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- PAUL M. SAGAR, *Freshwater Fisheries Centre, MAFFish, P.O. Box 8324, Riccarton, Christchurch*; JOY L. SAGAR, *38A Yardley Street, Christchurch 4*



SHORT NOTE

Starlings quick to find a new source of food

Naturalists in northern New Zealand are well aware that, when the pohutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*) and the flax (*Phormium tenax*) are flowering in early summer, many Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) become such avid nectar-feeders that often their pates and faces are stained red with pollen.

In my garden a shrubby feijoa, somewhat less than 2 metres high, began to flower about mid-October. There seems to be no limit to the enterprise of Starlings. They are always ready to extend their empire. On 14 October 1988, when the first dark-red feijoa flowers were rather inconspicuous, I noticed a pair of local Starlings darting in and out of the heart of the feijoa where nearly all the early flowers were. The birds were very active; and it appeared to me that the activity was sparked by their excitement at finding nectar-producing flowers so early in the season, a month or more before the full flush of the pohutukawa flowering.

Pohutukawa and feijoa belong to the same family, Myrtaceae, and their flowers are superficially alike, both in size and in colour.

Nearly four weeks later, on 9 November when importunate fledgling Starlings were noisy both at the nest and in the nearby trees, I again watched a pair of yellow-billed adults busily visiting new flowers on the feijoa.

R. B. SIBSON, *580 Remuera Road, Remuera, Auckland*