a thoroughfare, or in some secluded spot in a park, but the nest is usually on or near the ground or in very low bushes.

I watched the eggs every day or two until the young ducks hatched. The



### A HIGH HOME

*These mallard duck eggs in the nest were found on a tree branch ten feet above the ground where this kind of bird usually builds its nest.*