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KALORI

August '70

Eastern Shriketit

Wildlife Conservation Society

Lower Blue Mountains

CONSERVE, PRESERVE, INVESTIGATE, EDUCATE.

Kalori is published monthly by and for the members of the Lower Blue Mountains Wildlife Conservation Society.

The aims of the Society are, briefly, to:-

1. Educate the members and the community to the cultural values of nature.

2. Work for the reservation of areas of natural environment for the refuge and breeding of indigenous flora and fauna.

3. Carry out research into the distribution, population and species of flora and fauna in the Blue Mountains.

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WILDLIFE SURVEY
Report No2. June 1970

Location:- Crown land at the end of a Fire Trail running off Rickard Road, Warrimoo. Longitude 150°38'E, Latitude 33°43'S.

Twenty traps were set on a random pattern at the base of the first cliff-line, approximately 30 feet below the ridge-top. Traps were set at dusk and visited at 9PM. Two animals were captured, both being rodents of the same species. These animals were identical with those of similar size captured in Blue Gum Creek. The trapped area comprises a rather dry shelf approximately 30 yards wide, with considerable rock scree containing some very large boulders, at the base of the cliff. Traps were mainly set among or close to, this rock scree.

Vegetation was normal dry sclerophyll, with good shrub regeneration at 4 to 6 feet. Leaf litter and humus at ground level was nil or very sparse.

Weather:- Some light drizzle during the day, overcast till 6.oo or 7.oo PM. Fog at 9.oo PM.

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WILDLIFE SURVEY
Report No3. June 1970

Location:- Blue Gum Creek Survey Area. Long.150°36'30"E, Lat.33°39' S.

Traps were set on two nights. On the first night four runs were made, at 8.30PM, 12 midnight, 4.30AM and 6.30AM. The first run yeilded three animals, all rodents. The two smaller animals were identical to those of similar size captured previously. One was larger.

The second run - nil.

The third run yeilded three rodents. Two small, identical with those captured previously; one larger.

The fourth run - nil.

On the second night two runs were made, at 8.30PM and 11.00PM.

The first run - nil.

The second run - one rodent, identical with those of similar size captured previously.

The area covered comprised a section of gully floor and a section of damp weeping rock ledges on a south-east aspect. Above-ground cover from 2 to 6 feet was dense in places, there were some open patches, while in one or two areas the cover extended to ground level. Leaf litter and debris at ground level was nil to very light, except in the vicinity of the wet ledges. Vegetation consisted mainly of ferns, with shrubs and Eucalyptus regeneration to a height of 6 to 8 feet. Trees in the immediate area tended to be small, up to 15" diameter, about 40' height.

Weather:- Clear, rather cold, no moon, no wind.

A very effective method of handling animals has been arrived at. The animal is anaesthetized with ether, and it then may be handled without any distress to it. The effects completely wear off in 5 minutes and the animal is released.

S.K.King.

PESTS FOLLOW THE CHEMICALS IN THE COCOA OF MALAYSIA

Continued from July.

The decision to stop the spraying was based on a number of considerations. First, although some pests had been present since the beginning of cocoa planting, it was only after the introduction of the heavy spraying program that the major outbreaks occurred. Second, nearly all the insecticides used hitherto were of the broad-spectrum, contact-acting type: that is they killed most insects that came in contact with them. Differential mortality can thus occur, and the pest species are able to break out from the natural control exerted by their predators. It was felt that even if this was not the cause of the outbreaks on cocoa, the chances were that the spraying was preventing any possibility of natural predators re-establishing control.

The spraying was finally stopped in December. The event that followed almost immediately was the appearence of a braconid parasite, attacking the looper Hyposidra talaca. The rapid increase in this parasite caused the looper population to drop suddenly. It remained low until May when it flared back, only to be followed by another parasite building up. Within three to four weeks, the population had again declined, this time to a level at which damage was negligible. In April and May it became evident that the plant hopper Colobesthes falcata also was declining rapidly. In this case the cause was not obvious,but the decline continued, and by August the hoppers were present in only very small numbers.

The next pests to come under control were the branch borers. In August a decline in new borings became noticeable and it was found that over 50% of the branch borer larvae were parasitized by braconid wasps. The population continued to decrease rapidly; at the end of September few new borings were to be found, and by the end of the year, the damage was infrequent.

As has been mentioned above, although the ring bark borer damage was severe, the population was not very large; and near the end of 1961, it was decided to revert to inspection and eradication of individual borers.More labour was now available for this form of control since the general spraying programme was being stopped; small teams were organised to inspect the cocoa ant treat new borings with a jet of 1% dieldrin from a hand sprayer. By applying the insecticide in this extremely localised fashion, there was little possibility of affecting the natural enemies of the other pests. At about the same time it was discovered that an important, alternative host of the borer was secondary forest tree, Trema cannabina, which was not only common in the cocoa fields but, along roadsides and in other areas, was present in nearly pure stands. Inspection revealed that many of these trees supported considerable numbers of borers living in a complex of tunnels.

(to be continued)

THE SPARROW, THE STARLING AND THE NATIVE

Just over one hundred years ago the sparrow and the starling were introduced into the Australian environment. As in most other countries into which they had been introduced, these European birds spread very well in Australia.

In the years following 1862 (the yearvof the first release) the sparrow was protected - destroying it was considered a serious offence. It is now found all over the continent excepting Western Australia. The original 120 sparrows released in Melbourne in 1862 were followed by 125 in 1863 while groups of 36, 6 and then 15 starlings were released in the same city.

The sparrow, according to Caley, has some merit as a scavenger but it is regarded as a pest in some country districts where it attacks many kinds of crops. It is, in Britain, primarily a scavenger and graineater. However its period of greatest increase has passed owing to its dependence on the droppings of grain--feeding animals, such as horses, as a major source of food. Now after the passing of the horse sparrow populations have declined. On America's east coast there is one sparrow today for every twenty at the beginning of the century and no doubt the population has declined to the same degree in Australian cities as well

Cayley, and John Sidney - in his report on sparrows and starlings (Animals, July 1964) - refer emotionally to its cheerfulness and other such attributes, only with reservations concerning its economic shortcomings. Sidney finds that the sparrow being a scavenger holds down the populations of rats and other vermin, otherwise we should be 'up to our ears' in rats. He also draws attention to its prowess at insect destr--uction.

Any argument that the sparrow or the starling stand out alone for city scavenging can be discounted by the fact that many indigenous species could easily take their place given the chance.In Western Australia the Silvereye, it has been reported, has taken over the role of the sparrow, which is absent from that State. In Sydney the Silver Gull is becoming a more efficient scavenger than the introduced Rock Pigeon and can be seen feeding all over Sydney proper, and even penetrates to outer suburbs and along watercourses such as Parramatta River. I have even observed a pair feeding at Lemongrove, Penrith. In fact it is an interesting situation to see a seagull drive off pigeons from their feeding grounds. Many other species could do well in cities and would give our urban areas an Australian character instead of the Indo-European avian look they have now.

Both Cayley and Sidney however do not see fully another situation; the effect of these introduced birds on the welfare of the native species. Sparrows and starlings do not mix well with the majority of natives. Apart from vigorous competition

for both food and shelter the native has still more to contend with. Barbara Salter in her recently published Pocket guide gives examples of "atrocities"committed by the sparrow and recommends the destruction of this bird and its nests. Some of these observations are quite disturbing:-

"Six nests - eighteen eggs - and what was the result? The first three nests were robbed by sparrows (who delight in eating the eggs and destroying the nests of native birds). The fourth nest was safe until the young birds were a week old; then a gang of sparrows set upon it, dragged out the nestlings and pecked them to pieces."

She goes on to pardon the effect of the sparrow on native birds, taking just what happens in her own bush garden as a guide - bearing in mind that that sparrows cover over half the continent of Australia.

The starling however has not been as successful as the sparrow and the main worry it sauses to the natives is a vigor--ous competition for food and shelter. Cayley refers emotionally to its masseed flights and its wheezing notes. I would however feel much greater joy to see a massed flight of red-backed parrots nad hear the call of a willy wagtail in pesticide-free bush.

The persons who advocated the introduction of sparrows and other birds to Australia showed a very destructive ignorance. They played the part of the displaced European thrust into an unknown environment; too provincial to adapt to this new environment, they endeavoured to adapt it to them. Indeed even today - the Captain Cook bicentenary year - the fruits of this philosophy abound; the urban red roof desert of uniformity, the graded homesite devoid of trees or any natural condition and the inevitable sparrow on the fence. A humdrum existence in a unique land.

These two birds I am dealing with were established and exist in this country purely to scavenge the streets and to settle the European mind unaccustomed to the unique. Are these sufficient reasons to hang a millstone round the native species necks? And after all, only in Australia can you see a white--browed scrub wren flying wild - you can see sparrows or starlings in half the world's continents.

Michael Smithson

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APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

To the Treasurer,
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Enclosed please find the sum of $ to cover one years membership*

Name in full.....

Address in full.....

Occupation.....

* Individuals $2.00 annually or $20.00 Life.
Associates $1.00 annually - subscription to Kalori.
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